

## Ranking reveals world's top countries for higher education

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New research into national education systems gives the first ranking of countries which are the 'best' at providing higher education.

The *Universitas 21* Ranking was announced today (11 May 2012) at an event at Lund University in Sweden. *Universitas 21*, a leading global network of research universities, which includes the University of Birmingham, has developed the ranking as a benchmark for governments, education institutions and individuals. It aims to highlight the importance of creating a strong environment for higher education institutions to contribute to economic and cultural development, provide a high-quality experience for students and help institutions compete for overseas applicants.

Research authors at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne, looked at the most recent data from 48 countries across 20 different measures. The range of measures is grouped under four headings: resources (investment by government and private sector), output (research and its impact, as well as the production of an educated workforce which meets labour market needs), connectivity (international networks and collaboration which protects a system against insularity) and environment (government policy and regulation, diversity and participation opportunities). Population size is accounted for in the calculations.

Overall, in the *Universitas 21* Ranking of higher education systems, the top five were found to be the United States, Sweden, Canada, Finland and Denmark.

Government funding of higher education as a percentage of GDP is highest in Finland, Norway and Denmark, but when private expenditure is added in funding is highest in the United States, Korea, Canada and Chile. Investment in Research and Development is highest in Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland. The United States dominates the total output of research journal articles, but Sweden is the biggest producer of articles per head of population. The nations whose research has the greatest impact are Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United States, United Kingdom and Denmark. While the United States and United Kingdom have the world's top institutions in rankings, the depth of world class higher education institutions per head of population is best in Switzerland, Sweden, Israel and Denmark.

The highest participation rates in higher education are in Korea, Finland, Greece, United States, Canada and Slovenia. The countries with the largest proportion of workers with a higher level education are Russia, Canada, Israel, United States, Ukraine, Taiwan and Australia. Finland, Denmark, Singapore, Norway and Japan have the highest ratio of researchers in the economy..

International students form the highest proportions of total student numbers in Australia, Singapore, Austria, United Kingdom and Switzerland. International research collaboration is most prominent in Indonesia, Switzerland, Hong Kong SAR, Denmark, Belgium and Austria China, India. Japan and the United States rank in the bottom 25 per cent of countries for international research collaboration. In all but eight countries at least 50 per cent of students were female, the lowest being in India and Korea. In only five countries were there at least 50 per cent female staff; the lowest being in Japan and Iran.

Lead author, Professor Ross Williams at the University of Melbourne, said: "In a globalised world, a strong higher education system is essential if a nation is to be economically competitive.

"While there are a number of well-regarded global rankings of individual institutions, these don't shed any light on the broader picture of how well a nation's system educates its students, the environment it provides for encouraging and supporting excellence. Students choose countries to study in as much as individual institutions, and the *Universitas 21* Ranking offers clear data to support decision-making."

Jane Usherwood, Secretary General of *Universitas 21*, said: "More transparency and clarity is needed around the comparative strengths and qualities of national education systems around the world in order to encourage knowledge-sharing, collaboration and development of opportunities for students in all countries. We hope the *Universitas 21* Ranking will become an established point of reference for policy-makers, education institutions and development bodies globally."

*Universitas 21* is an international research network of 24 universities and colleges. Its membership works together to encourage international mobility and engagement between staff and students.

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