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Bringing the Students' Perspective into Rankings: The Use of Student Survey Data in National and International Rankings

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Presentation

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Rankings and the student perspective

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- Most <u>national</u> rankings want to give information to prospective students helping them to make an informed choice
- Hence they include indicators on teaching & learning (graduation rates, student-staff-ratio, …)

- International rankings focus on research excellence

- Both in national and international rankings the student perspective is lacking in most rankings
- For prospective students the assessment of their learning experience by current students can be see as a peer perspective

How can the student perspective be taken in?

Presentation

Introduction

CHE Ranking: The Use of Student Satisfaction Indicators in Rankings

U-Multirank: Student Satisfaction Indicators in International Perspective

Conclusions

The CHE University Ranking

- First ranking published in 1998
- Main purpose: information to prospective students
- Since 2004: stepwise internationalization: Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands
- Now: Regional cross-national ranking: "market" for German speaking students

- Methodology:
  - Field based (35 fields)
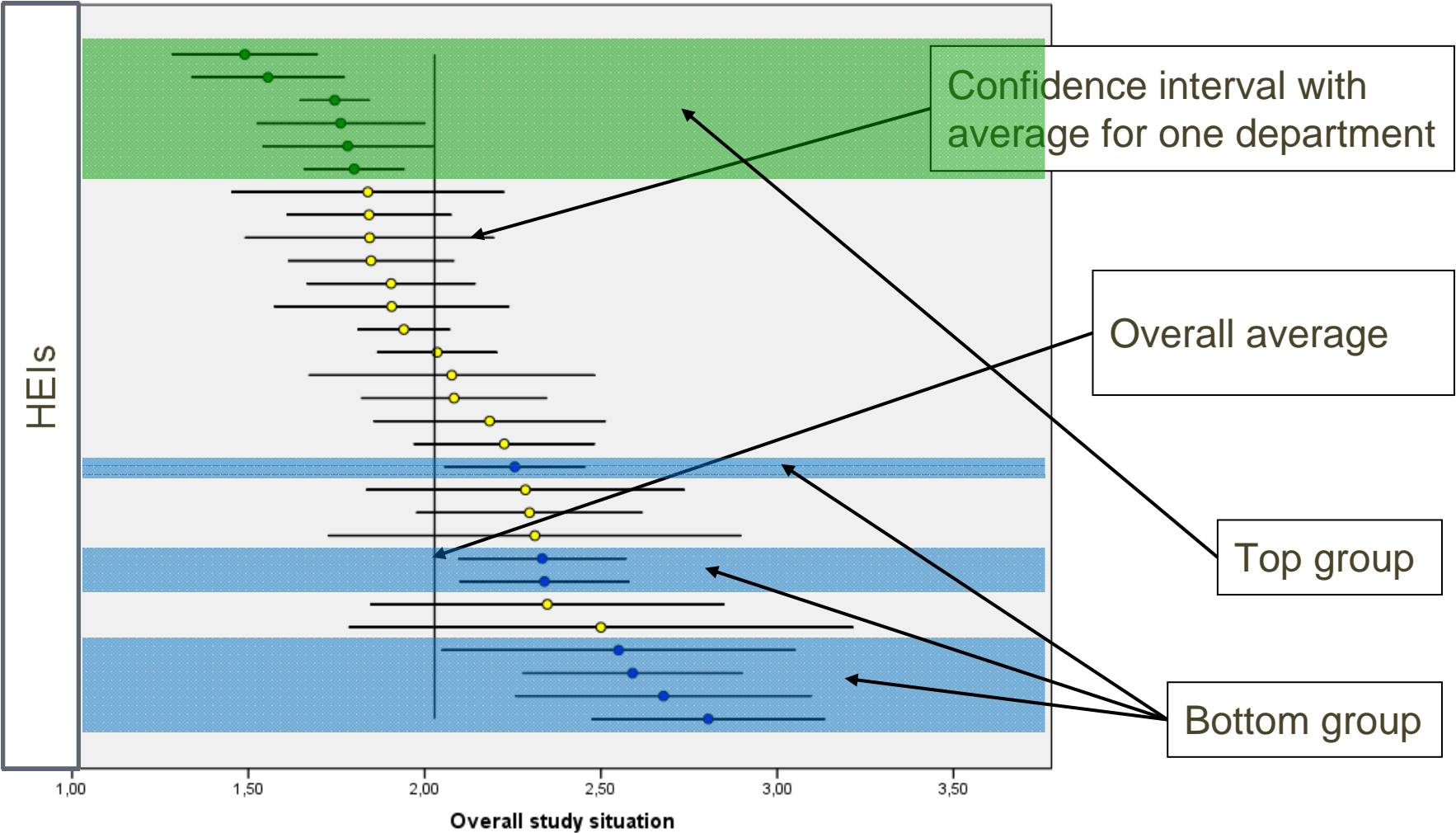 - Multidimensional
  - Groups (no league tables)

- Multiple data sources:
  - Self reported data on universities, departments, programmes
  - Bibliometric data
  - Surveys among professors, students (and alumni)

Student survey: procedure

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- Survey by online questionnaire

- Bachelor-students in their second and third year, either all students invited or if more than 500 per study program a random sample is drawn

- Organization of the survey hand in hand with the universities:
  - CHE tells universities which programs and which years of study should be included, provides material either letters or texts and access codes for the students
  - Universities select students as specified by CHE and sent out invitations via letter or mail. Number of invited students is reported to CHE.

- about 25 % return

Student survey: indicators

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- **Academic studies and teaching**
  - Contact between students
  - Counseling
  - Courses offered
  - E-Learning
  - Research orientation
  - Study organization
  - Scope and range of courses offered
  - Set-up and structure of course
  - Support from teachers
  - Teaching evaluation

- **Job market and career-orientation**
  - Job market preparation
  - Practice Support
- **Equipment**
  - IT-infrastructure
  - Library
  - Rooms
  - Laboratories
- **International orientation**
  - Support for stays abroad
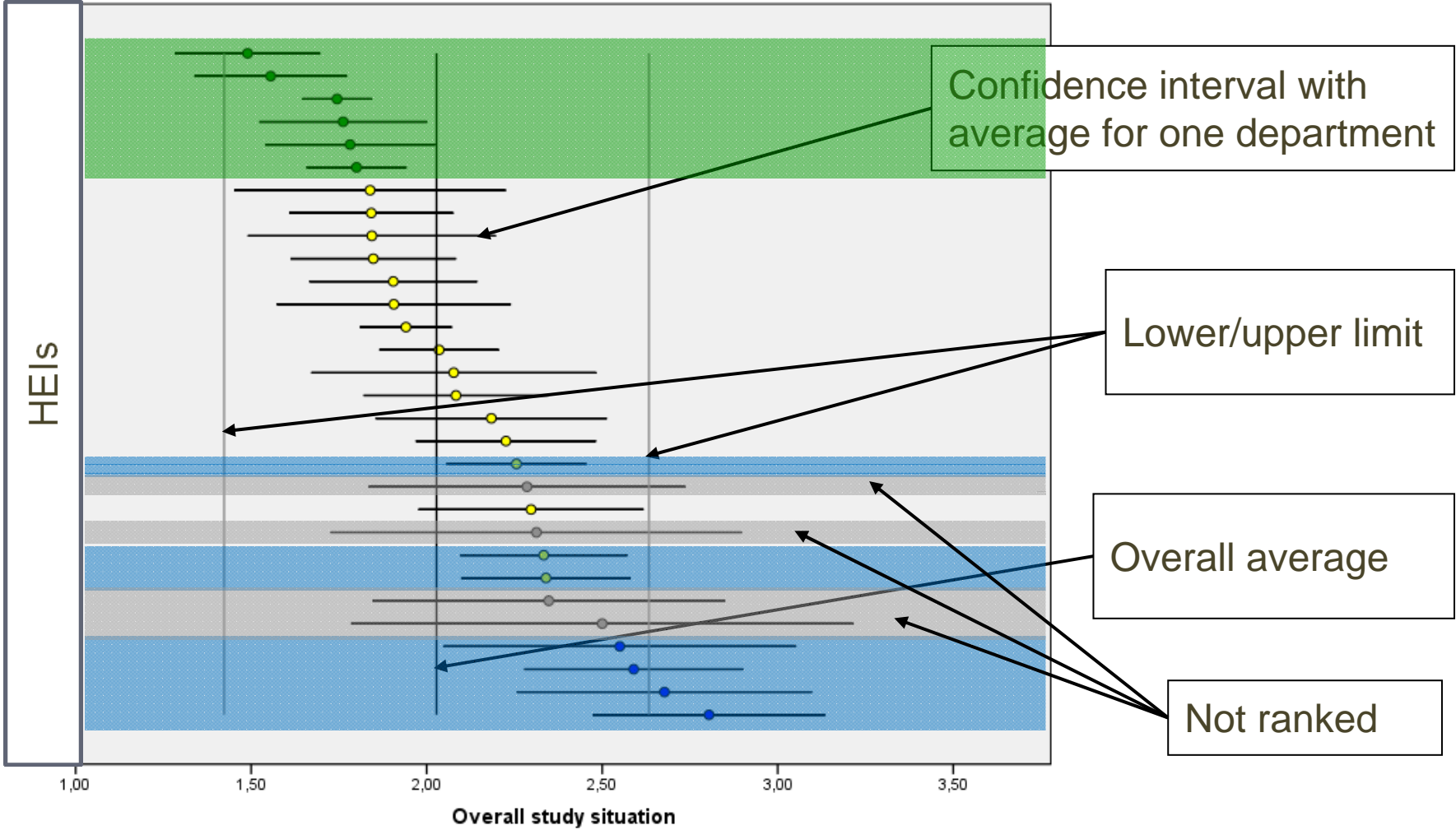- **Overall opinions**
  - Overall study situation

Student survey: rank groups

Confidence interval with average for one department

Overall average

Top group

Bottom group

HEIs

Overall study situation

Student survey: rank groups refined

- **Three values needed:**
  - Overall average
  - Lower/upper limit

  (= Overall average $\pm$ 0.25+(1.96*standard error on department level))

- **Top group**
  - all HEIs with CI completely on the left hand side of overall average

- **Intermediate group:**
  - Not top group and CI completely between lower and upper limit

- **Bottom group:**
  - Not intermediate group and CI completely on the right hand side of overall average

- **Else:**
  - Not ranked

Student survey: rank groups refined

Confidence interval with average for one department

Lower/upper limit

Overall average

Not ranked

HEIs

Overall study situation

1,00   1,50   2,00   2,50   3,00   3,50

Student survey: presentation of results

BACHELOR ... MENTS (UNDERGRADUATE, PRESENCE-LEARNING)

Library	Mean	Overall mean
Availability of literature that is necessary for the studies	2,1	2,1
Access to books and academic journals	1,9	2,1
Access to electronic journals	1,9	2,0
User support	2,4	2,2
Availability of study/reading places	3,5	2,6
Opening hours	2,6	2,0

2,6

2,0

2,8

1,8

2,2

semester [?]   3,4

Job market preparation [?]   2,6

Teaching evaluation [?]   2,5

E-Learning [?]   2,6

Library [?]   1,6

Rooms [?]   2,4

IT-infrastructure [?]   2,2

Support for stays abroad [?]   3,1

Overall study situation [?]   2,3

alphabetical

Third party

Publication

Job market

Teacher su

Overall stu

RWTH Aachen

Uni Amsterdam (NL)

VU Amsterdam (NL)

Uni Bamberg

FU Berlin

HU Berlin

Uni Bern (CH)

Uni Bielefeld

Uni Bochum

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The U-Multirank Project

- 2009-2011: Study on designing and testing the feasibility of a multi-dimensional global university ranking", funded by the European Commission

- Done by a consortium incl. CHE, CHEPS, CWTS, INCENTIM, OST

- Information to multiple stakeholders:
  - Prospective / mobile students
  - Researchers
  - Deans, Presidents / HE Managers
  - Employers
  - Policy Makers

- Basic approach from CHE ranking

The U-Multirank Project

- Multidimensional ranking:
    - No composite indicator !
    - Five dimensions:
        - Teaching & learning
        - Research
        - Knowledge transfer
        - International orientation
        - Regional engagement

- Pilot study:
    - 150 HEI (2/3 Europe, 1/3 Non-Europe)
    - Pilot fields (business and engineering)

- Mutiperspective ranking using a set of data sources
    - Self-reported data on institutions and departments
    - Bibliometric and patent data bases
    - **Student survey**

The U-Multirank Student Survey

- Bachelor & Master students (resp. students in national (long) first and second degrees)

- Random sample up to 500 students per field and institutions (at least one year enrolled in institution)

- Password protected online questionnaire; invitation by institutions either by mail or e-mail

- Total response: ~ 6,700 students from 90 institutions

Challenges to international student surveys

Do students in different cultures, countries and higher education system assess their own institution in a comparable way?

- Socio-cultural differences in answering behaviour?

- Differences in identification / critical distance to their own institution?

- Differences in standards and levels of expectations ?

The use of anchoring vignettes

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A technique „to ameliorate problems that occur when different groups of respondents understand and use ordinal response categories to evaluate services and social situations"(King and Ward 2006)

- Assessment of a pre-defined situation by respondents

- Introduced in social service research, in particular in health service research and evaluation

- (As far as we know) first use in higher education research

- Pilot study: Development of anchoring vignette questions on two dimensions:
    - Study organisation
   - Libraries

The use of anchoring vignettes

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Anchoring vignette 'study organization':

'In a term you want to take five courses. Due to organizational reasons (overlapping times, not enough places) you get a place in three out of those five'. How satisfied would you be with this situation?
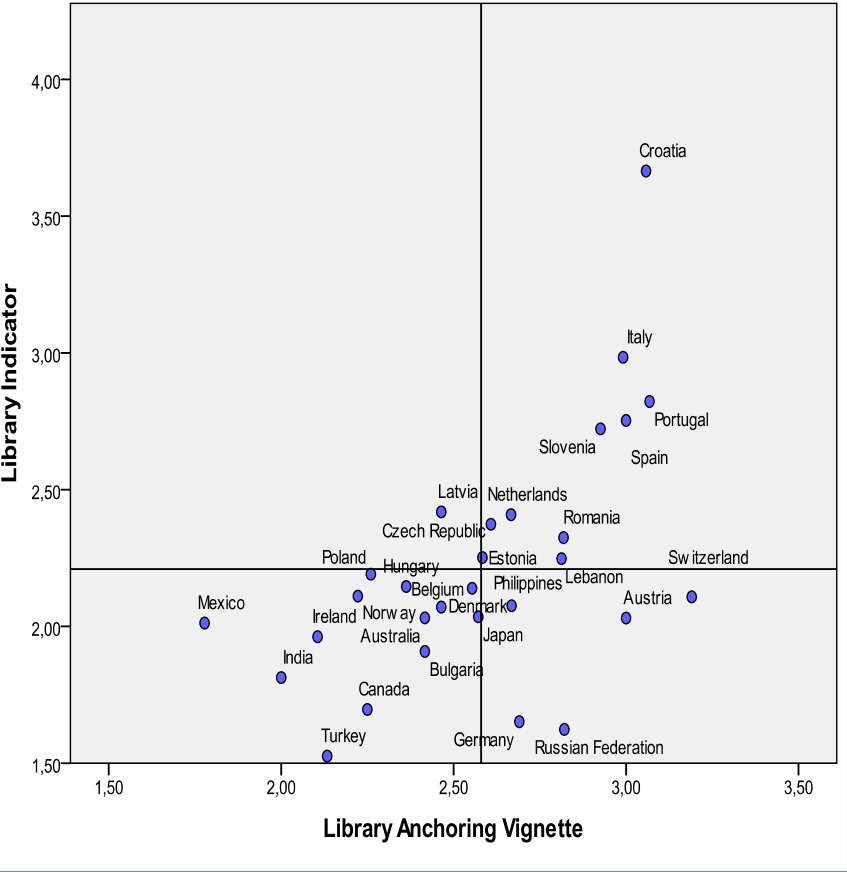
Anchoring vignette 'libraries':

You are trying to lend five books in your library; only two are available and only one of the missing three is available by interlibrary loan. How satisfied would you be with this situation?
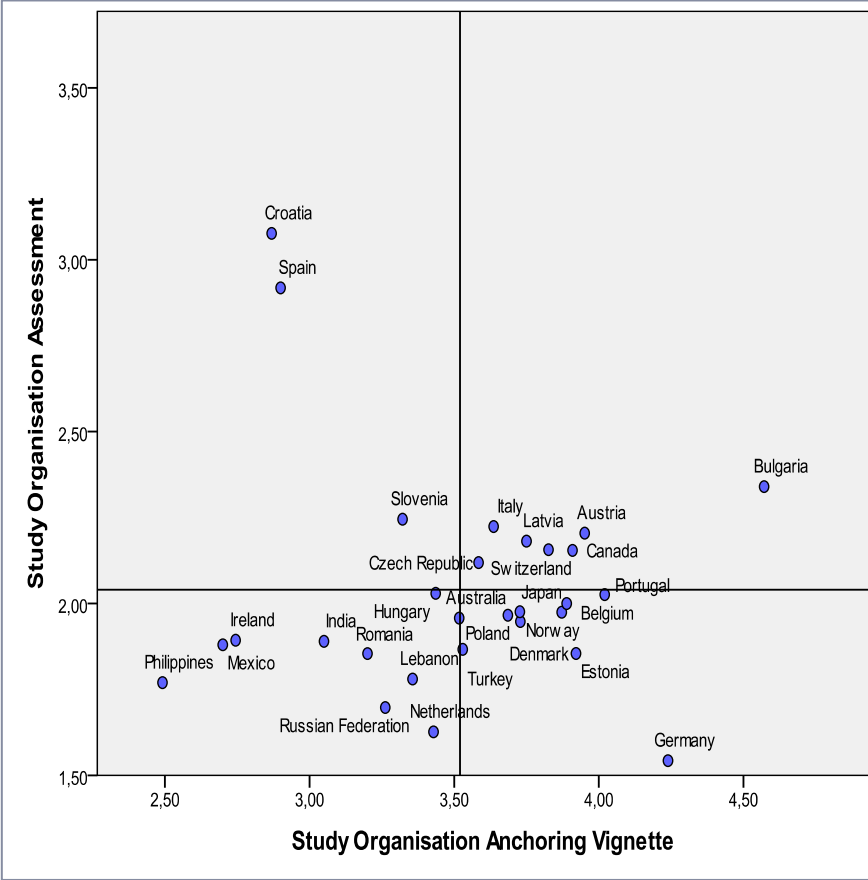
Correlation: -.10   Correlation: .56

Feasibility results

- No (strong) systematic correlation of anchoring vignettes and assessment variables

- No correlation between anchoring vignettes
  ➔ No general national differences in standards

- No systematic regional effects

Both on the institutional and the national level students' assessment of their own teaching and learning experience are not systematically biased by differences in standards /expectations

Further exploration

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- Analysis with a larger sample of institutions covering a wider range of countries and regions (and with more institutions per country)

- Extension of the scope of anchoring vignettes to other dimensions of the learning experience (e.g. contact to teachers, IT facilities)

- Exploration: Can anchoring vignettes be used to adjust assessments?

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Conclusions

- The assessment of their learning experience by students can produce valid and reliable information in rankings

- CHE ranking showed that this is possible on a cross national bases for countries with similar culture and higher education systems

- The U-Multirank pilot study has demonstrated that student satisfaction indicators can be a bases for international rankings, too
- But there are some methodological challenges (differences in standards, answering behaviour)

- The use of anchoring vignettes can help to validate student satisfaction indicators
- But further exploration is needed in a U-Multirank follow-up study

Practical recommendations

- Student surveys in rankings have to stick to methodological standards of empirical social research
  - Controlled sampling & access to the questionnaire
  - Clear rules to institutions on handling the survey (incl. rules of exclusion)

- The validity of student satisfaction indicators depends on the willingness of students to give a frank assessment of their own institution. Hence the communication with students should address the possibility to contribute to an enhancement of the quality of teaching at their institution

- The results of the survey can be a useful instrument for institutions to have a systematic and comparative (within fields) evaluation of their programmes /feedback by their students

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Thank you very much for your attention!

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