



BRICS PRINCIPLES

for the implementation of activities in compiling public rankings, ratings and other assessments of higher education institutions (universities)

The role of higher education is steadily increasing across all spheres of life, leading to a growing demand for university assessments. These assessments are essential for comparisons, decision-making, understanding the dynamics of institutional development, internationalization, quality assurance, collaboration opportunities and increased impact on society. They are utilized by applicants and their parents, employers, teachers and academics, authorities, analysts, media, and universities themselves.

Currently, there are numerous university assessment systems, primarily rankings. However, users often question their usefulness and credibility due to concerns about the objectivity of the assessments, potential conflicts of interest among authors, the lack of guaranteed integrity and continuity in the assessment processes, and misunderstandings about the goals and methodologies of the assessors.

Despite the fact that authorities in many countries use university assessments for decision-making and financing development programs, most jurisdictions have no yet established laws or even principles to regulate activities in the field of university assessment. One reason is that a higher level of confidence is required for the practical application of these assessments.

This document acknowledges the importance of various forms of university assessments without limiting their form, purpose, or methods.

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Growing trust is not only in the interests of individual universities or countries, but also contributes to the expansion of international cooperation and the development of mechanisms for mutual recognition, taking into account the diversity of cultural and educational systems. Reliable and high-quality rankings, ratings and other assessments can become a platform for regional cooperation.

These principles should also help to increase the representation of new developing universities, to create a reputation for a rating system that attracts, develops, retains and fully engages all the diverse types of universities whether public, private, national with respect for differences, equality of opportunity and treatment in all cultures among the BRICS countries.

This document is not intended to be a law, a binding standard or to override national policies and legislation. Neither does it restrict the creativity and scope of assessors and their work. Instead, it outlines a set of practical principles aimed at improving the quality of university assessments, protecting the interests of their users, and increasing public awareness and understanding.

Assessors who support these principles have the opportunity to publish regular transparency reports that highlight specific actions taken to adhere to these principles and the results achieved. The experience gained by assessors will contribute to the further development of this document and the embodiment of its specific practices and rules.

PRINCIPLES

Commitment of assessors: A public assessment cannot be anonymous. The authors of the assessments should have sufficient resources, experience and form a team of experts in the domain of ratings. The authors of the assessments must not be subject to political influence, and their approaches shall not show signs of discrimination. Representatives of all countries should be equally taken into account when conducting expert assessments or voting. Assessors who endorse these principles recognize their responsibility for the quality of published assessments, the data used, and ensure the continuity of their activities. Assessors use long-term monitoring and improvement mechanisms: based on past feedback and results, they periodically improve evaluation methods and data collection processes.

Assessment purposes: Users must be clearly informed about the semantic content of the assessments, including which aspects of the university are evaluated, the specific audience's viewpoint for each assessment, the form of the assessment, with complete transparency about the metrics, methodology and weighted factors and the underlying assumptions. The assessment purposes must be guided by their different social functions – such as the regulation and accreditation of institutions, the consultation of students and their families, or the decision-making of public managers in different spheres. Based on these purposes, stakeholders in the assessment and sets of upper and deeper level criteria must be identified. All this information provides the key to the correct use of assessments.

Avoiding conflict of interest: Users of assessments should have regularly updated information on the list of potential stakeholders, their role in assigning assessments, and possible influence on the results, should receive clear information on potential conflicts of interest, on the measures taken to eliminate them or, if this is not possible, to minimize the risk of these conflicts. In particular, the authors of rankings and assessments should be independent from the government and universities.

Assessment process design: Users should have access to the assessment methodology, understand how the assessments are conducted, and know which data is used, which procedures are used to verify the validity of the data, how the data are normalized and analyzed. They should also be able to provide critical feedback and suggestions, for example, through a dedicated feedback portal. Formal participation mechanisms such as roundtable discussions, surveys, and public hearings can also be created to allow users to actively participate in the assessment process and make constructive suggestions, rather than just providing passive feedback.

Quality assurance and compliance: Users should be informed about the measures taken by assessors to ensure both internal and, if possible, external control. In the future, it may be possible to agree within the BRICS framework to establish an independent audit body to conduct regular external quality checks of the assessment, ensuring fairness and objectivity.

Presentation of assessment results: Information about the assessment and its results should be easily accessible as an open publication, with efforts made to inform as many users as possible. Detailed interpretations, data analysis reports, and related training or workshops are also needed.

Application of information technologies: Use of modern data analysis and automation tools, creation of online platforms for assessment, exploiting the already existing database/online platforms for data collection, implementation of intelligent questionnaires, real-time feedback systems, integration of big data with personalized assessments, and application of predictive analytics, etc. as factors of quality control, reliability and effectiveness of assessments.