The Scottish HE Data Landscape

An overview of: UK university league tables

Type and scope of the data

The UK league tables provide a range of summary data and rankings of institutions as a whole and by subject, mainly focused on undergraduate teaching. The main measures used by the three main UK league table providers (The Guardian, The Times/Sunday Times and the Complete University Guide) are: average entry score, student satisfaction (from the National Student Survey), degree completion (from HESA Performance Indicators), percentage of graduates awarded a first or 2:1 (Heidi Plus), graduate prospects (from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey), student:staff ratio (Heidi Plus), services and facilities spend per student (Heidi Plus), and research quality/intensity (Research Excellence Framework). Each league table seeks to differentiate itself in the features it rates and/or the weightings it gives them, though there is much commonality.

Time period of data renewal

The Complete University Guide is published in April, The Guardian University Guide in May, and the Times/Sunday Times Good University Guide in September; each uses the latest available data.

Questions that the data can help to explore or answer

UK league tables provide a quick way to find summary data for an institution or group of institutions, at the overall level and by subject. Helpful for answering questions such as: 'Which institutions offer courses in subject X?'; 'How does institution Y perform for average entry score/student satisfaction/graduate prospects?'; 'What's the average entry tariff for entrants to institution Y?'; 'Who could be in a reasonable benchmarking/peer group for institution Y?'

Important caveats, exclusions etc.

A positive feature of the main UK league tables is that the underlying data is not sourced directly from the institutions, but indirectly from the universities' statutory reports to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), which subjects the data to rigorous validation, consistency and quality assurance procedures. The league tables are a handy way to quickly check performance, however, you should always closely read their statements on methodology and sources of data (see links below), particularly the year to which the data relates.

Publications/analyses which use the data

The league table results are reported in the relevant newspapers and may also be picked up by other news outlets, such as the BBC and the Times Higher.

Where to find the data and any further published analysis

- The Complete University Guide: www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings
- Guardian University Guide: www.theguardian.com/education/universityguide
- The Times/Sunday Times Good University Guide: https://st.hitcreative.com/education/university_guide/active/UniversityGuide/index