About 60% of universities reported online learning provisions in their strategic planning pre-COVID-19, but only few appeared to be prepared for a quick shift to full online programmes

(EUROPE, 09. JUNE 2019) The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed millions of learners, teachers and researchers to new realities, new ways of learning and teaching, examination, communicating and doing research. It is clear that the impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education has been tremendous, with all institutions and students having been affected. Many universities reacted in a flexible way to the crisis, but the U-Multirank data also show that few higher education institutions were prepared for the provision of full online programmes.

According to U-Multirank's latest data some 60% of universities reported online learning provisions in their strategic planning prior to COVID-19, while only one third appeared to provide full online courses in some form. The capacity of universities to replace the provision of traditional on-campus 'face-to face' educational programmes with online provision has proved to be a key strategic response to COVID-19.

Before the COVID-19 crisis, evidence suggests that universities with a significant focus on the subject areas of education, business studies and economics, as well as larger institutions and those with a broad disciplinary scope are more likely to provide online programmes. Although a majority of universities realised the strategic relevance of online teaching, only few were prepared for full online programmes. In engineering and science fields, the percentage of programmes that are available fully online is less than 3%, but this is substantially higher in subjects such as business studies (12%) and economics (7%). Furthermore, U-Multirank's data show that the availability of interactive learning tools and digital exams is low, which suggests that online support on a large scale proved to be difficult for many universities.

These results – exclusive to U-Multirank, are a first insight into online learning provisions at universities worldwide, and are published today during its seventh annual release which includes a comprehensive data set of nearly 1,800 universities from 92 countries.

> 'Universities all over the world appear to be caught by surprise by the COVID-19 crisis. Only few institutions appear to have had a risk management strategy in place that would allow them to respond to a pandemic. Particularly the capacity to offer online programmes and support appears to be a key strategic response. This capacity was not broadly available when the crisis hit,' said Frans van Vught, joint project-leader of U-Multirank.

U-Multirank's latest results not only give insights on the effects of online learning provision, but make transparent the detailed performance of universities, so students can make better informed choices about what, or where to study based on what matters most to them. Universities can use U-Multirank data to assess their strengths and weaknesses and find ways to create or strengthen their strategic plans, including aspects on the digitalisation of degree programmes – a new norm post-COVID-19.

> 'In the current crisis, it is even more imperative that when selecting a university, students consider what is most important to them. U-Multirank helps with this by providing data on student satisfiaction – whether that be in regards to the quality of courses and organisation of

studies, classroom size, contact to industry, or even how timely students graduate. Students can pick from these criteria and many more to create their own personalised rankings,' said Frank Ziegele, joint project-leader of U-Multirank.

The interactive tool assisting students to select their best matching university or programme is available at www.umultirank.org. In addition, U-Multirank also offers an interactive map of 100 top performing universities worldwide on different dimensions, including information on the experience of universities with full online programmes (**LINK**).

During the last years U-Multirank has become the largest international database on universities in the world. The breadth its database enables its users to create interactive multi-dimensional comparisons across five performance dimensions. U-Multirank provides users with customisable online rankings that not only focus on research, but also on teaching & learning, knowledge transfer, internationalisation and regional engagement.

A special feature of U-Multirank's results is its 'Global Top 25' performing universities lists. The ten lists show that in general the well-known international research universities score high on research impact but that less-known universities perform well on aspects like student mobility and open access publications.

Ends

Notes for editors

Since 2018 U-Multirank collects data at the subject level on various aspects of the digitalisation of degree programmes. This includes information on the availability of a fully on-line option within degree programmes; the percentage of digital teaching formats in degree programmes; and student assessments of different aspects of digital teaching and learning.

For journalists and all users alike, U-Multirank offers tailor-made rankings and story analyses, for example country reports focusing on university performance in a specific country, or its global 'Top 25 Performers' lists in areas like university-industry relations, or the most international universities.

Since its first publication in 2014, U-Multirank has more than doubled the number of universities (higher education institutions) from 850 to nearly 1,800 and increased the coverage of countries from 74 to 92, including more than 5,300 faculties and more than 11,800 study programmes across 28 subject areas.

U-Multirank is an alternative approach to comparing universities and offers a solution to the flaws of traditional league tables. Its multi-dimensional approach compares the performance of universities across a range of different activities grading each of them from 'A' (very good) to 'E' (weak). It allows users to identify a university's strengths and weaknesses, on the aspects that most interest them. The data included in U-Multirank are drawn from a number of sources, providing users with a comprehensive set of information: data supplied by institutions; and drawn from international bibliometric and patent databases; from national databases; and from surveys of more than 100,000 students at participating universities.

U-Multirank originated at a conference of the European Commission during the French presidency in 2008. Since 2017 it is funded by the Bertelsmann Foundation, the European Union's Erasmus+ Programme and Santander Group. U-Multirank is developed and implemented by an independent consortium led by the Centre for Higher Education (CHE) in Germany. The Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) at the University of Twente and the Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS) from Leiden University, both in the Netherlands, as well as Fundación Conocimiento y

Desarrollo (FCYD) in Spain are partners in the project. The consortium is headed by professors Frans van Vught (CHEPS) and Frank Ziegele (CHE).

Institutions that would like to participate in 2021 can express their interest online.

Appendix

- Interactive map showing top performers (including information regarding online provision)
- Infographics – How do universities perform? (available for selected countries)
- Full lists of 'Global Top 25' performing universities
- Country reports on global and national performances of universities (available for selected countries)
- Full list of universities participating in the 2020 U-Multirank release
- FAQ

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