



IREG Ranking Audit Manual

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IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence

(IREG *stands for* International Ranking Expert Group)

www.ireg-observatory.org



THE IREG RANKING AUDIT MANUAL

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1 INTRODUCTION

Academic rankings are an entrenched phenomenon around the world and as such are recognized as source of information, as transparency instrument as well as methods of quality assessment. There is also empirical evidence that rankings are influencing individual decisions, institutional and system-level policy-making areas. Consequently, those who produce and publish ranking are growingly aware that they put their reputation on the line in case their ranking tables are not free of material errors or they are not carried out with a due attention to basic deontological procedures. In this context important initiative was undertaken by an ad-hoc expert group - the International Ranking Expert Group (IREG) which came up in May 2006 with a set of guidelines – the *Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions* [in short “*Berlin Principles*” – see Appendix or www.ireg-observatory.org].

In October 2009, on the basis of IREG was created the IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence [in short “IREG Observatory”]. One of its main activities relates to the collective understanding of the importance of quality assessment as one of its principal own domain of activities – university rankings [actually covering all types of higher education institutions]. The IREG Ranking Audit initiative needs to be seen in the above context. It is based on *the Berlin Principles* and is expected to:

- enhance the transparency about rankings;
- give users of rankings a tool to identify trustworthy rankings; and
- improve the overall quality of rankings.

Users of university rankings (i.e. students and their parents, university leaders, academic staff, representatives of the corporate sectors, national and international policy makers) differ very much in their inside knowledge about higher education, universities and appropriate ranking methodologies. Particularly, the less informed groups (like prospective students) do not have a deep understanding of the usefulness and limitations of rankings, thus, an audit must be a valid and robust evaluation. This will offer a quality stamp which is easy to understand and in case of positive evaluation, rankings are entitled to use the quality label and corresponding logo “*IREG approved*”.



The purpose of this manual is to guide ranking organisations how to assemble and present requested information and other evidence in all stages of the IREG Ranking Audit. It also will serve the members of the IREG Secretariat and audit teams to prepare and conduct all stages of the audit process – collection of information, team visits, and writing the reports.

The main objective of this manual is to develop a common understanding of the IREG Ranking Audit process. Accordingly, this manual has the following main sections: The second and third chapter of this document describe the **criteria** of the IREG Ranking Audit as well as the **method of assessing the criteria**. Chapter four presents the **process of audit** in its various steps from the application for an audit to the decision making process within the IREG Observatory.



2 THE IREG RANKING AUDIT CRITERIA

The criteria of the IREG Ranking Audit have been developed and approved by the IREG Observatory Executive Committee in May 2011.

The criteria refer to five dimensions of rankings: first, the definition of their purpose, target groups and their basic approach, second, various aspects of their methodology, including selection of indicators, methods of data collection and calculation of indicators, third, the publication and presentation of their results, fourth, aspects of transparency and responsiveness of the ranking and the ranking organisation and, last, aspects of internal quality assurance processes and instruments within the ranking.

A number of criteria are referring to the *Berlin Principles* (see Appendix). The Berlin Principles were not yet meant to provide an operational instrument to assess individual rankings. They were a first attempt to define general principles of good ranking practice. Not all relevant aspects of the quality of rankings were covered by the Berlin Principles, not all the dimensions were elaborated in full detail. In addition, rankings and the discussion about rankings have developed further since the publication of the Berlin Principles in 2006. Hence there are a number of new criteria that do not relate directly to the *Berlin Principles*.

2.1. Criteria on Purpose, Target Groups, Basic Approach

The method of evaluation called “ranking” refers to a method which allows a comparison and ordering of units, in this case that of higher education institutions and their activities, by quantitative and/or quantitative-like (e.g. stars) indicators. Within this general framework rankings can differ in their purpose and aims, their main target audiences and their basic approach.

Criterion 1:

The purpose of the ranking and the (main) target groups should be made explicit. The ranking has to demonstrate that it is designed with due regard to its purpose (see *Berlin Principles*, 2). This includes a model of indicators that refers to the purpose of the ranking.

Criterion 2:

Rankings should recognize the diversity of institutions and take the different missions and goals of institutions

into account. Quality measures for research-oriented institutions, for example, are quite different from those that are appropriate for institutions that provide broad access to underserved communities (see *Berlin Principles*, 3). The ranking has to be explicit about the type/profile of institutions which are included and those which are not.

Criterion 3:

Rankings should specify the linguistic, cultural, economic, and historical contexts of the educational systems being ranked. International rankings in particular should be aware of possible biases and be precise about their objectives and data (see *Berlin Principles*, 5).

International rankings should adopt indicators with sufficient comparability across various national systems of higher education.

2.2. Criteria on Methodology

The use of a proper methodology is decisive to the quality of rankings. The methodology has to correspond to the purpose and basic approach of the ranking. At the same time rankings have to meet standards of collecting and processing statistical data.

Criterion 4:

Rankings should choose indicators according to their relevance and validity. The choice of data should be grounded in recognition of the ability of each measure to represent quality and academic and institutional strengths, and not availability of data. Rankings should be clear about why measures were included and what they are meant to represent (see *Berlin Principles*, 7).

Criterion 5:

The concept of quality of higher education institutions is multidimensional and multi-perspective and “quality lies in the eye of the beholder”. Good ranking practice would be to combine the different perspectives provided by those sources in order to get a more complete view of each higher education institution included in the ranking. Rankings have to avoid presenting data that reflect only one particular perspective on higher education institutions (e.g. employers only, students only). If a ranking refers to one perspective/one data source, only this limitation has to be made explicit.

**Criterion 6:**

Rankings should measure outcomes in preference to inputs whenever possible. Data on inputs and processes are relevant as they reflect the general condition of a given establishment and are more frequently available. Measures of outcomes provide a more accurate assessment of the standing and/or quality of a given institution or program, and compilers of rankings should ensure that an appropriate balance is achieved (see *Berlin Principles*, 8).

Criterion 7:

Rankings have to be transparent regarding the methodology used for creating the rankings. The choice of methods used to prepare rankings should be clear and unambiguous (see *Berlin Principles*, 6). It should also be indicated who establishes the methodology and if it is externally evaluated.

Ranking must provide clear definitions and operationalisations for each indicator as well as the underlying data sources and the calculation of indicators from raw data. The methodology has to be publicly available to all users of the ranking as long as the ranking results are open to public. In particular, methods of normalizing and standardizing indicators have to be explained with regard to their impact on raw indicators.

Criterion 8:

If rankings are using composite indicators the weights of the individual indicators have to be published. Changes in weights over time should be limited and have to be justified due to methodological or conceptual considerations.

Institutional rankings have to make clear the methods of aggregating results for a whole institution. Institutional rankings should try to control for effects of different field structures (e.g. specialized vs. comprehensive universities) in their aggregate result (see *Berlin Principles*, 6).

Criterion 9:

Data used in the ranking must be obtained from authorized, audited and verifiable data sources and/or collected with proper procedures for professional data collection following the rules of empirical research (see *Berlin Principles*, 11 and 12). Procedures of data collection have to be made transparent, in particular with regard to survey data.

Information on survey data has to include: source of data, method of data collection, response rates, and structure of the samples (such as geographical and/or occupational structure).

Criterion 10:

Although rankings have to adapt to changes in higher education and should try to enhance their methods, the basic methodology should be kept stable as much as possible. Changes in methodology should be based on methodological arguments and not be used as a means to produce different results compared to previous years. Changes in methodology should be made transparent (see *Berlin Principles*, 9).

2.3. Criteria on Publication and Presentation of Results

Rankings should provide users with a clear understanding of all of the factors used to develop a ranking, and offer them a choice in how rankings are displayed. This way, the users of rankings would have a better understanding of the indicators that are used to rank institutions or programs (see the *Berlin Principles*, 15).

Criterion 11:

The publication of a ranking has to be made available to users throughout the year either by print publications and/or by an online version of the ranking.

Criterion 12:

The publication has to deliver a description of the methods and indicators used in the ranking. That information should take into account the knowledge of the main target groups of the ranking.

Criterion 13:

The publication of the ranking must provide scores of each individual indicator used to calculate a composite indicator in order to allow users to verify the calculation of ranking results. Composite indicators may not refer to indicators that are not published.

Criterion 14:

Rankings should allow users to have some opportunity to make their own decisions about the relevance and weights of indicators (see the *Berlin Principles*, 15).

2.4. Criteria on Transparency and Responsiveness

Accumulated experience with regard to the degree of confidence and “popularity” of a given ranking demonstrates that greater transparency means higher credibility of a given ranking.

Criterion 15:

Rankings should be compiled in a way that eliminates or reduces errors caused by the ranking and be organized and published in a way that errors and faults caused by the ranking can be corrected (see *Berlin Principles*, 16). This implies that such errors should be corrected within a ranking period at least in an online publication of the ranking.

Criterion 16:

Rankings have to be responsive to higher education institutions included/ participating in the ranking. This involves giving explanations on methods and indicators as well as explanation of results of individual institutions.

Criterion 17:

Rankings have to provide a contact address in their publication (print, online version) to which users and institutions ranked can direct questions about the methodology, feedback on errors and general comments. They have to demonstrate that they respond to questions from users.

2.5. Criteria on Quality Assurance

Rankings are assessing the quality of higher education institutions. They want to have an impact on the development of institutions. This claim puts a great responsibility on rankings concerning their own quality and accurateness. They have to develop their own internal instruments of quality assurance.

Criterion 18:

Rankings have to apply measures of quality assurance to ranking processes themselves. These processes should take note of the expertise that is being applied to evaluate institutions and use this knowledge to evaluate the ranking itself (see *Berlin Principles*, 13).

Criterion 19:

Rankings have to document the internal processes of quality assurance. This documentation has to refer to processes of organising the ranking and data collection as well as to the quality of data and indicators.

Criterion 20:

Rankings should apply organisational measures that enhance the credibility of rankings. These measures could include advisory or even supervisory bodies, preferably (in particular for international rankings) with some international participation (see *Berlin Principles*, 14).



3 THE ASSESSMENT OF CRITERIA

3.1 General Rules of Assessment

The Audit decision will be based on a standardised assessment of the criteria set up above. Criteria are assessed with numerical scores. In the audit process the score of each criterion is graded by the review teams according to the degree of fulfilment of that criterion. The audit will apply a scale from 1 to 6:

Not sufficient/not existing	1
Marginally applied	2
Adequate	3
Good	4
Strong	5
Distinguished	6

Not all criteria are of the same relevance. Hence criteria will be divided into core criteria with a weight of two and regular criteria with a weight of one (see below table - Weights of Audit Criteria). Hence the maximum score for each core criteria will be twelve, for regular criteria six. Based on the attribution of criteria (with 10 core and 10 regular criteria) the total maximum score will be 180.

On the bases of the assessment scale described above, the threshold for a positive audit decision will be 60 per cent of the maximum total score. This means the average score on the individual criteria has to be slightly higher than “adequate”. In order to establish the IREG Ranking Audit as a quality label none of the core criteria must be assessed with a score lower than three.



3.2 Weights of IREG Ranking Audit Criteria

Criterion (short description)	Weight
PURPOSE, TARGET GROUPS, BASIC APPROACH	
1. The purpose of the ranking and the (main) target groups should be made explicit:	2
2. Rankings should recognize the diversity of institutions:	2
3. Rankings should specify the linguistic, cultural, economic, and historical contexts of the educational systems being ranked.	1
METHODOLOGY	
4. Rankings should choose indicators according to their relevance and validity.	2
5. The concept of quality of higher education institutions is multidimensional and multi-perspective (...). Good ranking practice would be to combine the different perspectives.	1
6. Rankings should measure outcomes in preference to inputs whenever possible	1
7. Rankings have to be transparent regarding the methodology used for creating the rankings.	2
8. If rankings are using composite indicators the weights of the individual indicators have to be published. Changes in weights over time should be limited and due to methodological or conception-related considerations	2
9. Data used in the rankings must be obtained from authorized, audited and verifiable data sources and/or collected with proper procedures for professional data collection	2
10. The basic methodology should be kept stable as much as possible.	1
PUBLICATION AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS	
11. The publication of a ranking has to be made available to users throughout the year either by print publications and/or by an online version of the ranking	1
12. The publication has to deliver a description of the methods and indicators used in the ranking.	1
13. The publication of the ranking must provide scores of each individual indicator used to calculate a composite indicator in order to allow users to verify the calculation of ranking results.	2
14. Rankings should allow users to have some opportunity to make their own decisions about the relevance and weights of indicators	1
TRANSPARENCY, RESPONSIVENESS	
15. Rankings should be compiled in a way that eliminates or reduces errors	1
16. Rankings have to be responsive to higher education institutions included/ participating in the ranking	2
17. Rankings have to provide a contact address in their publication (print, online version)	1
QUALITY ASSURANCE	
18. Rankings have to apply measures of quality assurance to ranking processes themselves.	2
19. Rankings have to document the internal processes of quality assurance	1
20. Rankings should apply organisational measures that enhance the credibility of rankings	2
MAXIMUM TOTAL SCORE (with 6 grade scale of assessment)	180



4 THE RANKING AUDIT PROCESS

This section of the manual is designed to help ranking organisations to learn how to assemble and present requested information and other evidence in all stages of the IREG Ranking Audit. It also serves the Secretariat of IREG Observatory as well as audit teams to prepare and conduct all stages of the audit process – collection of information, team visits, and writing the reports. The audit process follows the structure, procedures, processes and good practices which have been established in other forms of quality assurance, in particular the accreditation, for such procedures covering the institutions of higher education as well as their study programs and other activities.

The process includes a number of steps that are described in this session of the manual. Actors involved are:

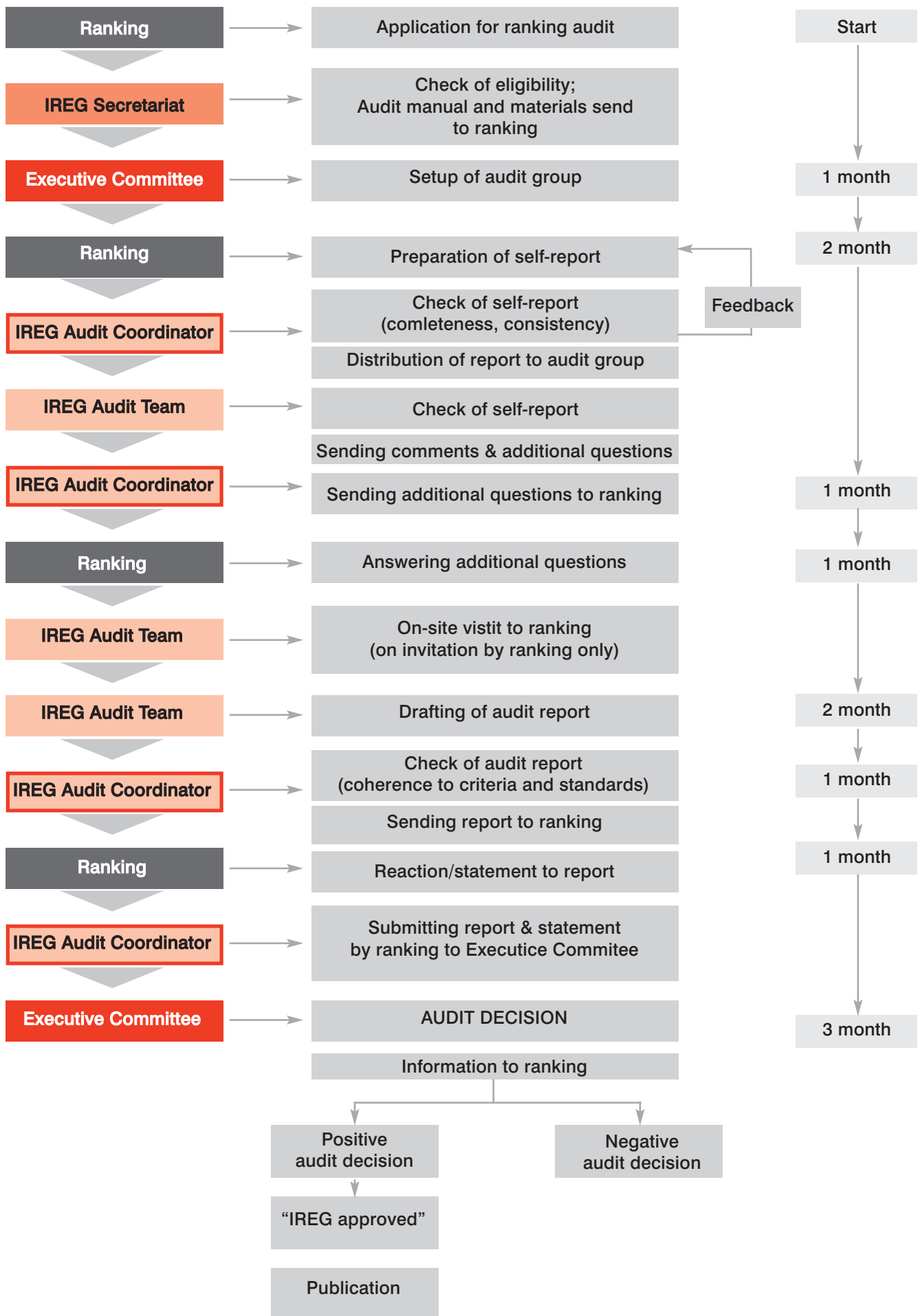
- The *IREG Executive Committee* has an overall responsibility for the audit in order to assure the highest standards and impartiality of the process and takes the decision about approval of rankings.
- The *IREG Ranking Audit Teams* are nominated by the Executive Committee in consultation with the Coordinator of IREG Audit out of a pool of auditors. The Audit Team is preparing a report and recommendation on the approval of a ranking to the Executive Committee.
- The *Coordinator of IREG Ranking Audit*. In order to assure the impartiality and the highest professional and deontological standards of the audit process, the Executive Committee appoints for a period of 3 years a Coordinator of IREG

Ranking Audit. He/she is not a member of the Executive Committee and is not involved in doing rankings. His/her task is to guarantee that all stages of the process as well as the collected evidence (i.e. the self-reports submitted by ranking organisations and the audit reports drafted by the Audit Teams) meet the standards set by this manual. He/she is providing advice on the composition of the audit teams. He/she reviews a report drafted by the Audit Teams and submits a recommendation to the Executive Committee but does not participate in the vote. The Coordinator of IREG Ranking Audit receives organisational support from the Secretariat of the IREG Observatory.

- The IREG Observatory Secretariat is giving administrative and technical support to the Audit Teams and the Audit Coordinator. The Secretariat is the contact address for the ranking organisation.
- The *ranking organisation* which is applying for IREG Ranking Audit: The Ranking organisation has to submit all relevant information to IREG Observatory, particular in form of a self-report and is involved in communication and interaction with IREG Observatory throughout the process.

The following illustration gives an overview on the whole audit process. The individual steps and procedures are described in the sections to follow.

[Overview: The IREG Ranking Audit Process](#) ►



4.1. Eligibility and Formal Application

Eligible for the IREG ranking audit are national and international rankings in the field of higher education that have been published at least twice within the last four years. The last release should not be older than two years.

The Ranking Audit and the approval refer to individual rankings, not to the ranking organisation as a whole. If a ranking organisation produces several rankings based on the same basic methodology they can be audited in one review, but decision will be made for individual rankings.

A ranking organisation that wishes to enter the IREG Ranking Audit process sends an application letter to the President of IREG and completes a datasheet containing basic data about the ranking and the ranking organisation. The datasheet can be downloaded from the IREG website. The IREG Secretariat may request further clarification if this appears necessary.

The decision about the start of the audit process will be made by the Executive Committee by simple majority of its members. Members who are related to the applying ranking (either as part of the ranking organisation or as member of any body of the ranking, executive or advisory), are excluded from the vote.

The decision about the start of the Ranking Audit will be communicated to the ranking within four weeks after application. Together with the decision about the eligibility the ranking organisation will be informed about the members of the Audit Team. The names of auditors have to be treated confidentially by the ranking organisation.

The Ranking Audit has been conceived as a public-responsibility initiative. For this reason its financing is based on cost-recovery principle. The fee which is periodically established by the Executive Committee takes into account the costs of the organisation and conduct of the audit. The level of the fee is higher by 50 per cent for non-members of IREG Observatory. The ranking organisation has to pay the fee for the audit process within two weeks after it received the confirmation of the start of the Audit by IREG Observatory.

4.2. Nomination and Appointment of an Audit Team

The nomination of an Audit Team will be made by the Executive Committee after the decision made about the start of an audit process.

The Audit Team consists of three to five members. In order to guarantee independence the majority of auditors are not actively involved in doing rankings. The IREG Executive Committee appoints one member of the Audit Team to chair the team. In order to guarantee neutrality and independence of the Audit Teams the chairs of Audit Teams are not formally associated with an organisation that is doing rankings.

There is no single best model for the composition of Audit Teams. The key requirements are that auditors should be independent of the ranking(s) under review and have a sufficient level of knowledge, experience and expertise to conduct the Ranking Audit to a high standard. The acceptance of the IREG Ranking Audit will largely depend on the quality and integrity of the Audit Teams. The Executive Committee can also consult the Coordinator of IREG Ranking Audit.

Members of an Audit Team should represent a range of professional experience in higher education, quality assurance and the assessment of higher education institutions or systems. With regard to the audit of national rankings at least one member of the Audit Team should have a sound knowledge of the respective national higher education system. International auditors in the team can provide valuable insights for the audit and help to enhance its credibility; therefore at least one member of the Audit Team should be an expert from outside the country or the countries (in case of cross-national regional rankings) covered by the ranking. The members of Audit Teams of global rankings should represent the diversity of regions and cultures. IREG is aiming at including experts from quality assurance agencies who are experienced in processes of evaluating, accrediting or auditing of institutions or agencies in the field of higher education.

Auditors will be required to notify the Executive Committee in writing of any connection or interest, which could result in a conflict, or potential conflict, of interest related to the audit. In particular auditors



have to notify the Executive Committee any commitment to the ranking(s) under review. This includes prior association with the ranking organisation, membership in any executive or advisory board of the ranking organisation or any of their rankings. If auditors are unsure as to whether an interest or conflict should be disclosed, they should discuss the matter with the IREG Ranking Audit Coordinator.

4.3. Avoidance of Conflict of Interest

In carrying out its audit responsibilities, the Audit Team should ensure that their participation and decisions are based solely on the application of criteria and procedure of IREG Ranking Audit and professional judgement. Therefore, it is important to avoid conflict of interest or appearance of conflict of interest.

Conflict of interest is defined as any circumstance in which an individual's capacity to make an impartial and unbiased decision may be affected because of a prior, current, or anticipated institutional affiliation(s), other significant relationship(s) with an evaluated organisation or institution.

In order to avoid conflict of interest all members of the Audit Team should be independent of the institution being reviewed, with no personal, professional or commercial relationships that could lead to a conflict of interest.

When first approached about participating in the particular audit the proposed member of the Audit Team will be asked to indicate any potential conflict of interest or prior association which could appear to influence judgment made. The members of the team will be asked to sign a Declaration confirming [see Annex] certifying that they have no conflict of interest with the institution under review. If the member has any doubts about whether any past relationship could be considered a conflict of interest details should be provided to the Executive Committee and IREG Ranking Audit Coordinator for consideration.

As a general rule members of the Executive Committee will not be included in Audit Teams for audits of rankings published in their own country (with regard to audits of national rankings); with regard to audits of global rankings members of the Executive Committee who are doing global rankings will not be part of Audit Teams, too.

4.4. Production of a Self-report by the Ranking Organisation

The production of the self-report by the ranking organisation is an essential part of the audit process and is the major portion of the evidence which the Audit Team will draw on in forming its report and suggestion regarding the audit decision. All claims, judgments and statements made by the ranking organisation should be backed up by the facts necessary to corroborate them. The self-report has to be submitted within two months after the start of the Ranking Audit has been communicated to the ranking organisation by IREG Observatory.

The self-report has to apply the structure which is determined by IREG and which is sent to the ranking organisation. According to the model structure (see Appendix) issues to be dealt with in the report include:

- information on previous record of ranking activities
- an outline of the purpose and main target groups of the ranking(s);
- information on the scope of the ranking in terms of regional coverage, types of institutions included, fields, time cycle of publication etc.;
- a detailed description of the methodology;
- a description instruments of internal quality assurance of the ranking;
- an outline of the publication and use of the ranking; and
- as far as available information on the impact of the ranking on the level of the individual (e.g. on student choice), of the institutions and the higher education system.

The assessment has to be based on the actual version of the ranking. Nevertheless the report should include a session on recent and planned changes.

The ranking organisation can decide about relevant annexes to the report beyond the mandatory deliverables (within reason, preferably not more than 5 to 10 annexes).

The self-report has to be in English, annexes should preferably be in English, too. The report, together with annexes and additional documents, should be sent to the IREG Secretariat in electronic copy and to each of the Audit Team members and the IREG ranking coordinator both in electronic and hard copy (printed double-sided). The address of the Audit Team members will be provided by the IREG Secretariat.

The report and materials delivered by the ranking organisation will be checked for completeness and coherence by the IREG ranking coordinator. The ranking organisation will be informed within four weeks after delivery of the report about additional requirements. A revised report should then be provided within another four weeks.

It is important to note, that should a self-report be considered inadequate as a preparation for the audit report, the whole process may be postponed (including a site visit which eventually has been planned). In this case, any additional costs incurred, e.g. in the rescheduling of auditor flights, will be at the expense of the ranking organisation.

4.5. Interaction Ranking Organisation – Audit Team

In order to guarantee a correct understanding of the ranking and a high quality of the Audit Report and decision it is necessary to include interaction between the ranking organisation and the Audit Team/IREG Observatory.

Communication should preferably be made by e-mail. All communication should be distributed to all members of the Audit Team, to the IREG Ranking Audit Co-ordinator and the IREG Secretariat and the contact person responsible for the audit in the ranking organisation. IREG Observatory will provide a mailing list to the ranking organisation.

Specification of the interaction process:

- After a first check of the report by the IREG Ranking Audit Coordinator, the Audit Team will react on the self-report within four weeks by written questions, comments and demands for additional information and materials. This feedback will be sent electronically to the ranking organisation by the IREG Secretariat.
- The ranking organisation is expected to answer to the additional questions within one month. The answer by the ranking organisation should be submitted electronically to the whole mailing list described above and in hard-copy to the IREG Secretariat.
- In order to avoid a flood of information at this stage the ranking organisation should send any additional material to the Audit Team beyond the written answer to the additional questions only after consultation with the IREG Ranking Audit Coordinator.

- The decision about the audit is taken (based on the report by the Audit Team) by the Executive Committee. Hence members of the Audit Team and the IREG Ranking Audit Coordinator are asked not to give any statements on the possible outcome of the audit process to the ranking organisation.

At the end of the interaction process the IREG Secretariat informs the ranking organisation about the formal closing of interaction.

Optional: Site visits (on invitation by the ranking organisation)

In order to keep the costs of the Ranking Audit low a visit to the ranking organisation is not planned as a regular element of the audit process. Yet the ranking organisation is free to invite the Audit Team to a visit. An invitation for such a visit has to be extended together with the application to the Ranking Audit. Members of the Audit Team are free to accept the invitation. At least two members of the Audit Team have to participate in a visit. The costs for the visits (travel costs, accommodation) for members of the Audit Team have to be paid by the ranking organisation.

Site visits should preferably take place after the additional questions have been sent to the ranking organisation. IREG expects the head of the ranking organisation, the person responsible for the Ranking Audit, all employees and the head of existing advisory bodies to be available at the visit. The duration and agenda of the visit will be scheduled by the contact person at the ranking institutions and the chair of the Audit team. The site visit is normally conducted in English. If the ranking organisation wishes to use interpreters, it should inform the IREG Secretariat at least one month prior to the visit. The ranking organisation will bear the cost of interpretation. When planning the site visit, it should be kept in mind that the use of interpretation will lengthen the duration of meetings and may also lead to some loss of information and full understanding of details.

If there is a site visit this is a good opportunity for an internal meeting of the Audit Team at the end of the visit. At this meeting the team will review the evidence presented and draw preliminary findings, and if possible put them into a “skeleton” report.

In sum a site visit can have a number of functions:

- to enable the IREG Ranking Audit Team to share, in personal communication, the impressions gained from the written materials,



- to explore in meetings with the key individuals at the ranking organisation their expertise and the compliance to the IREG Ranking Audit criteria,
- to formulate the Audit Team’s preliminary findings in face-to-face communication, and,
- to produce a material for the draft report as a basis for further elaboration after the site visit.

To enable the site visit to fulfil these key functions, it is essential that the visit is managed efficiently and effectively. The IREG Ranking Audit Team should avoid any impression that any “social program” might have influenced their evaluation of the ranking.

4.6. Production of an Ranking Audit Report

The Ranking Audit report by the Audit Team is the main basis of the decision about the approval of the ranking by the Executive Committee. The review report will be drafted by the chair of the Audit Team in collaboration with the other members of the Audit Team. The basis for the Audit Report are the self-report and additional materials provided by the ranking institution, communication between ranking organisation and the Audit Team (including site visit if it was part of the process) and the Audit Team’s findings.

The Audit Report should not exceed 15 – 20 pages (font size 11). The draft report will be sent to the members of the Audit Team by the IREG Secretariat for comments and approval. They should submit their comments within two weeks. The whole report should be finalised and sent to the ranking organisation not later than three months after the formal statement of the end of interaction (see 2.4.). A major part of the Audit Report is the Criteria Audit Form. Each criterion is assessed by a score from one to six. The final Audit Score is calculated as the sum of the products of the criterion score by the weight of the criterion (see chapter 3). Auditors have to agree upon the scores of each individual criterion.

A generic structure of the report

- 1) Executive Summary and Criteria Assessment Form
- 2) The ranking organisation
- 3) The ranking(s) under audit – short description
 - a) Scope (countries, types of institutions, ...)
 - b) Purpose and target groups
 - c) Methodology and Data sources
 - d) Indicators

- 4) Findings and assessment of criteria
 - a) Purpose, target groups, basic application (criteria 1 to 3)
 - b) Methodology (criteria 4 to 10)
 - c) Publication and presentation of results (criteria 11 to 14)
 - d) Transparency, responsiveness (criteria 15 to 17)
 - e) Quality assurance (criteria 18 to 20)
 - f) Final assessment (total score)
- 5) Recommendations and – if applicable – conditions to be fulfilled within one year

The draft of the Audit Report is submitted to the IREG Ranking Audit Coordinator who is checking whether the report fulfils the standards of Audits Reports set up in this manual and whether the assessment of the ranking is coherent with prior Ranking Audit exercises. He/she can recommend a revision of the report. The report will be sent electronically to the ranking organisation within two months after the end of interaction between the ranking organisation and the Audit Team.

The ranking organisation can formulate a reaction on the report within one month. The reaction has to be sent electronically to the IREG Secretariat, which will forward it to the IREG Ranking Audit Coordinator and the members of the Audit Team.

The Audit Report and the reaction of the ranking organisation are submitted to the IREG Observatory Executive Committee.

4.7. Ranking Audit Decision

Based on a statement of the IREG Ranking Audit Coordinator the Executive Committee testifies that the report applies the criteria for ranking audit. The Executive Committee decides about the approval of the ranking on the basis of the Audit Report delivered by the Audit Team and the reaction on the report submitted by the ranking organisation.

Decision is made by simple majority of the members of the Executive Committee. Members of the Committee who are associated or used to be associated with the ranking under audit (either directly or as member of any body of the ranking organisation) are excluded from the vote. The vote can take place either in a meeting of the Executive Committee or electronically.

4.8. Management of Disputes and Appeals

The process of audit and the preparation of reports are intended to be consultative and supportive rather than critical and adversarial. Nevertheless it is possible that differences of opinion or disputes may arise, or that judgments about conduct of the audit or its negative result may be disputed. Consequently procedures should be made available for resolution of disputes.

Complaints or disputes may relate to the following kinds of issues:

1. The way the tasks of the Audit Team or its particular member have been carried out.
2. Errors of fact, or misinterpretations of the evidence presented in the self-report or other documents presented during the audit.
3. Faulty decision reached by the Audit Team on the results of the audit.

In order to assure that the appeal process demonstrates procedural fairness for the appellant it is proposed that:

Ad.1. Any complaints about the procedures followed by members of the Audit Team should be addressed to the IREG Ranking Audit Coordinator (with a copy to IREG Secretariat) who will consider the matter, determine a response, and advise the complainant of action taken. In considering the matter the IREG Ranking Audit Coordinator may at his/her discretion seek the advice from the members of the IREG Observatory who are independent of the dispute and have not been involved with the given audit review. The final decision will be made by the IREG Ranking Audit Coordinator.

Ad.2. The ranking organisation will be given an opportunity to comment on significant matters of fact that may have been overlooked or misunderstood during the review or site-visit, and to request corrections. The IREG Ranking Audit Coordinator will consider any such requests and may consult the chair of the Audit Team in doing so. The ranking organisation will be advised of the response and provided with a copy of revised wording in the draft report. In case of the further dispute the second, and final, round of clarification is envisaged.

Ad. 3. The Audit Results are result of the work of the Audit Team and the ranking organisation. The conclusions should be based on evidence. If there is a dispute over the judgment of the Audit Team on audit results, the ranking organisation may submit an appeal to the IREG Ranking Audit Coordinator citing evidence in support of its appeal in relation to IREG Ranking Audit Criteria. The Coordinator will consider the submission and if he/she believes there were good reasons for considering the appeal will appoint an ad-hoc three-person appeal board to advice on the matter. The composition of the board will be selected from the members of IREG Observatory in consultation with the President of IREG Observatory. The IREG Ranking Audit Co-ordinator will chair the board.

The appeal board may recommend rejection of the appeal if it believes the decision made was reasonable in the light of the evidence and the criteria adopted for the audit. The decision of the board will be final. Consequently the ranking organisation is not allowed to claim the status "IREG approved".

If the appeal board believes there is insufficient evidence to make a fully informed decision, due to some ambiguity in technicalities or interpretation of evidence, it may recommend that decision is suspended and a further full or partial new audit is undertaken. The financial aspect of such audit is to be subject of the decision of the Executive Committee of IREG Observatory.

4.9. Publication of Ranking Audit Results

The audit decision does not have any formal consequences, e.g. concerning IREG Observatory membership. In order not to prevent too many rankings from undergoing the audit procedure only positive audit decisions will be published. IREG Observatory hopes that negative decisions will set incentives for the ranking organisation to enhance the quality of its ranking(s) - and maybe apply for a second audit at a later time.

The audit decision and the executive summary of the Audit Report are published on the IREG website. The detailed report can be published by agreement between IREG and the audited ranking organisation. The audits will not be turned into a ranking of rankings and hence the audit scores will not be published.



APPENDIX 1: Data Sheet – to be attached to application for audit

A. Information on Ranking Organisation

Name of the Ranking Organisation:										
Head/director of organisation:										
Year of foundation of ranking organisation:										
Kind of organisation (please select): <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Commercial/for-profit (incl. media)</td> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Private, non-profit</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> University/Higher education institution</td> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Independent public organisation</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> State organisation</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>			<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial/for-profit (incl. media)	<input type="checkbox"/> Private, non-profit	<input type="checkbox"/> University/Higher education institution	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent public organisation	<input type="checkbox"/> State organisation		<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial/for-profit (incl. media)	<input type="checkbox"/> Private, non-profit									
<input type="checkbox"/> University/Higher education institution	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent public organisation									
<input type="checkbox"/> State organisation										
<input type="checkbox"/> Other:										
Major activities (besides ranking):										
Is the Ranking organisation part of a parent organisation: <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> No</td> <td style="width: 50%; border: none;"><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</td> </tr> </table> If so: Name of organisation:			<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes						
<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes									
Address of ranking organisation										
Street	City									
Post box	Zip Code									
URL	Country									
Contact person for the ranking audit (Please nominate a contact person to whom all communication will be directed)										
Name	Function									
E-mail address	Phone	Fax								
Name(s) of ranking(s) for which IREG Approval is sought: (Please note that only rankings with a largely similar methodology can be audited jointly!)										
Ranking 1:										
Ranking 2:										
Ranking 3:										
If you apply for a joint audit of several rankings, please describe the similarity in methodology:										

B. Information on Ranking(s)

Note: This sheet has to be submitted for each ranking IREG approval is sought

Name of Ranking	
Cycle of publication/update of results: <input type="checkbox"/> Annual <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	First year of publication: Most recent year of publication:
Regional scope: <input type="checkbox"/> National: Country: <input type="checkbox"/> Regional cross-national Countries: <input type="checkbox"/> International/global	
Level of ranking/analysis (Multiple answers are possible) <input type="checkbox"/> Institutional ranking <input type="checkbox"/> Broad fields (e.g. humanities) <input type="checkbox"/> Fields (e.g. history) <input type="checkbox"/> Programmes	Major dimensions covered: Dimension 1: Dimension 2: Dimension 3: Dimension 4: Dimension 5: Dimension 6:
Publication (Multiple answers are possible) Print: <input type="checkbox"/> Part of magazine/other publication <input type="checkbox"/> Special publication Online: <input type="checkbox"/> Internet URL: <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile App.	Is there an online publication on the ranking methodology? If so, URL:



APPENDIX 2: Structure of the self-report

1. Information on the ranking organisation

- 1.1. Name and address
- 1.2. Type (academic – non-academic, public – private, for-profit – non-profit)
- 1.3. Financing model/sources of the ranking
- 1.4. Contact person

2. Information on previous record of the ranking activity

- 2.1. Date of first publication and brief history
- 2.2. Publication frequency
- 2.3. Date of the latest two publications

3. Purpose and main target groups of the ranking

- 3.1. Purpose
- 3.2. Main target groups /users

4. Scope of the ranking

- 4.1. Geographical scope (global, international (e.g. European, national etc.))
- 4.2. Types of institutions, number of institutions ranked, number of institutions published
- 4.3. Level of comparison (e.g. institutional, field based, etc.)

5. Methodology of the ranking

- 5.1. General approach, options include overall composite score through setting fixed weights to different indicators, separate indicators which allow customized rankings, other aggregation methods
- 5.2. Measured dimensions (research, teaching & learning, third mission etc.)
- 5.3. Indicators (relevance, definitions, weights etc.)

5.4. Data source, options include third-party database (data was not provided by universities), data collected from universities by third-party agencies, data collected from universities by ranking organisations (or their representative), survey of university staff or students by ranking organisations with collaboration of the universities, survey conducted by ranking organisations exclusively, etc.

5.5. Transparency of methodology

5.6. Display of ranking results (league tables, groups or clusters, mixed way)

6. Quality assurance of the ranking

- 6.1. Quality assurance on data collection and process
- 6.2. Organisational measures for quality assurance (consultants, boards etc.)

7. Publication and use of the ranking

- 7.1. Type of publication (print, online or both)
- 7.2. Language of publication (primary language, other available language)
- 7.3. Access for users of the rankings (registration, fees)

8. Impact of the ranking

- 8.1. Impact on personal level (students, parents, researchers etc.)
- 8.2. Impact on institutional level (higher education institution as a whole, rectors and presidents, deans, students, administration, etc.)
- 8.3. Impact on the higher education system

APPENDIX 3:

DECLARATION RELATED TO CONFLICT OF INTEREST

(to be signed by members of IREG Ranking Audit Teams)

I have read and fully understand the IREG Ranking Audit policy with regard to Conflict of Interest and, to the best of my knowledge, can declare that there are no situations and circumstances which may be considered conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest related to my participation as a member of the Audit Team undertaking the following audit:

Name of the audited organisation

Signature

Date

Printed Name



APPENDIX 4:

Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions

Rankings and league tables of higher education institutions (HEIs) and programs are a global phenomenon. They serve many purposes: they respond to demands from consumers for easily interpretable information on the standing of higher education institutions; they stimulate competition among them; they provide some of the rationale for allocation of funds; and they help differentiate among different types of institutions and different programs and disciplines. In addition, when correctly understood and interpreted, they contribute to the definition of “quality” of higher education institutions within a particular country, complementing the rigorous work conducted in the context of quality assessment and review performed by public and independent accrediting agencies. This is why rankings of HEIs have become part of the framework of national accountability and quality assurance processes, and why more nations are likely to see the development of rankings in the future. Given this trend, it is important that those producing rankings and league tables hold themselves accountable for quality in their own data collection, methodology, and dissemination.

In view of the above, the International Ranking Expert Group (IREG) was founded in 2004 by the UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES) in Bucharest and the Institute for Higher Education Policy in Washington, DC. It is upon this initiative that IREG’s second meeting (Berlin, 18 to 20 May, 2006) has been convened to consider a set of principles of quality and good practice in HEI rankings - the Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions.

It is expected that this initiative has set a framework for the elaboration and dissemination of rankings - whether they are national, regional, or global in scope - that ultimately will lead to a system of continuous improvement and refinement of the methodologies used to conduct these rankings. Given the heterogeneity of methodologies of rankings, these principles for good ranking practice will be useful for the improvement and evaluation of ranking.

Rankings and league tables should:

A) Purposes and Goals of Rankings

1. Be one of a number of diverse approaches to the assessment of higher education inputs, processes, and outputs. Rankings can provide comparative information and improved understanding of higher education, but should not be the main method for assessing what higher education is and does. Rankings provide a market-based perspective that can complement the work of government, accrediting authorities, and independent review agencies.

2. Be clear about their purpose and their target groups. Rankings have to be designed with due regard to their purpose. Indicators designed to meet a particular objective or to inform one target group may not be adequate for different purposes or target groups.

3. Recognize the diversity of institutions and take the different missions and goals of institutions into account. Quality measures for research-oriented institutions, for example, are quite different from those that are appropriate for institutions that provide broad access to underserved communities. Institutions that are being ranked and the experts that inform the ranking process should be consulted often.

4. Provide clarity about the range of information sources for rankings and the messages each source generates. The relevance of ranking results depends on the audiences receiving the information and the sources of that information (such as databases, students, professors, employers). Good practice would be to combine the different perspectives provided by those sources in order to get a more complete view of each higher education institution included in the ranking.

5. Specify the linguistic, cultural, economic, and historical contexts of the educational systems being ranked. International rankings in particular should be aware of possible biases and be precise about their objective. Not all nations or systems share the same

values and beliefs about what constitutes “quality” in tertiary institutions, and ranking systems should not be devised to force such comparisons.

B) Design and Weighting of Indicators

6. Be transparent regarding the methodology used for creating the rankings. The choice of methods used to prepare rankings should be clear and unambiguous. This transparency should include the calculation of indicators as well as the origin of data.

7. Choose indicators according to their relevance and validity. The choice of data should be grounded in recognition of the ability of each measure to represent quality and academic and institutional strengths, and not availability of data. Be clear about why measures were included and what they are meant to represent.

8. Measure outcomes in preference to inputs whenever possible. Data on inputs are relevant as they reflect the general condition of a given establishment and are more frequently available. Measures of outcomes provide a more accurate assessment of the standing and/or quality of a given institution or program, and compilers of rankings should ensure that an appropriate balance is achieved.

9. Make the weights assigned to different indicators (if used) prominent and limit changes to them. Changes in weights make it difficult for consumers to discern whether an institution’s or program’s status changed in the rankings due to an inherent difference or due to a methodological change.

C) Collection and Processing of Data

10. Pay due attention to ethical standards and the good practice recommendations articulated in these Principles. In order to assure the credibility of each ranking, those responsible for collecting and using data and undertaking on-site visits should be as objective and impartial as possible.

11. Use audited and verifiable data whenever possible. Such data have several advantages, including the fact that they have been accepted by institutions and that they are comparable and compatible across institutions.

12. Include data that are collected with proper procedures for scientific data collection. Data collected from an unrepresentative or skewed subset of students, faculty, or other parties may not accurately represent an institution or program and should be excluded.

13. Apply measures of quality assurance to ranking processes themselves. These processes should take note of the expertise that is being applied to evaluate institutions and use this knowledge to evaluate the ranking itself. Rankings should be learning systems continuously utilizing this expertise to develop methodology.

14. Apply organisational measures that enhance the credibility of rankings. These measures could include advisory or even supervisory bodies, preferably with some international participation.

D) Presentation of Ranking Results

15. Provide consumers with a clear understanding of all of the factors used to develop a ranking, and offer them a choice in how rankings are displayed. This way, the users of rankings would have a better understanding of the indicators that are used to rank institutions or programs. In addition, they should have some opportunity to make their own decisions about how these indicators should be weighted.

16. Be compiled in a way that eliminates or reduces errors in original data, and be organized and published in a way that errors and faults can be corrected. Institutions and the public should be informed about errors that have occurred

Berlin, 20 May 2006.



If you need more information, please contact:
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