

## University Rankings: How New Zealand compares.

### 1. Methodology

The Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) 'Top University' rankings are probably the best known international comparative rankings. Each year, a ranked list is compiled, and the 'Top 200' is widely reported.

As part of the process, considerably more than 200 Universities are considered. An extended list of the top 500 is also compiled (in fact, for 2006 it was the top 520 Universities.)

There are other ranking lists – the Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking is well known, and the Financial Times EMBA rankings are an example of a programme ranking. However, the THES ranking seems to be the most comprehensive in terms of methodology, and is certainly widely quoted.

The THES methodology (as outlined at the 2006 British Council 'Going Global' Conference, from which this explanation is drawn) concentrates on four key themes for comparison:

- Quality of research output
- Employability of graduates
- Internationalisation of university
- Commitment to quality of teaching

A Peer Review process, involving 2,375 academics in 88 different countries, is the key qualitative measure used by THES, and a key differentiator by comparison with other rankings. THES also use a comprehensive employer review to help determine employability. This qualitative approach is endorsed by some academic leaders; for example "Peer Review is an effective way to evaluate universities. It takes smart people to recognise smart people" - (Sir Richard Sykes, Rector, Imperial College – who come in at 9 on the list!). However, there are a range of quantitative tools used as well, including citations/faculty, student faculty ratios and the size of the international faculty. THES are the first to admit that these various indicators have limitations but the combination of factors gives them a fairly comprehensive picture. Overall, 50% of their methodology is qualitative and 50% quantitative.

### 2. New Zealand's performance

For 2006, six of New Zealand's eight universities made it on to the THES top 500, with two in the top 200 and one in the top 50. The actual rankings (as quoted from THES) were as follows:

University of Auckland: 46= (with Kings College, London)

University of Otago: 79= (with the University of Wisconsin)

Massey University: 216

Victoria University of Wellington: 222= (with Universitat Karlsruhe; Germany)

University of Canterbury: 333= (with Saarland University; Germany and the University of Rennes, France)

University of Waikato: 340= (with Universitat Leipzig; Germany and the European Business School; Germany)

What of the two New Zealand universities that missed out? Lincoln University is quite small, and given that size does matter in rankings (both in quantitative terms and for the sheer fact that its graduate/alumni pool is far less extensive and this mitigates against the qualitative evaluation) it is unlikely to appear in most general rankings regardless of its individual faculty excellence. AUT is very new in university terms, and again this will impact it adversely in both types of measure.

By comparison with 2005, five of New Zealand's Universities improved, and one went down slightly. The comparison is below:

	2006	2005
Auckland:	46=	52
Otago:	79=	186=

Massey:	213	188=
Victoria:	222=	292
Canterbury:	333=	467=
Waikato:	340=	350

Overall, 75% of New Zealand's Universities are in the top 500, 25% in the top 200 (in fact, in the top 100) and 12.5% in the top 50.

### 3. New Zealand Compared

So is New Zealand's comparative performance good or bad? How did other countries do? Is 75% or 46<sup>th</sup> or 340<sup>th</sup> something to brag about or not?

The first thing that needs to be taken into account is what constitutes the comparison? Different countries have different tertiary systems, many with varying levels and types of universities. Just because an institution is called a University doesn't mean it is exactly comparable with the New Zealand definition of the term. Because of this, the following numerical comparisons generally are made against the top tier of universities for those countries that have more than one type.

The United States has the largest university system in the world, with around 1,900 in total (a precise number is hard to define for the reasons above). These range from the very best (Harvard is the THES Number 1 for 2006, and they have 22 in the top 50 including seven of the top 10) to not so good. Obviously, with 1,900 to choose from one would expect the USA to dominate the rankings – although even if the whole 500 were US institutions, it would still put only 25% of their total into that category. However, in spite of their being the '900lb gorilla' in the system, the overall total of US universities in the THES 500 is 102, with 55 in the top 200. In % terms, they achieve 5.3% - a long way from 75%!

Turning to the UK, they have 89 universities in their 'top tier' (although if you include those classified as 'University Institutions' the total is 114 – we will use 89 for comparison). Cambridge and Oxford grab slots 2 and 3, there are 8 in the top 50 and 29 in the top 200 (32.5%). Performance tapers off however, with a further 16 in the top 500 for a total of 50.5% overall (remember, this uses the most favourable basis of comparison).

Australia is a standout performer, with six in the top 50 (15%) – the Australian National University leads the charge at position 16 (this makes it the 4<sup>th</sup> country to appear behind the USA, UK and China which has Peking University at position 14). They have 13 in the top 200 (32.5%) and 18 (out of 40 possibles) in total in the top 500 (45%).

Canada is the other major English speaking system – of their 82 universities they have two in the top 50 (2.4%), 7 in the top 200 (8.5%) and a further 13 in the top 500 for a total of 20 (24.4%).

How do other big countries do? Germany fails to place in the top 50, with the first coming in at 58= but a total of 43 in the top 500 for a score of 36.7%. Italy, the Netherlands, India Russia and Korea are others that miss out on the top 50 – in fact Italy's first appearance is at position 197!

What about other countries that New Zealand often compares itself with? Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Norway and Finland all miss out on a top 50 slot. In fact, only 11 countries are included in the top 50. Even the Swiss (whilst getting 2 in the top 50) only get 7 of 16 (43.75%) in the top 500. A table of relative performances by selected countries is set out below. Not counting China (for which the total number of universities is not immediately available although it is in the hundreds), this table charts the performance of at least 3,863 universities across 20 countries. Lest the charge be made of selective comparisons, these 20 countries between them have all the top 50 universities, 90% of the top 200 and 78% of the top 500. To even be in the Top 500 is probably to be in the top 8% of all universities in the world – 500 sounds a lot but it a modest portion of the overall number of universities in operation world wide. So a Top 500 spot is a considerable achievement in itself!

**Table 1: THES Results Comparison 2006**

	No. Universities	Highest Ranked	Top 50	%	Top 200	%	Top 500	%
<b>US</b>	1900 approx.	1	2.2	1.1	55	2.9	102	5.3
<b>UK</b>	89	2	8	9	29	32.5	45	50.5
<b>Canada</b>	82	21	2	2.4	7	8.5	20	24.4
<b>Australia</b>	40	16	6	15	13	32.5	18	45
<b>Germany</b>	117	58	-	0	9	7.7	43	36.7
<b>France</b>	79	18	2	2.5	7	8.9	28	35.4
<b>Netherlands</b>	18	67	-	0	11	61	12	66.6
<b>Denmark</b>	12	54	-	0	3	25	4	33.3
<b>Switzerland</b>	16	24	2	12.5	7	43.75	7	43.75
<b>Italy</b>	83	197	-	0	1	1.2	16	19.3
<b>Sweden</b>	21	111	-	0	4	19	8	38
<b>Ireland</b>	9	78	-	0	1	11.1	6	66.67
<b>China &amp; HK</b>	?	14	4	N/A	10	N/A	15	N/A
<b>Japan</b>	700 approx.	19	2	0.28	11	1.6	32	4.6
<b>Singapore</b>	9	19	1	11.1	2	22.2	2	22.2
<b>Korea</b>	300 approx.	63	-	0	3	1.0	8	2.6
<b>Finland</b>	20	116	-	0	1	5	7	35
<b>Norway</b>	10	177	-	0	1	10	4	40
<b>India</b>	350 approx.	57	-	0	3	0.86	7	2
<b>New Zealand</b>	8	46	1	12.5	2	25	6	75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3863</b>		<b>50</b>		<b>180</b>		<b>390</b>	

As can be seen, New Zealand's performance by comparison is excellent. In the Top 50, our relative performance is 2<sup>nd</sup> = with Switzerland, and only Australia do better. The Netherlands is a handsome winner in the Top 200 (although this may be skewed by what has been counted as their total number of universities) with Switzerland, Australia and the UK also doing well along with New Zealand and Denmark. The relative performance in the Top 500 comparison is a 'hands down' win for New Zealand ahead of Ireland and the Netherlands. Many countries are exposing a long 'tail' in their systems at this point.

So, what does it all mean? It means that New Zealand has a University system that bears comparison with the world's best on a systemic basis. It means that the overall quality of the system is consistent – there aren't a few standouts and a lot of inferior institutions. And this means that students, whether domestic or international, can choose any New Zealand University with confidence and determine their choice on the basis of courses and convenience rather than whether or not they are fundamentally sound.

Of course New Zealand can not rest on its academic laurels. But whilst we will always want to do better, we can as a country take quiet pride in just how good our university system is on a global basis.