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King's has been ranked in the top 20 universities in the world by the QS world rankings. Hallelujah! I hear you say. But apart from massaging the ego of every student, alumni and staff member at King's, what does this really mean for us?

Produced annually by Quacquarelli Symonds, the QS world ranking is one of the most highly renowned international ranking systems. The system works by using five weighted categories in which the respective universities are given a score: an academic peer survey, the student-faculty ratio, citations per faculty, a recruiter review survey and the level of international orientation.

The ranking allows us to do what we seem to crave so much in our modern society, compare ourselves to what others have. It shows that King's is internationally well-known as a successful higher education institution, from which a good degree will be highly respected and get students jobs.

But why is the QS, out of the many international rankings produced, now King's ranking of choice?

QS' 19<sup>th</sup> place ranking for King's is quoted every day by the university, from inside our campus corridors to multiple pages on the university website. But why not quote the Times Higher Education World University Ranking of 38<sup>th</sup> place, or the 67<sup>th</sup> place we come in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (more commonly known as the Shanghai ranking)?

The fact is, different rankings favour different variables to rank universities, and King's hasn't made an objective decision about which method it thinks is the Best, it's just happy to quote the one that makes it succeed in the pumping our chests, macho world of cross-university competition.

In fact it's not surprising that King's doesn't choose to shout about our domestic UK ranking positions as much. Despite King's regularly achieving top positions in international rankings, the university often struggles to make it into the top 20 universities in the country.

The Complete University Guide ranks us as the 19<sup>th</sup> best university in the country, whilst the Sunday Times and the Guardian put us at 27<sup>th</sup> and 32<sup>th</sup> respectively.

But what is behind this huge variation? The main reason is that the domestic rankings focus less on the number of Nobel prizes and grand awards that academics have been winning, and factor in variables such as student satisfaction and teaching quality. Yes, that revolutionary idea that if we are going to judge universities we should probably see what the students who actually pay tuition fees think about the experience. But it is in this exact area that King's underperforms and therefore loses out in the domestic rankings.

In the Complete University Guide of UK universities, King's comes in at 103<sup>rd</sup> out of 124 universities for overall student satisfaction, and in the Guardian ranking we are 14<sup>th</sup> from bottom, whilst the Sunday Times puts us 11 places off the worst position. Of course student satisfaction is a difficult thing to quantify, but all these rankings are

based off the National Student Survey (NSS) and show that students at King's aren't entirely impressed with the university experience offered to them.

This point gets tight to the heart of the problem with league tables: How do you define a good university? International repudiation? Quality of teaching? Student experience? There is no right or wrong answer.

Any ranking is making a subjective decision about what it thinks makes a good university and covering itself in so called facts, figures and formulas to try and make its verdict sound concrete and objective.

Sure, it's a good thing that King's is an internationally well-recognised university, and it's good that this will help thousands of our fellow students achieve. But this 19<sup>th</sup> position in one particular arbitrary ranking cannot be used as the wallpaper to cover over all the cracks at King's.