

How to read a league table

This guide will help you and your students to understand how the three most widely used UK university league tables are compiled. All data can have limitations and so students should also attend open days, read up on courses and talk to careers advisers.



Measures included:	The Guardian	The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide	Complete University Guide
Entry standards	✓	✓	✓
Student satisfaction with teaching	✓	✓	✓
Staff to student ratio	✓	✓	✓
Graduate outcomes	✓	✓	✓
Research quality		✓	✓
Academic services spend		✓	✓
Facilities spend		✓	✓
Completion		✓	✓
Student satisfaction with course	✓		
Student satisfaction with feedback	✓		
Student satisfaction with overall experience		✓	
Research intensity			✓
Graduates on track			✓
Spend per student	✓		
Value added score	✓		
Continuation	✓		
Proportion of first and 2:1 degrees		✓	

Definitions

Entry standards concern the average UCAS tariff scores of students entering the university.

Often this measure is restricted to students under 21 and some international qualifications may not be counted.

Research quality scores are based on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) which classifies university departments on a scale from 4* (world-leading) to 1* (nationally recognised). The REF only takes place periodically - recently it has taken place in 2014 and 2021.

Student satisfaction with...

Student satisfaction measures tend to be calculated using data from the National Student Survey (NSS). Every year, all final year undergraduate students are asked to complete this survey.

Teaching - this measure covers the quality of teaching on the course, as perceived by final year students

Course - calculated from ratings of the overall quality of the course

Feedback - based on ratings of the quality of feedback and assessment

Overall experience - based on NSS scores for organisation and management, learning resources, learning community, student voice and overall satisfaction.

Research intensity concerns the percentage of staff at the university involved in high-quality research.

Academic services spend is calculated per student. This covers spending on services such as libraries. The data is sometimes averaged out over a few years as investment can vary with time.

Facilities spend covers spending on non-academic facilities for both students and staff, for example sports facilities. Data comes from the Higher Education Statistics Agency.

Completion refers to the number of first year students who are expected to complete their degree. It can include students who begin a degree at one university and then transfer elsewhere to finish.

Continuation is the percentage of students who progress from the first year to the second year. In other words it is the proportion of first year students who don't "drop out".

Spend per student is a measure which concerns the average level of expenditure per student. It does not cover the costs of employing academic staff.

Value added score is a measure which looks at how well students do at the end of their courses relative to where they were academically at the start.

Graduates on track is a measure which considers the extent to which graduates feel they are on track with their plans fifteen months after graduation.

Proportion of first and 2:1 degrees is a measure of the proportion of students who graduate with the two highest grades and achieve a "good honours degree".

Staff to student ratio is calculated by simply dividing number of students at a university by the number of staff. Only academic staff are counted and adjustments are made for staff or students who are part time.

Graduate outcomes measures tend to use data from the Graduate Outcomes Survey. Graduates complete this fifteen months after graduation and indicate whether or not they have progressed into graduate level employment or further study.