The Which, When and Why of University League Tables
Students’ Use and Perceptions of Institutional vs. Subject Rankings

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1 Executive Summary

The primary aim of this research was to investigate the trade-off between a university’s institutional ranking and subject ranking within published league tables. Specifically, whether a university’s overall ranking or subject ranking was seen as more important and at which point during the decision making process does this displacement take place. The research also provided insight into the use of university league tables alongside the student decision making process.

Both primary and secondary research analyses were undertaken. Quantitative research was undertaken with current undergraduate students (at the University of Leeds and Leeds Beckett University) and qualitative research with prospective undergraduate students (from a local Sixth Form College in Leeds). HESA overseas international (OSI) enrolment data was correlated with institutional and subject rankings from both the Times and the Guardian, to form the secondary data analysis.

Due to the relatively limited participant sample used, the present findings should be treated as purely indicative.

The main findings were as follows:

- Subject rankings are of greater importance to students and applicants than institutional rankings are. Students generally reasoned this was because of the need to focus on their own subject of study.

- This preference was stronger for Leeds Beckett students than for University of Leeds students, which may reflect student quality or the greater vocational/professional focus of the former’s courses, or the reality of each institution’s institutional rank.

- Institutional rankings tend to be used as an initial discriminator before the focus narrows, with the use of subject ranks to create a final short list.

- When faced with increasing divergence between institutional level and subject rankings (60 vs. 40 through to 80 vs. 10), around a third of students conceive the disparity to be too large (and alter their original preference) – this is the ‘trade-off’ between a subject and an institutional rank.

- An institution with a current high ranking (subject or institutional), having risen from a longstanding low or moderate rank is perceived as attractive to students (rather than a university with a current low ranking, fallen from an established high ranking). This indicates that students/applicants are living in the moment and are seeking providers that can demonstrate quality today rather than a reliance on previous status/rank.

- Subject of study is generally not a significant differentiator of ranking preference.

It is recommended that universities monitor and communicate departmental rankings effectively, alongside the consideration of sub branding in order to create and sustain flagship subjects. This approach is most relevant for modern institutions where a high institutional ranking is less achievable and so there is more of a reliance on flagship subjects.
2 Introduction and Scope

2.1 Discussion

An institution’s reputation is shaped by numerous elements and gauges, and differs in the minds from individual to individual. Nevertheless, university league tables attempt to offer a more formalised and public representation of reputation and quality\(^1\).

A primary purpose of UK university league tables is to aid and inform prospective undergraduate students’ choices. This is achieved by presenting a simplified ranking based on aggregating and also weighting data representing a basket of variables that ranking compilers and publishers deem to be relevant. The factors include: entry requirements, staff/student ratio, academic services and facilities expenditure per student, student satisfaction, staff/student ratio, research ratings, the distribution of degree classifications, completion rates and student destinations\(^2\)\(^3\).

However, league tables are not without their controversies\(^4\), with a distinct lack of consensus being evident on how to either measure academic quality or the educational experience, or even on the purpose of higher education and thus what returns on the investments made by students and others might be appropriate.

As such, the varying weightings given to individual factors can be problematic; many claim that the data used to compile the tables is defined by what is accessible (already collected or measured for another purpose) rather than by reference to what is considered valuable or significant by the stakeholders that use them to inform their choices.

The notion that universities “chase” rankings is also controversial. Many institutions set ranking targets as primary KPIs. The implication is that they disproportionately attempt to focus their energy and resources on the factors that will gain them a stronger league table position – inevitably at the expense of other dimensions of university life. Few would deny that league tables are now a central part of the supply-side decision making process\(^5\).

As interest in rankings developed so their proliferation was inevitable; there are various domestic and international league tables. Of increasing importance are the subject specific rankings, in addition to the more established and historically more widely used institutional rankings. However, there is often moderate convergence between institutional and specific subject rankings. This therefore highlights the potential trade-off prospective students have to make: choosing an institution with a high institutional ranking and a moderate subject ranking, or vice versa.

Many within the higher education sector hold the belief that subject level league tables have the most impact\(^6\); this is proposed to be a logical notion since more and more research findings appear to indicate “subject” to be a key driver in applicant choice. For example, a

\(^1\) Hazelkorn, E. (2013) How Rankings are Reshaping Higher Education
\(^3\) Complete University Guide Methodology [http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/methodology/]
\(^4\) Reporter 485 | 28 October 2002 | University league tables [http://reporter.leeds.ac.uk/485/s7.htm]
\(^6\) Roberts, D. & Thompson, L (2007). University League Tables and the impact on student recruitment
recent report by Hobsons\textsuperscript{7} found that whilst students do consider rankings to be important, most “typically care more about subject ranking or a course’s academic reputation than that of the institution”. International students in particular are continually looking for ways to compare courses, subjects, and institutions in part because the cost/risk for them of making a poor choice is perhaps that much greater than for domestic students.

2.2 Research Objectives

Taking the above research into account, this study primarily aimed to investigate the trade-off between an institution’s institutional ranking and subject ranking: which is of most importance to prospective undergraduate students? Although research has indicated there may be a trend towards the primacy of subject league tables, this study aimed to evaluate this in more detail –

- Is more importance placed on an institution’s institutional or subject league table ranking?
- Is there a specific point when institution or subject ranking has more perceived value or power?
- Is there a pattern as to which segments give more weight to each rank type (e.g. students applying to study certain subjects, higher quality students)?
- What is the effect of longevity of a ranking (i.e. the trade-off between an institution holding a high ranking for a short time and a low ranking for an extended period, and vice versa)?

A variety of research techniques were used, with both primary and secondary research analyses conducted in order to gain a view of the larger picture of league table usage.

- HESA OSI enrolment data was correlated with institutional rankings and subject rankings.
- Quantitative analysis (current university students).
- Qualitative analysis (prospective university students).

\textsuperscript{7} Hobsons (2014) Influencing international student decision making
3 Statistical Relationship between Rankings and Enrolments

The following analyses use HESA first-degree 2012/13 enrolment data and 2012 institutional and subject rankings from the Guardian and the Times.

Overseas International (OSI) enrolment data was only analysed because of the cap that has existed on home student numbers. This cap therefore constrains the use of UK/EU enrolment data, as these volumes are not an accurate reflection of student demand.

A strong more desirable ranking corresponds to a low number (i.e. 1 is the best rank) so the y-axes has been placed in reverse order within the scatter diagrams (see appendices A-N). Therefore, a positive correlation would denote a relationship between a ‘high’ ranking and a high volume of enrolments. Each data point marks an individual institution.

3.1 Institutional Ranking vs. Institutional Enrolment Volume

Here, the number of 2012/13 first-degree full-time OSI enrolments for each UK institution were compared with the institution’s corresponding institutional rank (Guardian and Times) for that year (2012).

This analysis (see appendix A and appendix B) demonstrated the volume of overseas international (OSI) students achieved by each institution was positively related to their ranking. An $R^2$ value of 0.2391 indicated a low to moderate positive correlation between enrolment and Guardian institution rankings. From this relationship it could be inferred that prospective OSI students are influenced by institutions’ league table positions when making a decision about which university to attend/apply to. However other variables clearly interplay.

There was also a positive correlation between the Times institution rankings and OSI enrolments in 2012/13, however the correlation was not as strong as for the Guardian, with an $R^2$ value of 0.1875. Again other variables are at play which is as expected – reputational image (which is influenced over time by rank but should not be confused with ranking), prices, scholarships, the extent and efficacy of marketing activity and so forth.

3.2 Subject Ranking vs. Subject Enrolment Volume

Secondly, the number of 2012/13 full-time first-degree OSI enrolments for UK institutions (on a subject basis) were compared with the institution’s corresponding subject rank (Guardian and Times) for that year (2012).

Three JACS principal subject enrolments with their corresponding subject league tables were compared: (N1 and N2) Business Studies and Management Studies combined, (L1) Economics, and (M1 and M2) Law by Area and Law by Topic combined. These three subject fields achieved the largest volumes of full-time first-degree OSI enrolments in 2012/13.

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8 Excluding (N3) Finance and (N4) Accounting – subjects that did not align to a 2012 Times League Table, and (W2) Design Studies – a very large JACS code which was felt to be too broad across many varying programmes.
(N1) Business Studies & (N2) Management Studies

There was no correlation between OSI Business Studies and Management Studies enrolments and subject rank, for the Guardian ($R^2 = 0.0024$) (see Appendix C), or for the Times ($R^2 = 0.0012$) (see Appendix D).

(L1) Economics

In contrast to business and management, there did appear to be a relationship, albeit moderate ($R^2 = 0.2011$) between OSI Economics enrolments and the corresponding institutions' Guardian subject rankings (see Appendix E), as well as the Times subject rankings ($R^2 = 0.2783$) (see Appendix F). From this, it may be inferred that prospective Economics OSI students are influenced to some extent by an institution's subject rankings. However, this relationship may be a result of an alignment between institutional institutional rank, rather than subject rank. Therefore whilst subject ranking appears to be an influential factor upon enrolments, this correlation may be by chance.

(M1) Law by Area & (M2) Law by Topic

There was a positive relationship between the volume of Law OSI students and institutions' Guardian ($R^2 = 0.3307$) (see Appendix G) and Times ($R^2 = 0.3419$) (see Appendix H) rankings for Law; suggesting that prospective OSI Law students may refer to and be influenced by subject league tables when choosing where they study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Guardian $R^2$</th>
<th>Times $R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N1 &amp; N2</td>
<td>0.0024</td>
<td>0.0012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>0.2011</td>
<td>0.2783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M1 &amp; M2</td>
<td>0.3307</td>
<td>0.3419</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a general statement, there was a positive correlation between subject enrolments and subject rankings but it tended to be weak. This was true for just Economics and Law however, not for Business and Management subjects (where no relationship existed). This may reflect some constraint on the part of universities in terms of the number of OSI students admitted but that is unlikely to be a major factor; more likely this suggests that price, programme design, marketing recruitment activity etc. are also playing a strong role. However, as an analysis was only performed on three subject groups, this conclusion should only be treated as indicative of a trend.

3.3 Institutional Ranking vs. Subject Enrolment Volume

The next hypothesis to test was that institutional rankings may be more important to OSI students than subject rankings are – conceivably there may be more of a familiarity with such league tables.

The following analysis compares the number of 2012/13 first-degree full-time OSI enrolments for each UK institution (on a subject basis), with the institution's corresponding rank (Guardian and Times) for that year (2012).
(N1) Business Studies & (N2) Management Studies

In a similar vein to subject rankings, there was no correlation between OSI Business Studies and Management Studies enrolments and institutional rank. This was true for both the Guardian ($R^2 = 0.0004$) (see Appendix I) and the Times ($R^2 = <0.0001$) (see Appendix J). This reinforces the notion that other factors outside of university league tables play a deciding part in international students’ decision making.

(L1) Economics

There was a relationship between an institution’s rank and the OSI Economics enrolments they obtained. This was true for both the Guardian ($R^2 = 0.2673$) (see Appendix K) and the Times ($R^2 = 0.2882$) (see Appendix L). Although these correlations were slightly stronger than were present for subject rankings, they are still relatively weak.

(M1) Law by Area & (M2) Law by Topic

Again, of the three subjects, Law demonstrated the strongest correlation between enrolments and league table ranking. The strength of correlation was similar to that seen for subject rankings ($R^2 = 0.3240$ and $R^2 = 0.3538$; for the Guardian and the Times respectively) (see Appendix M and Appendix N).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Guardian</th>
<th>Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N1 &amp; N2</td>
<td>0.0004</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>0.2573</td>
<td>0.2882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M1 &amp; M2</td>
<td>0.3240</td>
<td>0.3538</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In line with the hypothesis, there tended to be a slightly stronger correlation that existed between institutional ranking and enrolment volumes, than with subject rankings. Though stronger, the relationships were still relatively weak. This therefore indicates that, at least for the three subject groups in question, league tables do not play a key role when international students are choosing their place of study.
4 Primary Research – Quantitative Survey (Current Students)

To further explore the use and impact of rankings, we conducted small-scale primary research drawing on two different samples – one representing prospective university students (see section 4) and one of current university students (see below).

4.1 Objectives, Sample & Method

The overarching aim of the quantitative survey was to investigate the trade-off between the use and importance of subject rank and institutional rank in university decision-making.

Methodology

The interviews were conducted on the street, outside the University of Leeds and Leeds Beckett University. The interviews were structured and conducted individually with each respondent, lasting approximately 5 minutes.

A total of 117 UK/EU (home) undergraduate university students (68 male; 45 female; 4 unclassified) took part in the quantitative component of the study.

Respondents were part of a face-to-face opportunity sample consisting of students attending university in Leeds – students were predominantly either from Leeds Beckett University (57) or University of Leeds (58) (see Appendix O).

The majority of students were in the 3rd year of their degree (55), followed by 2nd year (29) and 1st year (20), with the remainder in 4th year (13). Details of the students’ tariff bands upon entrance to their degrees, where known, were also recorded. The most commonly achieved tariff band being 300-359 (36), followed by 240-299 (26) and 360-419 (24) (see Appendix P). Each student’s subject of study was also noted in line with the HESA JACS Subject Group coding (see Appendix Q).

4.2 Results

Estimation of how many universities in the UK

The students were asked to estimate the number of UK universities (a figure to the nearest 10); the true number of universities in the UK is between 150 and 160⁹.

This was a control question to establish each respondent’s wider knowledge. The answers given by the students provided context to the following survey questions regarding their perceptions of their university’s ranking. As such, if respondents tended to overestimate the number of universities, their estimated ranking of their own institution may reflect this – i.e. be lower, in proportion with the estimated number of UK universities.

⁹ The precise number of universities in the UK is difficult to quantify due to continual changes and the recent proliferation of private institutions
**Table 4** – the average (mean and median) and range of estimations of how many universities there are in the UK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions in the UK</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Sample</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds Beckett</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uni of Leeds</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>870</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the average and range of estimates made by undergraduate students. The means show that on average respondents tended to over-estimate the number of universities there are in the UK. The median score was close to reality.

Leeds Beckett students’ estimates were typically closer to the actual number, with the University of Leeds students on average overestimating the number of universities by 50. However when the median and modal values are taken into account, University of Leeds students are seen as slightly more accurate than Leeds Beckett students.

**Figure 1** – frequency bar chart showing estimations of how many universities there are in the UK

As a general statement, students tended to lack knowledge of the number of universities in the UK. It is likely that students are less informed about the higher education sector than universities perhaps believe they are.

**Estimating their university's league table ranking**

Respondents were asked where they perceived the rank position to be for their university in institutional league tables.
In 2014, Leeds Beckett was ranked 107th in the Guardian University Guide and 103rd in the Times University Guide. University of Leeds was ranked 34th in the Guardian university Guide and 29th in the Times University Guide.

**Table 5** – the average (mean, median and mode) and range of institutional league table ranking estimations of the university the respondent attended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Institutional ranking of university</th>
<th>Reality (2012)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds Beckett</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uni of Leeds</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows that the students tended to over-rate the university they attend in terms of ranking – particularly in the case of Leeds Beckett students, who rated their university on average approximately 20 ranks higher than the reality. University of Leeds students also had an inflated average ranking (between 3 and 8 ranks higher), though much less significant.

The range of ranking estimations was also much larger for Leeds Beckett students – 130 as opposed to 43 for University of Leeds students.

However, this finding should be treated with caution, as proportionately this may not be true. Based on the principle of distribution and standard deviation, as Leeds Beckett have a much lower ranking than the University of Leeds, the range of estimates is likely to be larger and therefore would explain why Leeds Beckett students vary in their ranking estimates to a larger degree than University of Leeds students did.

**Figure 2** – frequency bar chart showing estimations of the ranking of the university the respondent attended

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10 It should be noted that this research was completed prior to the name change of Leeds Beckett University (formerly known as Leeds Metropolitan University) and therefore perceptions may have altered since the research was performed.
Trade-off Scenario – Subject vs. Institutional rank (Part 1)

The aim of this scenario task was to understand the trade-off in university decision-making that exists between the importance of university institutional rank and university subject rank.

Essentially, respondents had to make a choice between a university with a low institutional rank and a high subject rank, or a university with a high institutional rank and a low subject rank.

Respondents were given the following scenario:

Assume your friend/relative is interested in studying the same subject as you at university, which of the following universities would you advise them to choose?

Figure 3 – Trade-off Scenario – Subject vs. Institutional rank (Part 1)

An ‘institutional rank preference’ was defined through the respondent choosing the university with a high institutional rank (i.e. 10-20), but low subject rank (i.e. 60-80) as preference. In contrast, a ‘subject rank preference’ was defined through the choosing of the university with a high subject rank, but with a low institutional rank. The results are outlined below.

Figure 4 – Distribution of subject to institutional ranking preferences in response to Part 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University A: Overall (60) &amp; Subject (20)</th>
<th>University B: Overall (20) &amp; Subject (60)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60th overall rank &amp; 20th subject rank</td>
<td>20th overall rank &amp; 60th subject rank</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 117
76 of the 117 (65%) respondents chose University A – a subject rank preference. Thus, around two thirds of the respondents felt having a high subject rank of 20 outweighed having a low institutional rank. In other words, a moderately ranked institution with a high subject rank outweighed a highly ranked institution with a moderate subject rank.

**University:**

The following analysis were undertaken to investigate whether the university the students attended impacted upon ranking perceptions. Leeds Beckett and University of Leeds were the key universities within the sample and subsequently the analysis investigates whether there is a difference between the perceptions of students at these two universities.

**Figure 5** – The effect of university attended upon the distribution of subject to institutional ranking preferences in response to Part 1

The above chart shows Leeds Beckett students tended to demonstrate a stronger preference towards subject rankings (75%) as opposed to institutional rankings (26%), than University of Leeds students did. Although University of Leeds respondents did show a modest preference towards subject rankings (53%), it was much less significant at just over half of students, in contrast to three quarters of Leeds Beckett students.

**Tariff Band:**

The data gained on respondents’ tariff bands was divided into three categories in terms of student quality: Low (120-299), Medium (300-419) and High (420-540+). However the following analysis should only be used as indicative due to the uneven and sometimes small sample sizes within each category (Low: 38; Medium: 62; High: 10) – particularly in the instance of the ‘High’ quality category where there were just 10 respondents.
**Figure 6** – The effect of student quality upon the distribution of subject to institutional ranking preferences in response to Part 1

The above chart shows that subject ranking is more important than institutional ranking across all student quality segments based on their entry tariff scores. This observation is most true for high-quality students where 90% of them prioritised a high subject ranking over a high institutional ranking (however, this is based on a sample of just 10 students). Low-quality students also demonstrated a significant preference, with circa three quarters of them showing a preference towards subject rankings. Medium-quality students were most divided of the three groups, with just 55% of students choosing subject ranking over institutional ranking but still the majority were trading in favour of subject over university rank.

**Degree Subject:**

The following analysis was undertaken to see whether the subject studied by students impacted upon whether they demonstrated a preference towards subject or institutional rank. The demographic data revealed the three most studied subject groups by the sample were Business and Administrative Studies (N), Social Studies (L) and Historical and Philosophical Studies (V).
Figure 7 – The effect of degree subject upon the distribution of subject to institutional ranking preferences in response to Part 1

It does not appear that the degree subject impacted ranking preferences. For each subject group, circa 70% of students felt a high subject ranking was more important than a high institutional ranking.

Summary – Part 1

- Around two thirds of students felt that a university with a high subject rank (20) (and a moderate institutional rank) was preferential to a university with a high institutional rank (20) (and a moderate subject rank).

- Although both University of Leeds and Leeds Beckett students demonstrated a preference towards subject rankings (as opposed to institutional rankings), a stronger majority was present in the Leeds Beckett sample. Thus, suggesting that Leeds Beckett students place stronger importance upon subject rankings than University of Leeds students do.

- Subject ranking was more important across all student qualities, but particularly for high-quality students, followed by low-quality students. Medium-quality students were the most divided of the three groups, with only a slight majority prioritising subject rank over institutional rank.

- The degree subject studied by students did not significantly impact upon ranking preferences.
Trade-off Scenario – Subject vs. Institutional rank (Part 2)

Depending on the answer the respondent gave to Part 1 (the choice between University A and University B), the respondent was then asked a follow-up choice question (Part 2). This question encompassed the university they chose as preferential, but with the contrast between institutional and subject rank made more significant relative to the university they had initially rejected (essentially, “upping the ante”).

Respondents were given the same scenario as in Part 1:

Assume your friend/relative is interested in studying the same subject as you at university, which of the following universities would you advise them to choose?

Figure 8 – Trade-off Scenario – Subject vs. Institutional rank (Part 2 (a))

If your answer was University A...

University C:

80th overall rank & 10th subject rank

University B:

20th overall rank & 60th subject rank

Figure 9 – Distribution of subject to institutional ranking preferences in response to Part 2 (a)

27 (36%) respondents who originally demonstrated a subject rank preference, perceived the discrepancy between institutional rank and subject rank was now too large. In other words, the institutional rank of 80 outweighed the subject rank of 10.
On the other hand, 49 of the 76 (64%) respondents who originally demonstrated a subject rank preference chose University C – again, a subject rank preference. Thus, the majority of these respondents felt the benefit of the high subject rank (10) outweighed the impact of the low institutional rank (80) and were undeterred by this disparity.

*University:*

**Figure 10** – The effect of university upon the distribution of subject to institutional ranking preferences in response to Part 2 (a)

Of the respondents initially exhibiting a preference towards subject ranking in part 1, around one third felt that the disparity between institutional (80) and subject ranking (10) was too wide and so altered their preference to a high institutional ranking. This finding applied to both Leeds Beckett and University of Leeds students. In other words, the university attended did not impact upon the perception of subject to institutional ranking prioritisations.
**Tariff Band:**

Figure 11 – The effect of student quality upon the distribution of subject to institutional ranking preferences in response to Part 2 (a)

Of the students that demonstrated a preference towards subject ranking, just under half (44%) of both medium- and high-quality students perceived the disparity between a low institutional ranking (80) and a high subject ranking (10) to be too large. Low-quality students appeared to be less deterred by this disparity – just 29% of them evidently felt that a subject ranking of 10 did not outweigh the benefits of an institutional ranking of 80.
Degree Subject:

Figure 12 – The effect of degree subject upon the distribution of subject to institutional ranking preferences in response to Part 2 (a)

From the above chart, it can be seen that Business and Administrative Studies students were less influenced by the disparity between the institutional (80) and subject (10) rankings, with the vast majority (81%) still prioritising a high subject rank over a high institutional rank. In contrast, the majority (55%) of Historical and Philosophical Studies students evidently felt the disparity was too large, choosing University B instead.

Figure 13 – Trade-off Scenario – Subject vs. Institutional rank (Part 2 (b))

If your answer was University B...

University D:

**10th overall** rank & **80th subject** rank

University A:

**60th overall** rank & **20th subject** rank
Figure 14 – Distribution of subject to institutional ranking preferences in response to Part 2 (b)

13 of the 41 (32%) respondents originally demonstrating an institutional rank preference chose University A – a subject rank preference. Therefore, a third of these respondents perceived the low subject rank (80) now outweighed the high institutional rank (10).

In contrast, the other two thirds (28 respondents) who originally demonstrated an institutional rank preference, the larger discrepancy between institutional rank and subject rank did not impact upon their preference.

University:

Figure 15 – The effect of university upon the distribution of subject to institutional ranking preferences in response to Part 2 (b)
Of the students that initially demonstrated a preference towards institutional rankings, a slightly greater proportion of Leeds Beckett students (40%) (than 30% of University of Leeds students) perceived the discrepancy between institutional (10) and subject (80) rank too large at University D.

**Tariff Band:**

**Figure 16** – The effect of student quality upon the distribution of subject to institutional ranking preferences in response to Part 2 (b)

![Tariff Band Graph](image)

Of the low- and medium-qualified students that initially demonstrated a preference towards institutional ranking, around a third of students perceived the low subject ranking (80) outweighed the high institutional ranking (10) and subsequently demonstrated a subject ranking preference. On the other hand, the remaining two thirds of students were not sufficiently wavered by the enlarged disparity. The high-quality student sample was disregarded due to the minimal sample size of just 1 student.
Degree Subject:

Figure 17 – The effect of degree subject upon the distribution of subject to institutional ranking preferences in response to Part 2 (b)

Business and Administrative Studies students were less influenced by the increased ranking disparity. Here, 86% of students did not feel that the low subject ranking (80) outweighed the high subject ranking (10). In contrast, half of Social Studies and Historical and Philosophical seemingly felt the disparity was too large and prioritised a high subject ranking over a high institutional ranking.

Summary – Part 2

- The increased disparity between the subject and institutional rankings (in the case of University C and University D) impacted upon university choice for around a third of respondents. In other words, “upping the ante” to a difference of 70 ranks between subject and institutional ranking was perceived as too large for 1 in 3 students.

- The university attended by students did not significantly impact upon responses to both Part 2 scenarios.

- Student quality (as measured by achieved degree entrance tariff) did affect responses given for both scenarios within Part 2. There was no particular pattern present however. Furthermore, some of the sample sizes were quite small, rendering findings only indicative.

- Of the subject areas analysed of Business, Social Studies and Historical and Philosophical Studies, students studying Business subjects tended to be less
influenced by the increased disparity in rankings, with the majority (73% - 81%) maintaining their initial preferences.
5 Primary Research - Qualitative Interviews (Prospective Students)

5.1 Objectives, Sample & Method

The qualitative interviews aimed to answer the motivation and attitudinal factors surrounding league table use. Specifically, the ‘whys’ and ‘when’ of the research question – if a certain league table is used (i.e. institutional or subject), why is it used, and when during the application process is it used?

Methodology

The interviews were conducted individually with each respondent and on average lasted between 30 and 40 minutes and was semi-structured.

Nine A2 Level students took part in qualitative one-on-one interviews. All were from Yorkshire.

These respondents were in Year 13 at a sixth form at a state school in Leeds and had recently applied to university for the academic year 2014/15 through UCAS.

Due to respondent availability, interviews were conducted at two different time periods:

- Set 1 = 3 respondents: prior to A-Level Results Day (14th August)
- Set 2 = 6 respondents: following Results Day (late August)

The implications of this split timing is discussed in the final section of the report.

This sample consisted of 5 males and 4 females studying a variety of STEM and HASS subjects at A-Level. Five of these respondents were aiming to study STEM subjects at university, and the remaining 4, HASS subjects. All but one respondent’s preferred university choice was an established pre 1992 university; all were predicted or received between BBB and A*A*A* at A-Level. All respondents were ‘very’ or ‘100%’ certain that they wanted to study their chosen degree subject.

5.2 Results

The following analysis is based on keynotes made from the interviews, along with results from the card sorting tasks.

University decision-making (‘card-sorting’ task)

Respondents were given cards, each with a factor on it that conceivably influenced their university decision-making process (i.e. which university to apply for) – these were factors which available secondary research has shown to be important (Higher Expectations, 2013).

Respondents were subsequently asked to place the cards in order of ‘importance’ – i.e. how influential each factor was. During the task, respondents were asked to talk the interviewer through their thought process and reasoning behind their choices and ordering. NB the interviewer made a particular note if the respondent recalled league table rankings or reputation as an influential factor.

Distance from home / location appeared to be a particularly influential factor in university decision making, often acting as an initial determinant in creating a short list of universities. The general consensus seemed to be far enough from home, but not too far. In terms of the
destinations themselves, respondents labelled characteristics such as nightlife, being a city (although not London), alongside reasoning of having a “life outside of study”. In getting a “feel for the university”, open days (post-application) appeared to be very influential.

Details of the course were also prevalent factors, such as the facilities/resources available, staff and the modules on offer. Tied in with this was the frequent reference to “reputation”, particularly in relation to the course, as opposed to the university as a whole. Respondents also quoted departmental “prestige” and “redbrick” in a similar vein, with reference made to league tables and the perceptions of others.

The course itself featured as a high priority for respondents. On the other hand, recommendations, along with bursaries/scholarships featured low in prioritisation but this may reflect the nature of the sample.

Reputation in general was also ranked highly in most cases, with reputation of department / lecturer(s) typically seen as more important than the institutional reputation of the university.

Research-led reputation tended to be prioritised more by the respondents that aspired to be academics / go on to postgraduate study (a third of respondents planned to do this – a proportion which was likely to be higher than the average across the sector).

League tables as an influence varied respondent to respondent – for example, one respondent rated them as the most influential factor and another rated them as the least. The average placement they achieved of the 13 factors tended to place them lower to mid-range.

Knowledge of University League Tables

In this segment, respondents were asked various questions relating to their knowledge and experience of university league tables. Discussion points included – their current knowledge of rankings, whether they knew there are subject and institutional league tables, and multiple versions (i.e. Guardian, Times, Complete University Guide etc.). Where it was clear from the respondents’ responses that they had some knowledge of league tables, they were asked where and how the y found out the information.

Their knowledge:

All of the respondents were aware of the existence of multiple domestic league tables – the Guardian, the Times and in most cases, the Complete University Guide. All respondents also were aware of institutional and subject league tables.

Generally, there was an apprehension and mistrust towards the use of league tables. There was complete consensus on a lack of knowledge of how league table rankings are compiled. Although there was an acknowledgement of how the individual tables varied between each other, there was a significant mistrust in how rankings were formulated – for example, the Guardian was mentioned a few times as unreliable and to “fudge” and create misleading rankings.

There was considered to be a significant lack of clarity and accessibility as to how the rankings are compiled and because of this their credibility is questionable. Some felt that people need to interpret rankings with a more “critical” eye and how they should not be perceived as the “be all and end all” and a more autonomous decision should be made.
Others offered views on how there should be just one league table and subject league tables for combined subjects.

*How they found out about them:*

In general, it was felt that they had known about league table rankings for a while. Specific influencers labelled were schools, parents, Google and the news. It seems applicants are not directed to rankings, they become aware of them unconsciously over time.

**University league table experience**

Of the 9 respondents, 8 used league tables to aid their university decision-making. The applicant that did not use league tables cited the reason being that she had applied to a very specific professional course (Speech and Language Therapy) and league table rankings were not relevant.

*Which?*

Five of the 9 respondents used the Guardian League Table, 2 used the Times and 2 used the Complete University Guide. This is broadly in line with the latest Higher Expectations (Youth Sight, 2015) study data. Open free access is likely to have played a part in this distribution – i.e. although the Times is long established, it is no longer accessible free of charge and this has seen its use/influence wane. Most of the participants had used both the institutional and subject league tables, with more importance placed on subject league tables.

*When?*

Respondents who claimed to have used both institutional and subject specific league tables, generally used institutional league tables as an initial filter, followed by subject league tables to create a more refined short list. Some respondents also used UniStats during this shortlisting process. In some cases, UniStats was seen as a much less confusing measure of “quality”.

*Why?*

The general consensus was that university league tables help to “quantify” all of the different factors, therefore enabling “easy” and “quick” comparison. In a similar vein, it was also felt that the rankings saved them doing the research themselves and the league tables represented more than they “could ever know”.

Outside of Oxbridge, Durham and some London universities, typically at the top of the tables, it was felt that something was necessary to quantify the remaining universities.

One respondent who had used the league tables (although to a limited extent) expressed strong disapproval of them believing that universities should not be ranked as it encouraged graduates and students to compare themselves with others based on the university they are/had attended.
Trade-off Scenario – Subject vs. Institutional Rank

Respondents were given the same scenario task as described in the Quantitative survey.

Part 1:

The vast majority of respondents chose University A – a subject rank preference. Again, students clearly present a tendency to prioritise a high subject ranking over a high institutional ranking. Those that demonstrated this preference tended to be very confident in their choice of University A, with many using the word “definitely” in describing their decision.

Reasoning given included:

“Why does it matter about other departments?”

“Should aim to get a better education and gain from their degree. It’s about the student, not about other people”

“If you want to stay in the subject you’re studying [Chemistry], subject rank is more important”

“You’re in your department, not any others”

On the other hand, the two respondents who expressed an institutional rank preference suggested:

“People remember the university you’re at, not what you’re studying”

“Going to an established, prestigious university is more important”

Part 2 (a):

The majority of participants demonstrating a subject rank preference maintained this preference even when the institutional rank dropped to just 80. Therefore, the disparity between a subject rank of 10 and institutional rank of 80 did not deter the majority of respondents.

The explanations given by these respondents was in line with their original comments. However there were a couple of respondents who were somewhat hesitant; although they chose University B they suggested that they would have to find out as much information as possible about the university (why it’s ranked 80th) and look at the specific statistics (e.g. employability) in order to confirm their decision.

On the other hand, the two respondents who evidentially perceived the discrepancy between institutional rank and subject rank too large (and therefore chose University B) felt:

“80th [institutional] rank isn’t very good, but 60th isn’t that bad”

“There is too bigger difference between 10th and 80th”

Part 2 (b):

Of the two participants prioritising a high institutional rank over a high subject rank, one felt that an 80th subject rank was just too low and outweighed a high (10th) institutional rank. They gave the reason that, “80th is too low and you won’t get a good degree from there”.
Trade-off Scenario – Rankings Longevity

Respondents were given the following scenario:

Assume your friend/relative is interested in studying the same subject as you at university, which of the following universities would you advise them to choose?

**Figure 16 – Trade-off scenario – Rankings Longevity**

**Overall ranking**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University A</th>
<th>University B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Subject ranking**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University C</th>
<th>University D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Participants responded to this scenario twice – firstly in the context of university institutional ranking and secondly in the context of subject ranking.

The aim of this scenario task was to understand the importance and trade-off of certain rankings over a period of time.

Essentially, respondents had the choice of advising their friend/relative to choose a university that had been ranked relatively low for 10 years, but highly for the most recent 2 years, or vice versa (highly for 10 years, but low in the last 2 years).

The following findings represent responses to both subject rankings and institutional rankings scenarios – and the results showed that responses did not change depending on whether the ranking scenarios were for institutional or subject. Thus, the way in which universities are perceived in terms of how well embedded their rank is similar for subject and institution-wide.

All but one of the respondents felt that having a high ranking in the most recent 2 years was more preferable than having a high ranking for 10 years (but low ranking in the most recent 2 years).

Reasons given by respondents included:

- A recent decrease seen as more detrimental:

“A decline is much worse and it could carry on declining while you’re there”
“If they’re slipping down, in the next 2 years, where are they going to be?”

“I want somewhere that’s improving rather than declining. You’re only as good as your last 2 years”

- Recent increase seen optimistically:

“Obviously something has changed for the better. Need to stay away from the other university [University B] until its better”

“2 years shows a bit of consistency – not just the odd year. It’s gaining reputation. What’s happening currently is more important”

“Things change quickly these days. Shows progress in the right direction”

“Something new is obviously good”

- Employers:

“Employers should be more up to date with universities”

“Will want a job pretty soon after being at university – employers will look at how it looks in the present”.

Higher education is unusual in that each year it engages a largely fresh cohort of prospects. These prospective students are typically at an age where they are unlikely to have a longitudinal view of a university’s ranking and will be most exposed to only current table positions. Thus they may typically be unaware if a specific institution is climbing or declining in the ranks over time – unless the university or perhaps the media draws their attention to this.

However this partial contemporary perspective of the standing of universities in ranking terms is set in the context of the broader concept of reputation; others may intervene overtly or otherwise to inform candidates of the prestige or image of universities, regardless of their current rank. This is the return for having a good reputation – you are protected somewhat in the short term from a poor set of visible indicators. However the research reported here strongly suggests that even amongst some of the brightest candidates, it is today’s evidence of quality that they will take sharp note of, so resting on past achievements would be a serious error.

Summary

- Key factors in university decision making included, distance from home / location, course facilities/modules, open days, and outside-of-study factors such as nightlife.

- Reputational factors were also key influencers and in most cases was expressed to be more important at a departmental/course level rather than at an overall institutional level. This was echoed in the responses given in the scenario task.

- Students tended to question why other departments mattered; with the quality of an individual’s subject/course of study directly affecting them, rather than the impact of other irrelevant departments (which are taken into account in an overall institutional league table).
• Students were aware of the existence of multiple domestic league tables but generally questioned their creditability and trustworthiness as a measure of quality.

• The majority of students had used the Guardian League Table; using the institutional league table as an initial filter before creating a short list using the subject league tables.

• The reason for using league tables generally was out of ease – to help “quantify” all of the different factors, enabling a quick comparison

• A recent improvement in a university’s rankings from a longstanding low ranking was preferable to a recent decline from an established high ranking (regardless of whether at institutional or subject level).
Conclusions & Implications

6.1 Overview

Survey and sample limitations

Before the findings of the study are discussed in more detail, it is important to acknowledge the methodological limitations of this study, specifically relating to the research samples. Because some of the qualitative interviews were conducted prior to A-Level Results Day and some following this, the outlook of the students is likely to have been very different. These students were also from the same sixth form and all were from the highly qualified end of A-Level standards (from BBB to A*A*A*). The quantitative sample was relatively large but limited in terms of geographical location – with all students from Leeds. Despite the questionability of ability to generalise the findings, both primary research samples were well-targeted.

The use of rankings

University league tables are an established resource known to and used by many applicants during their university decision-making process.

Higher Expectations (Youth Sight, 2013) found that 74% of applicants refer to at least one domestic league table. The more recent study has seen this proportion rise further.

This study highlighted the prevalent awareness both prospective and current students have of league tables (institutional and subject), and in the case of prospective students a relatively longstanding one.

Despite this clear influence however, there was almost consensus on a lack of knowledge of how the league tables are formulated, resulting in some feelings of mistrust towards them. The publishers may claim they are transparent and that they explain their approach and method in detail both in print and online but the users seem disinclined to delve too far for the details. This is ironic – rankings are suffering from a credibility deficit because their users are looking for short-cut answers which of itself encourages a search only for the superficial top line easily absorbed results. This is the antithesis of what higher education is surely about!

Nevertheless, the prospective students demonstrated that their application process had been influenced, although to varying levels, by university league table rankings. This demonstrates the salience of a university’s ranking.

Is more importance placed on an institution’s institutional or subject league table ranking?

Prospective university students made frequent references to “reputation”, in particular relation to the course or subject (as opposed to the university as a whole), when asked about factors that influenced them in their decision-making process.

In a similar vein, departmental “prestige” was mentioned, with specific reference to league tables. Moreover, when we asked participants to order known influential factors (using the Higher Expectations (2013) framework), the reputation of department / lecturer(s) was
typically seen as more important in final choice than the institutional reputation of the university.

Crucially, the above finding came through in both the scenario task completed with both the prospective and current student samples. 65% of current students demonstrated a subject rank preference – in other words, a university with a high subject rank but a low institutional rank was seen as more desirable than a university with a low subject rank but a high institutional rank. We accept that in many cases this is not a typical scenario and the variance of ranking was extreme to force the choice but it is nonetheless instructive.

More importance is generally placed on subject rankings because of the student/applicants’ perceived necessity to focus on their own subject of study; considering other subjects that contribute to an institution’s institutional ranking as being an irrelevance to their own study experience. This suggests the notion of the comprehensive or integrated interdisciplinary university to be something of an irrelevant proposition to the typical degree student. Perhaps £9,000 fees has created a more subject focussed prospect.

Is there a specific time when institutional or subject ranking have the ascendancy?

In terms of personal use, the majority of the prospective students had used both institutional and subject league tables, but placed most importance on subject league table rankings – a finding in line with the above discussion. Of the students claiming to have used rankings, they (generally) used institutional league tables as an initial filter, followed by subject league tables to create a more refined shortlist.

Thus subject rank is likely to be a discriminating factor when students compare universities on their long list all of which are likely to be of similar institutional ranking and asking for similar tariff entry points (these are the natural first stage filters together with place or distance from home). Subject rankings thus are likely to influence predisposition at the point of application and to frame expectations regarding future interactions and service episodes. Sadly most universities appear to have centralised and systematised their conversion communications when we might infer from this research that subject/course is the focus of the applicant and authentic communications on this level may have greater resonance.

Which type of student/applicant displayed a preference for institutional or subject ranking?

Leeds Beckett students appeared to demonstrate a stronger preference for subject rankings, compared to University of Leeds students. This may be because the University of Leeds is a well-established, Russell Group institution, which holds a relatively high institutional ranking. On the other hand, Leeds Beckett holds a relatively low ranking, but for specific subjects it is much stronger. Thus, it is likely that many of its students may have had their choice influenced or justified based on subject specific / departmental reputation, as opposed to the university as a whole (i.e. what TKP terms the flagship or signature subject effect).

The degree subject of study did not appear to impact upon initial weighting given to subject or institutional rank – circa 70% of current students prioritized a high subject ranking over a high institutional ranking.

However the follow-up scenario question did give rise to some perceptual differences between students studying different subjects; students studying Business related subjects
appear less influenced by an increased divergence between institutional and subject rank than students from other subjects.

**Do rankings impact upon enrolment volumes?**

The discussion above brings into question whether institutional and/or subject rankings impact upon enrolment volumes. Research by Roberts and Thompson (2007) indicated there to be a very weak positive correlation between university ranking and the share of international UCAS applications. In terms of enrolments, this study similarly found there to be a weak positive correlation between OSI enrolments and universities’ institutional league table rankings.

This relationship (although not a trend) was slightly stronger with the Times than for the Guardian rankings which either means that OSI students may refer to the Times more than the Guardian domestic rankings or the former simply aligns more closely to overseas students’ perceptions of university reputation.

In terms of subject rankings, the respective volume of OSI enrolments at each institution did not correlate as strongly with subject ranking. The relationship was weakest in Business subjects, with a modest positive correlation for Economics and a stronger one for Law. It is not clear why this difference can be observed. We can speculate that as a very competitive and large field of study enrolments might be more a product of aggressive marketing and pricing differentials than just ranking compared with Economics or Law.

There was a slightly stronger correlation that existed between an institution’s ranking and OSI enrolments, although still relatively weak. Thus, it may be concluded that league tables do not appear to play a key role when international students are choosing their place of study, but there is a slight trend for international students to be more familiar with institutional rather than subject rankings.

**The role of ranking consistency or longevity**

How institutions are perceived by prospective students with regard to how long they have held an approximate ranking was found to be the same for whether the scenario is framed in terms of subject or institutional rankings.

Findings revealed that a high contemporary ranking was seen as a more attractive scenario than a high ranking for a longer period of time, prior to a declined ranking position in the most recent years. Thus currency of ranking is a material factor. This is a rational response since a high historic ranking might not reflect the quality of the institution today and thus directly impact on their experience. However a long established ranking would impact on reputation and brand value, something that many students and applicants do appreciate as having labour market and societal value.

Students cited reasons for their preference for giving greater weight to the more recent higher ranking in terms of a “change for the better” (a positive trajectory that they may benefit from directly) but saw consistency as the virtue of having achieved a high ranking for multiple years (lower risk).

Students can only experience what the university is today not what it was like 20, 10 or even 3-4 years ago. Unlike most industries undergraduate higher education largely addresses a
new cohort of applicants each year; there is little repeat purchasing. Each cohort is active in the market making choices for a short duration – a university or department’s ranking at that time is what matters most. Thus it appears reputation needs to be earned and revalidated and not relied upon. It means that those universities that play the REF game and have deliberately engineered, through deliberately targeted strategies, to climb the rankings will gain some returns.

6.2 Summary

- The overarching finding is that subject rankings are generally claimed to be of greater importance by both students and applicants than institutional rankings. Typically, institution-wide league table rankings tend to be used as an initial filter to construct a consideration list – creating a secure sample of options in which to exercise final choices. Subject ranks are then used to create a final short list.

- Students/applicants’ perceived necessity to focus on their own subject of study was generally the reason given for placing the most importance on subject rankings. This brings into question the relevance of comprehensive or integrated interdisciplinary university.

- When faced with increasing divergence between institutional level and subject rankings (60 vs. 40 through to 80 vs. 10), around a third of students conceived the disparity to be too large and changed their initial preference of university. This therefore can be described as the ‘trade-off’ between a subject and an institutional rank.

- Leeds Beckett students demonstrated a stronger preference towards subject rankings when compared to University of Leeds students. This may reflect the student’s achieved tariff or the greater vocational/professional focus of the former’s courses or the reality of each institution’s institutional rank.

- Subject of study was not a significant differentiator of ranking preference. Although HESA data revealed some positive correlations between overseas enrolment volumes and subject ranking (e.g. for Law and Economics), these correlations were relatively weak. Though the primary research revealed some moderate differences between students of different degree subjects, these analyses were based on sample sizes too small to draw statistically reliable conclusions.

- An institution with a current high ranking (regardless of whether it is subject or institutional) having risen from a longstanding low or moderate rank is perceived as attractive to students. This indicates that students/applicants are living in the moment and are seeking providers that can demonstrate quality today rather than a reliance on previous status/rank.

- An institution with a recent/current low ranking that has fallen from an established high rank was seen as a less attractive scenario.
6.3 Implications and Action Points for Universities

- Acknowledge, monitor and communicate departmental reputations and positive rankings. A relatively strong institutional ranking is important in the initial short listing of universities, but league table strength in a prospective student’s chosen subject of study appears to be what clinches the deal during the application process.

- Stronger communications centred on course, department and subject are essential where these are strong fields for the institution. Sub branding needs to be considered as a means of creating and sustaining flagship subjects and departments, and more authentic subject/course specific conversion engagement tactics are likely to be productive for subjects well placed in the league tables as a counter to a weaker university-wide position. Such an approach is most relevant perhaps for modern institutions, where “prestige” and high institutional league table rankings are typically not achievable but where strength in flagship subjects is seemingly of more importance and needs to be deployed for university-wide benefit.

- Reputation is clearly a very important consideration factor to students, and although a long established ranking inevitably impacts upon brand value, the ranking held in the most recent few years is of most importance. Strategic plans needs to ensure there is no complacency therefore and in a market context setting KPIs that are designed to ensure ranking is maintained or enhanced are relevant. There are clear implications for marketers – the story needs to be told to place the ranking in context, perhaps aligned with future positive ambition.

- The greater use of and emphasis given to the Guardian ranking somewhat downplays the impact of the REF which has greater weight in the Times and raises the value of the NSS and a more teaching/experience centred approach. That said for many universities playing the REF game will deliver some returns especially where the unit of assessment aligns well with the scope of subject rankings and fields where there is a large pool of applicants.
Appendices

Appendix A – the relationship between the Guardian 2012 institution ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments.

Appendix B – the relationship between the Times 2012 institution ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments.
**Figure C** – the relationship between the Guardian ‘Business and Management Studies’ 2012 subject ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (N1) Business Studies and (N2) Management Studies programmes *combined*.

**Figure D** – the relationship between the Times ‘Business Studies’ 2012 subject ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (N1) Business Studies and (N2) Management Studies programmes *combined*.
Figure E – the relationship between the Guardian ‘Economics’ 2012 subject ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (L1) Economics programmes

Figure F – the relationship between the Times ‘Economics’ 2012 subject ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (L1) Economics programmes
**Figure G** – the relationship between the Guardian ‘Law’ 2012 subject ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (M1) Law by Area and (M2) Law by Topic programmes *combined*

![Figure G](image-url)

\[ R^2 = 0.3307 \]

**Figure H** – the relationship between the Times ‘Law’ 2012 subject ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (M1) Law by Area and (M2) Law by Topic programmes *combined*

![Figure H](image-url)

\[ R^2 = 0.3419 \]
**Figure I** – the relationship between the Guardian 2012 institution ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (N1) Business Studies and (N2) Management Studies programmes *combined.*

![Graph showing the relationship between Guardian 2012 ranking and 2012/13 OSI FT enrolments combined.](image1)

\[ R^2 = 0.0004 \]

**Figure J** – the relationship between the Times 2012 institution ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (N1) Business Studies and (N2) Management Studies programmes *combined.*

![Graph showing the relationship between Times 2012 ranking and 2012/13 OSI FT enrolments combined.](image2)

\[ R^2 = 5 \times 10^{-5} \]
Figure K – the relationship between the Guardian 2012 institution ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (L1) Economics.

![Graph showing the relationship between Guardian 2012 ranking and 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (L1) Economics.](image)

Figure L – the relationship between the Times 2012 institution ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (L1) Economics.

![Graph showing the relationship between Times 2012 ranking and 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (L1) Economics.](image)
**Figure M** – the relationship between the Guardian 2012 institution ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (M1) Law by Area and (M2) Law by Topic programmes combined.

![Graph showing the relationship between Guardian 2012 ranking and OSI enrolments with R² = 0.324](chart1.png)

**Figure N** – the relationship between the Times 2012 institution ranking and the volume of 2012/13 OSI full-time enrolments coded to (M1) Law by Area and (M2) Law by Topic programmes combined.

![Graph showing the relationship between Times 2012 ranking and OSI enrolments with R² = 0.3538](chart2.png)
### Table O – University attended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University attended</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Proportion of Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Leeds</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds Beckett University</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds College of Music</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds College of Art</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>119</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table P – Tariff band achieved upon application to university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tariff Band</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Proportion of Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>300-359</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>240-299</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>360-419</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180-239</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>420-479</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>480-539</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120-179</td>
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<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>540+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unknown</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>8%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>117</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table Q – Top 10 degree subjects studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Studied (HESA JACS Subject Group)</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Proportion of Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N  Business and Administrative Studies</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L  Social Studies</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V  Historical and Philosophical Studies</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W  Creative Arts and Design</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B  Subjects Allied to Medicine</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C  Biological Sciences</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P  Mass communication and Documentation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H  Engineering</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q  Linguistics, Classics and Related Subjects</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M  Law</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>117</strong></td>
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