Foreword

Higher education is my passion. Attending University was my aspiration from a very young age as neither of my parents had the opportunity to do so during the post-second world war era when access was extremely limited. I feel fortunate in having had the opportunity to study economics at the University of Cambridge and management at The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. And I can say with sincerity that both experiences changed my life for the better and motivated me to become a social entrepreneur and to develop QS, a business dedicated to the field of higher education. In fact QS was established during my MBA, from a small office in the Entrepreneurship Center at Wharton. Why do I tell you this? Because QS is my way of giving back and giving thanks for the benefits higher education has afforded me. QS puts the needs of students first and QS World University Rankings are designed principally with the student in mind, by focusing not just on research quality, but also on graduate employability, teaching commitment, and internationalisation.

That is why I am delighted to introduce a book which examines the origins of global and regional rankings and looks in detail at the implications for stakeholders of rankings; students, employers, university leaders, academics and governments.

‘World University Rankings and the Future of Higher Education’ represents essential reading for anyone interested in the ranking of higher education institutions. The book helps to explain the differences between the ‘big three’ global rankings systems, ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities), QS (QS Quacquarelli Symonds) and THE (Times Higher Education) and reviews some of the criticisms faced by these rankings systems from amongst the academic community, trying to differentiate academic self-interest from genuine concerns. It also highlights some of the key insights which have made these rankings so popular; examining how rankings are used to inform university selection, career choices, strategic planning, resource allocation, and even national agendas in establishing what one might call ‘world-class’ universities.

Edited by Dr. Kevin Downing of City University of Hong Kong, widely recognised as one of the earliest adopters and leading analysts of global rankings and Dr. Fraide Ganotice, Jr., a prolific social science researcher with the University of Hong Kong who has turned his research attention to the rankings debate, it contains detailed views from a range of acknowledged global experts and recognised agents of change about the standing of university rankings in the world of higher education. The book is divided into three main sections with section 1 focusing on the history and development of global and regional university rankings and their methodological nuances. Section 2 of the book presents some fascinating critical analyses on some of the ranking systems, including the so-called ‘Big Three’ of global rankings, ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities), QS (QS Quacquarelli Symonds) and THE (Times Higher Education). The chapters in this section examine the problems that rankings
raise concerning the size of institutions, potential cultural and social bias and the possibilities that still exist for the development of new ranking systems around the world. Section 3 consists of a number of case studies of how universities from various geographic regions have responded to the emergence of university rankings, and the way in which institutional strategic direction has been influenced and shaped by the ranking phenomena.

Today, tens of millions of prospective undergraduate and postgraduate students make use of global rankings to decide whether to study domestically, or to take the leap and go overseas. Thousands of university leaders and administrators focus on how their institutions can improve performance and build international research partnerships to meet the demands of the increasingly globally competitive market which is 21st century higher education.

This may seem natural to the new generation of academics and students but before 2003-2004 when the first truly global ranking systems were introduced, the world of higher education was very different with roughly half as many students studying abroad full-time and very few universities who prioritised their international profile and research engagement. I believe ‘good’ rankings help improve lives and build cultural understanding and friendship amongst the future leaders of the world. I am pleased to recommend this book which imparts the collected knowledge and wisdom of some of the pioneers of rankings analysis, now one of the hottest topics in global higher education.


Nunzio Quacquarelli
QS Quacquarelli Symonds Limited, UK