

News Release

Cambridge tops interactive university guide – if that is what users want

Hopeful students can tailor league table to match their needs

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Cambridge tops new interactive university guide – if that is what users want

The UK University Guide – an interactive aid for students seeking the best university for their needs – goes live on Monday July 30 with the publication of its authoritative ranking of 113 UK universities.

The University of Cambridge asserts its place at the pinnacle of UK academic excellence, beating Oxford into second place in the rankings. The two universities have dominated the league tables published by national newspapers and others for more than a decade.

For the first time The UK University Guide's on-line interactivity allows users to break away from the rigidities of existing newspaper and book-based guides.

Users will be able to customise their own league table by choosing the criteria which are directly important to them and then weighting them to reflect the significance they attach to them, such as weighting student satisfaction over entry standards or destinations over good degrees.

The individualised ranking could turn league tables on their heads and goes a long way to meeting criticisms that rankings are engineered to reproduce an out-dated hierarchical view of the UK university system.

Dr Bernard Kingston of Mayfield University Consultants, said: "League tables attempt to define quality by use of appropriate measures which are weighted according to the views of the compilers. We have chosen nine measures and given two of them (student satisfaction and research assessment) a higher weighting (1.5) than the rest (1.0).

"In book form that decision is imposed by us and cannot be moderated by the reader. Now we have an interactive league table which readers can tailor to the measure or measures important to them. Thus, they can create their own ranking by choosing perhaps to eliminate some measures or by concentrating on any one or more measures of personal significance to them and then weighting them accordingly between 0.5 and 2.5."

The on-line interactive guide is also more easily accessed by international students, can be constantly updated, and is free to users. It is going live just before universities enter clearing for 2007 entry and candidates begin to make their choices for October 2008.

And visitors to the site will also have access to information about which universities have the best sports and recreational facilities, which offer the most generous bursaries and scholarships, and an extensive list of relevant internet resources.

Users will be able to search for the best-performing universities across 61 academic subjects, and will also find details of graduate employment rates and starting salaries for specific academic subjects.

Nova Jayne Heath, Director of Constable & Robinson Ltd., said: "Finding the right university is a major decision. We are told that 16-24 year olds spend more time

online than they do watching TV. It is our job as publishers to make the information required for this decision available in the most accessible format. Now students complete their applications online, it is time that this information is interactive with all relevant information to hand.

The league table and other information are available at www.thegooduniversityguide.org.uk.

Data for the rankings has been derived from official sources and have been meticulously checked with the universities themselves.

The Guide is the result of a joint research project between Dr Miguel Nunes, of the Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield, and Dr Kingston, and was sponsored by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

It reached publication through a new partnership between publishers Constable & Robinson and Mayfield University Consultants.

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