

Embracing Industrial Collaboration for Quality Higher Education: An Anthology of Selected Papers Presented at the APQN 2025 Conference

20-23 November 2025

Hong Kong SAR, China



Embracing Industrial Collaboration for Quality Higher Education:

An Anthology of Selected Papers Presented

at the APQN 2025 Conference,

Hong Kong SAR, China



香港學術及職業資歷評審局

Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of
Academic & Vocational Qualifications

Editors:

Dr. Jagannath Patil

Board Director and APQR Chairman, Asia Pacific Quality Network - APQN

Prof. Dr. Jianxin Zhang

Past President, Asia Pacific Quality Network - APQN

Dr. A.V. Prasad

Assistant Adviser, National Assessment and Accreditation Council, India

Editorial Committee:

Dr. Galina Motova

President, Asia Pacific Quality Network – APQN

Mr. Albert Chow

Executive Director, Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of
Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ)

Dr. Chen Taohong

Secretary, Asia Pacific Quality Network – APQN

APQN Board Directors:

Mr. Nar Bahadur Raika

Ms. Umankulova Onolkan

Dr. Timur Kanapyanov

Mr. SHI Weimin

Administrator, Asia Pacific Quality Network – APQN

Ms. Claudia Lam

Senior Manager (Corporate Services), Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of
Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ)

Ensuring Quality in Higher Education through Financial Sustainability: Managing Endowment Funds for Institutional Excellence <i>Nayer Fardows – Pakistan and Shakeel Jaffar – United Kingdom</i>	93
Quality Assurance and Innovative Learning Pathways <i>Amberin Tanveer and Bisma Nawaz – Pakistan</i>	100
Foreign Languages in University Non-Language Education Quality Assurance in Line with Industry Requirements: Academic Trends and RUDN University Experience <i>Anastasia Atabekova and Larisa Lutskovskaia – Russia</i>	109
Industry-Academia Collaboration in Medical Imaging Education: The Transformative Model of Tung Wah College's Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Medical Imaging Programme <i>Christopher Lai, FH Tang, Jacky Wong, Ricky Chau, Shing Yau Tam, Bobby Shiu, Adams Hei Long Yuen and Mohan Huang – Hong Kong, China</i>	117
Integrating Digital Innovation in Quality Assurance: The Development of MEAMI at Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia <i>Maria Hidayati, Swasono Rahardjo, Joko Samodra, Mohammad Agung, Yogi Dwi Satrio and Syihabudin – Indonesia</i>	123
Industry-Integrated College Curriculum Design and Delivery: A Quasi-empirical Assessment of GenAI-enhanced Learning Outcomes <i>Jianrong Sun, Hongfei Hu and Wanqi Cai – China</i>	133
Accreditation and Rankings as two ways to one target: TOP accreditation of the TOP universities <i>Oksana Tanikova and Galina Motova – Russia</i>	143
The Role of Indonesian Accreditation Agency for Higher Education in Health (IAAHEH) in Improving the quality of Higher Education Health Study programs in Indonesia <i>Nils Aria Zulfianto, Setyowati, Besral, Rohman Azzam and Zulvi Wiyanti – Indonesia</i>	151
The Role of External Quality Assurance in Driving Excellence in Higher Education – SEEI's practice in embracing industrial collaboration in evaluation <i>LIU Pingping and HU Kaizhen – China</i>	160
A Strategic Analysis for Bridging the Gap Between EQA Compliance and Workforce Alignment in Thailand <i>Punyisa Phumiphol – Thailand</i>	167
Bridging the Skills Gap: Enhancing Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) Through Industry Collaboration in Hong Kong <i>David Man, Will W. K. Ma and Sally Chan – Hong Kong, China</i>	178

Accreditation and Rankings as two ways to one target:

TOP accreditation of the TOP universities

Oksana Tanikova¹, Galina Motova²

Abstract

Accreditation and university rankings are two key instruments of external quality assurance in higher education, serving both distinct and complementary purposes. While accreditation focuses on compliance with international standards, rankings assess comparative performance based on research, reputation, and other metrics. This article explores the synergy between these mechanisms, proposing TOP Accreditation as an innovative, resource-efficient alternative to traditional processes. The National Centre for Public Accreditation (NCPA, Russia) presents its experience with TOP Accreditation as a formal recognition mechanism for elite Russian universities based on their performance in the Subject-Based National Aggregated Ranking (SNAR), global rankings, and AI-driven analytical reports. This data-driven approach shifts the paradigm from compliance-based to performance-based accreditation. Using comparative analysis and Russian case studies, the paper demonstrates how TOP Accreditation can mitigate the limitations of rankings by promoting a more holistic assessment of educational quality. The authors prove that a harmonized approach where accreditation and rankings incentivize excellence can enhance transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in higher education.

1 Introduction

The global landscape of higher education is increasingly competitive. Universities strive not only for academic excellence but also for international recognition and prestige, often measured through global university rankings. While numerous factors contribute to a university's ranking, external quality assurance (EQA) mechanisms, particularly accreditation, play a significant role in building trust and enhancing global competitiveness. This article explores the synergy of accreditation, university rankings and AI.

Accreditation provides independent evaluation of a university's academic programmes, research capabilities, and overall institutional effectiveness. This independent evaluation acts as a powerful signal to prospective students, faculty, researchers, and collaborators worldwide. The perceived quality and credibility, that is often associated with accreditation status, can directly influence a university's attractiveness and global recognition. Accreditation in higher education is a process through which educational institutions and programmes are evaluated by QA agencies to ensure they meet certain standards of quality and excellence. Accreditation helps to maintain and improve the quality of education.

1) Deputy Head of Accreditation Department of the National Centre for Public Accreditation

2) Director of the National Centre for Public Accreditation, APQN President

There are different types of accreditation offered by NCPA, such as national accreditation, which often involves only local experts; international accreditation, which typically applies to reviews based on international standards and involving international experts; and joint accreditation, when the review is conducted by a domestic and a foreign agency and, as a result, two independent decisions are made. The National Centre for Public Accreditation introduced a new instrument of accreditation for national leaders in the sphere of higher education, called TOP Accreditation. TOP Accreditation procedure involves the results of Global and National rankings and other open sources of information, so the next chapter will focus on key global studies on university rankings that are taken into account by the National Centre for Public Accreditation.

2 University rankings and Accreditation synergy

University rankings and international accreditation are widely recognized worldwide as two key mechanisms for assessing higher education quality. While they use different methodologies when rankings rely on quantitative analysis of open data while accreditation utilizes qualitative peer assessments through site visits, we would demonstrate that they evaluate fundamentally similar aspects of institutional performance.

Both systems assess core dimensions including academic environment and teaching quality, graduate employment outcomes and faculty qualifications and research productivity. Rankings measure these through metrics like employer reputation surveys, citation indices, and faculty-student ratios, while accreditation examines them via peer reviews, stakeholder interviews, and faculty credential verification.

University rankings are very popular and have become a significant factor in shaping higher education policies, student choices, and institutional reputations worldwide. Organizations such as QS World University Rankings, Times Higher Education, and the Academic Ranking of World Universities (also known as the Shanghai Ranking) evaluate universities based on various criteria, including academic reputation, research output, faculty quality, and internationalization. These rankings influence funding, student enrollment, and global partnerships, making them a crucial subject of study in higher education research. Creation of university institution rankings is one of the consequences of globalization in the context of higher education. However, the degree of separation from national borders should not be exaggerated. Marginson & van der Wende (2009) stated that “the great majority of institutions continue to be nationally embedded and dependent on governmental legitimization and resource support. The nation is not fading away: it remains the main site of economic activity”.

QS World University Rankings is considered prestigious and includes such key indicators as Academic Reputation (40%); Employer Reputation (10%); Faculty/Student Ratio (20%); Citations per Faculty member (20%); International Faculty members (10%). While QS World University Rankings and international accreditation serve different purposes in higher education, they share overlapping criteria, such as international research. In 2025 QS introduced an additional metric «International Research Network» to account for global research collaborations but which is not part of the traditional five criteria. Accreditation criteria also cover such requirements so we can say both systems evaluate research output, faculty qualifications, and global engagement, but from different perspectives.

Times Higher Education World University Rankings can be characterized by the balanced approach between teaching and research, covering such key indicators as Teaching (30%), Research (30%), Citations (30%), International Outlook (7.5%), and Industry Income (2.5%). They don't directly use accreditation status as a single and explicitly weighted criterion in its scoring methodology and there is no point system where a university automatically gets X

points for holding a specific accreditation. However, accreditation indirectly influences a university's score through several pathways:

- Reputation Surveys: Accreditation from prestigious agencies can positively influence the perceptions of academics and employers surveyed for the reputation metrics.
- Research Output: Accreditation often necessitates a research profile of the university or study programmes, that are usually evaluated during accreditation and, consequently, stimulate to invest more in research. This in turn can lead to increased research citations, grant income, and international collaborations – all of which are directly measured in THE's methodology.
- International Outlook: Joint accreditations are internationally recognized, demonstrating a university's commitment to global standards and attracting international students and staff. This improves the university's international outlook score, a key element of the THE rankings.

Academic Ranking of World Universities is research-focused and covers such key indicators as Nobel Prizes & Fields Medals (30%), Highly Cited Researchers (20%), Publications in Nature and Science (20%) and Research Output (20%). It is particularly known for its emphasis on research performance and academic excellence, with a strong focus on measurable, objective indicators. ARWU and international accreditation are distinct higher education evaluation instruments, yet they share a common overarching goal: ensuring and promoting research excellence in universities. While ARWU measures absolute research performance through bibliometrics and awards, accreditation assesses institutional capacity to sustain high-quality research as part of broader educational standards. Together, they provide a multi-dimensional view of research strength, making them synergistic rather than contradictory. ARWU and international accreditation are not competing but completing each other. ARWU answers: "Who is leading in research today?" and accreditation answers: "Who can keep leading tomorrow?"

U-Multirank includes over 1,200+ universities from 83 countries with 85 000 students taking part as of 2025. The U-Multirank project resembles an online hotel booking system as it examines the situation in universities in detail across a range of parameters and leaves it to the user to decide whether a particular option suits them. Universities are ranked across five areas: education, research, internationalization, knowledge transfer, and regional engagement. The system allows users to independently select the indicators that matter to them and, as a result, obtain groups of universities that meet their requirements. One of the system's innovations is the use of student feedback as part of the university evaluation. While U-Multirank and accreditation differ in approach, they converge in purpose. Despite their methodological differences, both systems evaluate teaching quality, research, internationalization, and knowledge transfer, making them complementary rather than contradictory.

The Moscow International University Ranking, also known as the "Three University Missions" Ranking, was launched in 2017 to evaluate universities based on their core missions: education (45%) with the focus on teaching quality, alumni achievements, and student awards; research (45%) that measures publications, citations, and research influence; societal impact (10%) that assesses public engagement, knowledge dissemination, and societal contributions.

The list of universities to be considered has been growing every year: in 2021, the shortlist included over 2,000 universities, in 2022 – over 2,200 universities, in 2023 – over 2,300 universities, in 2024 – over 2,500 universities from 165 countries. Unlike QS and ARWU, MIUR gives equal weight to education and research. By prioritizing measurable outcomes over subjective assessments, MIUR aims to provide a more transparent and data-driven evaluation of university performance.

In addition, most rankings ignore public engagement, but MIUR incorporates University websites' visibility (measuring outreach) and Graduate contributions to public service. Besides MIUR includes more universities from BRICS and developing nations, unlike QS/THE, which favour Anglophone institutions. On the other hand, compared to QS, THE, and ARWU, MIUR has less recognition among universities, employers, and policymakers. Comparative analysis of the Global Rankings (Motova & Navodnov, 2021) is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1 – Comparative analysis of the Global Rankings

Aspect	MIUR (Three Missions)	QS	THE	ARWU (Shanghai)	U-Multirank
Primary Focus	Education + Research + Society	Reputation + Employability	Teaching + Research	Elite Research	Multidimensional performance
Methodology	Composite score	Composite score	Composite score	Composite score	Multi-indicator, no single score
Reputation Surveys	None	50% weight	33% weight	None	Minimal reliance
Societal Impact	10% weight	None	Minimal	None	Strong emphasis (regional engagement)
Research Dominance	45% (balanced)	20% (citations)	60% (combined)	90%	Balanced approach
Global Diversity	More BRICS inclusion	Western bias	Western bias	Elite Western focus	Most inclusive
User Customization	No (fixed ranking)	No (fixed ranking)	No (fixed ranking)	No (fixed ranking)	Yes (users choose indicators)

3 TOP Accreditation: from concept to practice

Accreditations and rankings serve as EQA tools and reflect on an institution's commitment to maintaining high standards, and through these standards, stakeholders and students will be able to make informed decisions.

The National Centre for Public Accreditation proposes TOP Accreditation technology for leading programmes that have already achieved outstanding results and gained nationwide and international recognition, having proven their excellence beyond doubt. So NCPA uses this approach as an innovative, data-driven approach to quality assurance that shifts the paradigm from compliance-based to high performance-based accreditation.

TOP Accreditation is not offered to all universities, but only for TOP universities to those that have:

- undergone multiple successful accreditation cycles,
- gained wide recognition domestically and internationally for their achievements,
- secured top positions in national and global rankings.

These institutions have already earned their reputation, and thus can be offered a simplified recognition procedure through TOP Accreditation. Such precedents already exist at various levels:

National-Level Examples:

1. Olympiad winners enter the university without entrance exams:
 - Winners and prize-winners of the All-Russian School Olympiads are granted direct university admission without entrance exams, with their achievements equated to perfect scores (100 points) on the Unified Russian State Exam.
2. Dissertation defense based on published works:
 - In Russia, a doctoral dissertation can be submitted as a scientific report compiling the candidate's previously published high-impact research in leading scientific journals and monographs. This format is permitted when the candidate's work has made significant contributions to science, technology, and innovation.

International-Level Examples:

1. UK QAA's risk-based approach:

Pol et al. (2018) stated that the the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) emphasizes the need to reduce institutional burden by adjusting review intensity based on preliminary desk assessments and shortening external evaluations for providers with a proven track record of compliance. This demonstrates that trust in established excellence can streamline accreditation procedures.
2. APQN's simplified QA agency recognition:

When deciding whether to include an agency in the Register, the Asia-Pacific Quality Network takes into account previous accreditations in international organizations, such as ENQA or INQAAHE, waiving desk reviews in favor of on-site visits. Therefore, the procedure is carried out in a simplified form without a site-visit.

Given these precedents, TOP Accreditation offered by NCPA includes 3 key stages.

Stage 1: Data Collection & AI-Powered Analysis (Public Face Report).

If the programme meets the Premier League threshold (top-tier ranking performance), it receives TOP Accreditation without requiring a self-assessment report. NCPA prepares an analytical report using AI to assess a university's standing across (:

- Subject-Based National Aggregated Ranking,
- 13 Global rankings (e.g., ARWU, QS, THE, etc.),
- Open global databases of accreditation decisions such as DEQAR and DAQAR,
- Independent expert evaluations (academic recognition),
- Open data on University graduate employment.

The National Centre for Public accreditation uses core 13 global aggregate ranking results (Bolotov, Motova, & Navodnov, 2021) that are open to public and can be used in TOP Accreditation. The global aggregate ranking is a classification of higher education institutions ranked by indicators from 13 rankings and one public database (table 2). As of July 2025 31, 846 universities in total from 140 countries are represented in it. The data on global rankings were taken from the official websites and cover 14 positions. They are represented by number of universities and countries, and also include the information on the quantity of Russian HEIs in them.

Table 2 – Global Rankings and their representation by number of universities and countries

№	Ranking name (Country)	Quantity of HEIs/Quantity of countries	Quantity of Russian HEIs
1	THE - TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS (UK)	2671 HEIs 108 countries	108
2	QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS (UK)	1497 HEIs 104 countries	48
3	ARWU - ACADEMIC RANKING OF WORLD UNIVERSITIES (China)	1000 HEIs 64 countries	7
4	MIUR (Three Missions) (Russia)	2000 HEIs 112 countries	152
5	US NEWS - BEST GLOBAL UNIVERSITY RANKING (the USA)	2459 HEIs 108 countries	42
6	RUR – ROUND UNIVERSITY RANKING (Russia)	1167 HEIs 90 countries	129
7	CWUR - THE CENTER FOR WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS (United Arab Emirates)	2000 HEIs 96 countries	46
8	NTU - PERFORMANCE RANKING OF SCIENTIFIC PAPERS FOR WORLD UNIVERSITY (Taiwan)	1228 HEIs 79 countries	14
9	CWTS - CENTRE FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY STUDIES (the Netherlands)	1506 HEIs 74 countries	15
10	SIR - SCIMAGO INSTITUTIONS RANKINGS (Spain)	4762 HEIs 147 countries	166
11	URAP - UNIVERSITY RANKING BY ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE (Turkey)	3000 HEIs 125 countries	41
12	ISC - WORLD UNIVERSITIES RANKING (Iran)	2555 HEIs 112 countries	52
13	RANKPRO WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS (France)	1000 HEIs 85 c countries	13
14	UNITED DATABASE OF ACCREDITATION DECISIONS (UDB) consists of DEQAR (the European Database) and DAQAR (the Asian Database)	>5000 HEIs >105 countries	>70

Analytical report covers information on the institution against All Russian higher education institutions (national standing), Institutions under the Governmental Authority (sectoral comparison), Peer competitors (university-selected rivals for targeted benchmarking). The report is developed using advanced AI technologies, significantly enhancing its depth, accuracy, and analytical value.

Stage 2: Expert Validation & Decision (Final Human Decision):

- A panel of independent experts reviews the Public Face Report, ensuring credibility. The panel conduct the desk review. At the request of experts, meetings with stakeholders can be organized to clarify specific issues. The Panel give their comments if necessary and formulates recommendations for improving the content of study programmes. The next step is when the National Accreditation Council of NCPA makes a decision.

Stage 3: Continuous Monitoring & Improvement Insights.

- Accredited programs receive Public Face Report with comments and recommendations as a growth roadmap, identifying areas for enhancement in research, teaching, and industry collaboration to maintain global competitiveness.

A natural question arises - why do only leaders and elite universities can achieve TOP accreditation? Inspired by the principle that “Olympic champions should not be subjected to basic fitness tests,” TOP Accreditation technology is designed exclusively for TOP universities that have already proven their excellence through objective and transparent metrics and helping universities to:

- Reduce duplication between national accreditation and global ranking efforts,
- Get elite accreditation reducing time, stuff and money efforts,
- Cuts processing time from 6+ months to just 1 month,
- Align with APQN’s mission of fostering innovative, efficient QA mechanisms.

So TOP Accreditation serves as a formal recognition mechanism for leading Russian universities, identifying leaders in higher education. Six leading universities adopted TOP Accreditation within the first year, confirming its feasibility and appeal. 204 study programmes in Economics, Engineering, Construction, Pedagogy, Psychology, and Music have received TOP Accreditation as of July 2025.

Conclusion. Rankings and accreditation: it’s time to build a bridge

Accreditation and rankings play a pivotal role in shaping the quality, reputation, and competitiveness of higher education institutions worldwide. Taking into account the fact that accreditation procedures are usually resource-intensive, TOP Accreditation can be an alternative accreditation procedure to save time, resources, and money. The synergy between robust accreditation systems and transparent, multidimensional rankings can drive higher education toward greater accountability, excellence, and global relevance.

However, to maximize their impact, these mechanisms must complement rather than compete with each other. Accreditation should remain the foundation of quality assurance, ensuring compliance with essential academic standards, while rankings can provide additional insights into performance, research output, and international competitiveness. A balanced integration of both systems where accreditation guarantees quality and rankings highlight excellence can help institutions identify the areas of improvement and strengths, address weaknesses, and strategically position themselves in the global education market.

Moreover, as the higher education landscape continues to evolve under the influence of digitalization, globalization, and shifting labor market demands, both accreditation bodies and ranking agencies must adapt. Emphasizing student outcomes, employability, and societal impact rather than purely reputational or input-based metrics will make these evaluation tools (Top accreditation and Rankings) more meaningful for students, policymakers, and employers.

By aligning these mechanisms with the core mission of education fostering knowledge, innovation, and societal progress, stakeholders can ensure that quality assurance remains both rigorous and adaptive in an ever-evolving academic and EQA landscape.

» References

1. Bolotov, V. A., Motova, G. N., & Navodnov, V. G. (2021). Global aggregated ranking of universities: Russian trace. *Higher Education in Russia*, 30(3), 9–25.
2. Marginson, S., & van der Wende, M. C. (2009). The new global landscape of nations and institutions. In *Higher Education to 2030: Vol. 2. Globalisation* (pp. 17–57). OECD Publishing.
3. Motova, G. N., & Navodnov, V. G. (2021). *Aggregated Ranking as a Tool for Quality Evaluation and Positioning of Asia-Pacific Universities at the Global Level* [Paper presentation]. APQN Annual Academic Conference, Singapore.
4. Pol, M., Valeikiene, A., Hazelkorn, E., & Stan, A. (2018). *ENQA agency review: Quality assurance agency for Higher Education (QAA)*. European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Retrieved August 1, 2025, from <https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/External-review-report-QAA-FINAL.pdf>