



QS World University Rankings 2021: Top universities rated

The annual QS World University Rankings have been revealed for 2021. The rankings evaluate over 5,000 universities from around the globe and then a list of the top 1,000 is compiled. We delve a little deeper into this year's movers and shakers, the institutions to watch, and the performance of different regions. We also give you a bit of an idea of how the rankings are put together and how universities are judged.

First prize went to The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) who came out top of the rankings, something the institution has done for the previous nine years. This is in keeping with the general trends of the rankings with U.S. and [UK universities](#) continuing to dominate the top positions of the university rankings. However, U.S. institutions have shown a drop in the table overall, with only 34 out of 153 showing improvement. Meanwhile, one of the notable developments 26 Asian universities sit within the top 100 and the leading UK university falls by one place.

Which universities are in the top ten of the university rankings?

The top ten universities in the world on the QS World University Rankings 2021 are:

- [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) (USA)
- [Stanford University](#) (USA)
- [Harvard University](#) (USA)

- [California Institute of Technology](#) (USA) (5th in 2020)
- [University of Oxford](#) (UK) (4th in 2020)
- [ETH Zurich](#) (Switzerland)
- [University of Cambridge](#) (UK)
- [Imperial College London](#) (UK) (9th in 2020)
- [University of Chicago](#) (USA) (10th in 2020)
- [UCL](#) (UK) (8th in 2020)

The ranking of the top ten universities reveal that the leading three institutions have remained in the same position as they occupied in the 2020 university rankings. In fact, these [American universities](#) have actually held the top positions since 2018.

Below the top three, there have been some changes in ranking positions. For example, Oxford University has fallen by one place from 4th to 5th, overtaken by the California Institute of Technology. Another noticeable difference is the ranking of UCL from 8th to 10th position, with the University of Chicago climbing the ranks by a place.

Interestingly, ETH Zurich in Switzerland has gradually climbed up the table starting in 10th position in 2018, 7th in 2019 and sticking in 6th place in the 2020 and 2021 university rankings.

Have a course or destination in mind? Why not use our course matching tool to [find programmes](#) in different countries around the world and see how [higher education systems in different countries rate](#).

What universities are in the top 25 of the QS rankings?

While the top ten of the university rankings are heavily dominated by institutions from the USA and UK, the top 25 includes slightly more variation with universities from China, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan. The number 11 to number 25 ranked institutions are:

- [National University of Singapore](#) (Singapore)
- [Princeton University](#) (USA)
- [Nanyang Technological University](#) (Singapore)
- [EPFL](#) (Switzerland)
- [Tsinghua University](#) (China mainland)
- University of Pennsylvania (USA)
- [Yale University](#) (USA)
- [Cornell University](#)
- Columbia University (USA)
- [The University of Edinburgh](#) (UK)
- [University of Michigan- Ann Arbor](#) (USA)
- [The University of Hong Kong](#) (Hong Kong SAR)
- [Peking University](#) (China mainland)
- [The University of Tokyo](#) (Japan)
- [Johns Hopkins University](#) (USA)

In comparison to the previous university rankings in 2020, the Swiss University EPFL has jumped from 18th to 14th position, putting two [Swiss universities](#) within the top 15 institutions in the world.

Similarly, two [Chinese universities](#) also remain in the top 25, with Tsinghua University reaching a new high of 15th position (2020-2021).

How are universities in the QS World University Rankings evaluated?

The rankings consider six key metrics that have remained fairly unchanged since 2015. The aim of the metrics is to balance out the evaluation of institutions, so that none are unfairly disadvantaged. The areas that universities are judged on are:

- Academic reputation (40%)
- Student to faculty ratio (20%)
- Employer reputation (10%)
- Citations per faculty (20%)
- International faculty ratio (5%)
- International student ratio (5%)

The most critical component for any university aiming for a top ranking is an excellent academic reputation. The university rankings survey more than 100,000 people in the higher education sphere to assess the teaching and learning at universities, in combination with the quality of the research they produce.

Closely allied to the quality of teaching is the ratio of students to faculty, with low ratios facilitating for more personalised learning and greater interaction between students and staff. The metric is used to evaluate how much meaningful interaction and exposure to research students will get at respective institutions. Critically the ratings of an institution are also reliant on the demonstration of a global outlook that facilitates a diverse university environment. This means a university community that has staff and students from around the world.

What universities made the top 50 in the QS World University Rankings?

By extending your search to view the top 50 institutions, you will start to see Canadian and Australian institutions making an appearance. More specifically, the top 50 includes five [Australian](#) and three [Canadian universities](#). Numbers 25 to 50 in the university rankings are:

- =25. [University of Toronto](#) (Canada)
- 27. [The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology](#) (Hong Kong SAR)
- =27. [The University of Manchester](#) (UK)
- 29. [Northwestern University](#) (USA)
- 30. [University of California, Berkeley](#) (USA)
- =31. [The Australian National University](#) (Australia)
- =31. [Kings College London](#) (UK)
- =31. [McGill University](#) (Canada)
- 34. [Fudan University](#) (China mainland)
- 35. [New York University](#) (USA)
- 36. [University of California, Los Angeles](#) (USA)
- 37. [Seoul National University](#) (South Korea)
- 38. [Kyoto University](#) (Japan)
- 39. [KAIST](#) (South Korea)
- 40. [The University of Sydney](#) (Australia)
- 41. [The University of Melbourne](#) (Australia)
- 42. [Duke University](#) (USA)
- 43. [The Chinese University of Hong Kong](#) (Hong Kong SAR)
- 44. [The University of New South Wales](#) (Australia)
- 45. [University of British Columbia](#) (Canada)
- 46. [The University of Queensland](#) (Australia)
- 47. [Shanghai Jiao Tong University](#) (China mainland)

48. [City University of Hong Kong](#) (Hong Kong SAR)
49. [London School of Economics](#) (UK)
50. [Technical University of Munich](#) (Germany)

As you can see, the top 50 reveals more variety in terms of the destination, such as [Japanese](#) and [South Korean institutions](#). However, the two Japanese universities have moved slightly lower down the rankings than previously. For example, Kyoto University has fallen from 33rd to 38th position. Similarly, Duke University in the USA has fallen from 25th to 42nd, which is a quite considerable drop. In contrast, Fudan University in China has jumped from 40th to 34th position, further demonstrating the growing presence of Chinese institutions in global university league tables.

It's important to remember that these rankings are a guide to universities around the world, so try not to be too concerned if a university you're interested in has moved position or isn't ranked as highly as you may expect. While rankings are a useful resource, there are many other factors to consider. Hopefully these rankings will provide you with a clearer understanding of which universities are highly rated and have an international reputation, how they are evaluated and how they can inform your decision making. If you're looking for a bit more information, you can also get a better idea of [how to use university league tables](#) with our ultimate guide.

