PRESS RELEASE

Better with age: Older universities' advantage in research, challenged by new breed, shows U-Multirank study

(EUROPE, 4. NOV. 2015) - Older universities tend to perform better than younger ones across most measures of research excellence, according to a new analysis by the international university ranking U-Multirank. However, many universities are bucking the trend and finding strategies to outperform their years.

The findings are revealed in a new ranking showing university age and research performance, developed exclusively by U-Multirank (www.umultirank.org) and published today.

The ranking shows that age does make a difference when it comes to research performance, but reveals a newer breed of universities around the world that are challenging the traditional institutions.

For the ranking, U-Multirank's expert team divided over 1,200 universities into four age categories based on when they were established: before 1870; between 1870 and 1945; between 1945 and 1980; and after 1980.

The older the group was, the more likely its universities were to score top 'A' ratings for indicators of excellent performance in research. For example, on citation rate (a measure of how influential academic research is), 38% of universities in the oldest group gained the top score, while just one in ten of the youngest group achieved the same. The other two groups confirmed the trend with proportions of 38% (for the 1870 to 1945 group) and 22% (1945-1980).

However, older universities do not have it all their own way. Each age-segment includes universities that challenge the supremacy of long-established universities like Oxford and Harvard. For example, Rockefeller University and Telecom ParisTech shone in the 1870-1945 group. Eindhoven University of Technology and the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology did well in the 1945-1980 group. And even in the group of universities founded in the past 35 years, the Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology and Pompeu Fabra University performed significantly beyond their ages.

The ranking also reveals a potential weakness among older universities. When it came to collaborative research, the age differences largely disappeared. The oldest group were only ahead when it came to producing international co-publications and even that advantage vanished in the measures of regional co-publication.

Closer study of the findings also sheds some light on the reason for the link between age of university and research performance. "Many universities were founded post-1945 and they account for a large percentage of the world's higher education institutions," said Professor Dr. Frans van Vught, U-Multirank's joint project leader. "They were not necessarily created with the intention of ever becoming international centres of research excellence. Instead, they gave more people from a wider variety of backgrounds the opportunity to study. They also became drivers of local and regional economic growth."

Professor Dr. Frank Ziegele, U-Multirank's joint project leader added, "Age of course is not in and of itself a contributor to research performance. The question is what are the contributing factors associated with age that explain these differences in research performance. U-Multirank begins to answer that question and makes performance transparent."

U-Multirank allows everyone to do their own comparison of universities, understand where they perform strongly, and by ranking them alongside similar universities to see the factors that may be making a difference, whether it's age, geography or what the university is aiming to achieve.

In addition to the new Readymade Rankings by University Age, U-Multirank provides 17 additional "readymade" rankings, published last March during its 2015 launch. Designed by U-Multirank's expert team, these rankings offer a quick overview on a specific aspect of university performance. At the institutional level these focus on: research and research linkages, international orientation and economic involvement. Meanwhile, some readymade rankings look at teaching and learning and international orientation in seven different subject areas. Through its readymade rankings, U-Multirank further demonstrates the diverse ways in which different universities perform well as opposed to the narrower measures of traditional league tables.

About U-Multirank
U-Multirank's multi-dimensional approach compares university performance across a range of different activities grading them from 'A' ('very good') to 'E' ('weak'). It does not produce a league table of the world's 'top' universities based on composite scores. Instead, it allows users to identify a university's strengths and weaknesses, based on the aspects that most interest them. The data included in U-Multirank are drawn from a number of sources, providing users with a comprehensive set of information: data supplied by institutions; data from international bibliometric and patent databases; and surveys of more than 85,000 students at participating universities – one of the largest samples in the world, offering students a unique peer perspective.

Although wholly editorially independent, U-Multirank is supported by the European Commission and receives €4 million in funding from the European Union Erasmus+ programme for the years 2013-2017. The future goal is for an independent, non-profit organisation to manage the ranking as an open source for international comparisons thereafter, serving the needs of various stakeholder groups in higher education.

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Appendix
   a.   Ranking results by university age (listed under 'Research & Research Linkages Rankings')
   b.   Further analysis and background of ranking results
   c.   Results summary charts, based on top performers

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