Viewpoints

EMPOWERING INSTITUTIONS TO SELF-EVALUATE

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES OFFERS THE MOST COMPLETE PORTRAIT OF A UNIVERSITY
INTRODUCTION

Universities are continually looking to assess their comparative standing in meaningful ways, and to do so they need reliable, quantifiable data on which they can survey their activity and base well-informed decisions about their future direction. The rise of applied citation data in benchmarking and decision support speaks to the need for objective, validated data that can be readily manipulated and compared across institutions.

Institutional Profiles offers universities the ability to connect the full scope of research activities to their impact. Research administrators can use the quantitative and qualitative metrics available in Institutional Profiles to look at a broad range of areas, from research performance to funding and reputation as well as comparison with domestic and international peers.

Institutional Profiles uses data gathered by the Thomson Reuters Global Institutional Profiles Project. The data from this project are also used by Times Higher Education to inform its World University Rankings. But Institutional Profiles is not a ranking tool – it is a comparison and analytical tool that offers universities the ability to assess objectively their own performance and benchmark themselves against peer institutions. It delivers a wide range of carefully curated data on university activity to administrators via a clear and simple interface.

Tools to help users to clearly visualise data across 40 different indicators are core to Institutional Profiles. Mapping the results to a Research Footprint™ (see diagram) helps research administrators to see their institution’s strengths and identify areas for improvement, as well as enabling them to assess their institution’s performance in the context of its peers.

‘Users tell us they particularly like the visual tools such as the Research Footprint, the Trend Graph and the Scatter Plot tool. The benefit of those tools is they allow users to create a detailed portrait of each institution’s activity and immediately to grasp its relative strength,’ says Patricia Brennan, director, Evaluative Products.

The data provided within Institutional Profiles can be used for both inward and outward facing analyses, including strategic planning or identifying disciplines within the institution that are outperforming their current reputation or trading on past glories. They can also be used to identify and assess potential collaborators for compatibility or future opportunities.

ABOUT INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES

- The latest module available on the InCites™ platform – a web-based research evaluation tool that allows you to analyze your institutional productivity and benchmark against peers worldwide.
- Nearly 500 research institutions from 47 countries and territories are currently represented in Institutional Profiles, with more to be added later this year.
- The first time academic institutions have had the opportunity to assess their activity and achievements across more than 40 performance indicators.
- Qualitative and quantitative metrics cover funding, reputation and research performance.
Institutional Profiles are created using data from three sources: an academic reputation survey; factual data provided by the universities themselves; and bibliometric data from the Web of Science®.

A dedicated Institutional Profiles Project Team at Thomson Reuters began work in 2009 to address the need for a more complete picture of the global institutional landscape. The team gathered factual data via a new web-based data collection tool from 600 of the world’s leading academic institutions to create comprehensive profiles of their activity. The same team produced and launched an academic reputation survey, the first of its kind in scale and discipline-level scope, which received over 31,000 unique responses from scholars in its first two years. The participants of the survey were selected from academics who have published an article indexed in the Web of Science®.

However, it is not the individual data sets that are the most informative part of Institutional Profiles – it’s how they come together that makes the tool so powerful.

Simon Pratt, project manager for the Thomson Reuters Profiles Project explains: “When those three components come together, what’s interesting and exciting is the ability to generate information such as the number of papers published per million dollars of research funding, or the number of papers published per staff member. It’s unique and nobody’s ever done it before, and we are excited about the potential Institutional Profiles has to capture and present a wide range of university activity and inform strong, strategic decision-making.”

Built into the system is a subject classification scheme, which enables Institutional Profiles users to compare like-for-like across international boundaries for the first time. The subject classification scheme is divided into social sciences, arts and humanities, physical sciences, engineering and technology, health and clinical health, and life sciences. Pratt explains further: “The subject classification scheme is common for all three sets of data and, again, this is unique and really valuable, so you can go in and look at University College London, for example, and what it does in terms of clinical health. How many articles per staff member does it have? How does that compare to UCLA or Karolinska Institute, Sweden – that’s where the really valuable stuff comes in.”

With an update to the database due later this year, more institutions, data and new indicators will soon become available.

Q What is the difference between the Global Institutional Profiles Project and Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings?
A The Global Institutional Profiles Project is not a ranking project. The data collected through the Global Institutional Profiles Project is used to inform Times Higher Education World University Rankings. THE applies its own weighting and interpretation to the data provided by Thomson Reuters.

Q What is the data collection process?
A Through the Global Institutional Profiles Project, Thomson Reuters collects “objective” data about universities, such as funding information, the number of researchers, the number of students etc. The data may be collected from public sources, though most will come from the institutions themselves via a dedicated web-based data collection portal which nominated university personnel will have access to. The portal is available in multiple languages.

Q What methodology is used to validate the data acquired in the collection process?
A The answer to this is three-fold: Identification of logical data errors – a series of automated processes are used to spot logical data errors for universities to rectify. Data comparisons – by comparing data to reliable third-party sources we can spot potential problems. Data anomalies – for data errors not identified in previous steps, it is possible to compare data to expected values and search for outliers.