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QUALITY CHECK ON THE

NEWER UK UNIVERSITIES

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Lessons on the relative contributions of the newer UK universities to world scientific literature

The UK University league tables do not use scientific contribution as a core value of university competition at national level. Instead, literature output analysis is useful to assess the relative performance of the so-called 'post-92 UK universities', 25 years after their creation. 1992 was the year during which the government of, then Prime Minister John Major, granted university charters to a number of former polytechnics and colleges of higher education. While their transformation to become places of the mass education has brought some real benefit in supporting students with low university entry points—they have not reached scientific contribution parity with older-prestigious universities. In fact, their contribution to the world scientific literature is inferior in many respects to the top universities from the often-criticised continent, Africa, as insignificant scientific contributor on our planet. In the absence of adequate resources that bridge the existing scientific knowledge/capacity gap, global scientific contribution could be further undermined while universities put their focus on league positioning.

Since they shed off their polytechnic status in 1992, this group of the UK universities have had to compete with elite universities to attract their students, provide a research-oriented teaching-learning environment with the same level of benchmarking, produce graduates that are equally employable in the job market, and demonstrate international competitiveness through publications and innovations. There is nowhere better to show such academic excellence by these institutions other than here in London, the scientific knowledge superpower, where numbers in all assessment criteria comes in abundance. Four classical examples of prestigious traditional higher

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education establishments of science education with significant student numbers; Imperial College, King's college, University College London (UCL) and Queen Merry University of London (QMUL) are used to assess the performance of the post-92 London universities. These include East London, Greenwich, Kingston, London Metropolitan, London South Bank, Middlesex, Roehampton, West London and Westminster.

The UK national university leagues do not show the volume of global scientific contribution

One major problem associated with the UK university league provision lies on the fact that different providers using slightly different criteria and weighting publish a pecking order often far different from each other. For King's College, for example, a league position in the 2018 assessment can vary by over 30 places depending on who compiled the league: [Guardian](#) or [THE](#). The second major problem with international dimension is that a pecking order—especially at the middle and lower-end for the post-92 universities—have absolutely no meaning in global significance *vis-a-vis* contribution to the world research output. Even when a research data is used (e.g., [CUG 2018](#) league), data from the [REF – 2014](#) exercise (compiled in 2013) was employed. Hence, the [CUG 2018](#) national league table has no relevant information on the current level of research output in qualitative or quantitative measures. The [THE](#), arguably one of the best provider of the world university ranking, uses research (volume, income and reputation) and publication citations (research influence) as performance indicators. It's ranking, while giving a clear picture to the top performers of the elites, grouped 23 universities at the bottom-end to same ranking (67th) and the last four as 90th. Similarly, one would not get scientific contribution for smaller universities from other global league providers such as the [U-MultiRank](#).

Post-92 universities are evolved to be places of the mass education



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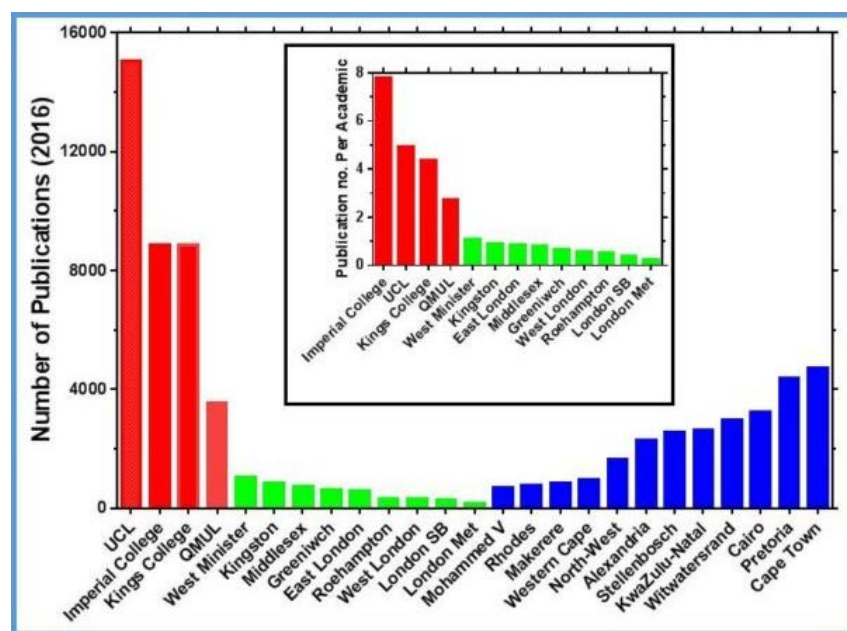
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The greatest achievement of the post-92 London universities lies on their large market-share of students' intake. The [HESA data for the 2015-16](#) academic year showed that there were more students with lesser number of academic staff (FTE) in these universities as compared to the four older traditional elites. The average SSR for the new universities were 17.2 while that of the older traditional group was 11.3. Even though these universities never made it to the top-end of the UK league tables, they have some level playing fields such as teaching excellence (e.g., [TEF](#)) and student satisfactions.

Post-92 universities lag far behind in contribution to global scientific literature

Research output bibliographic data sourced from the [Web-of-Science database](#) shows that the combined output of the post-92 group was about 8-fold smaller than the four older universities (see Figure 1 below).



There were also about five publications per academic in the older universities while in post-92s, it was 0.7. Hence, an academic at the older prestigious universities has about 7-times more chance to make a scientific paper contribution to the world of science as compared to a post-92 academic.

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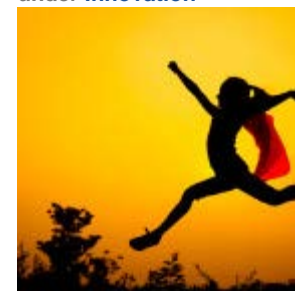


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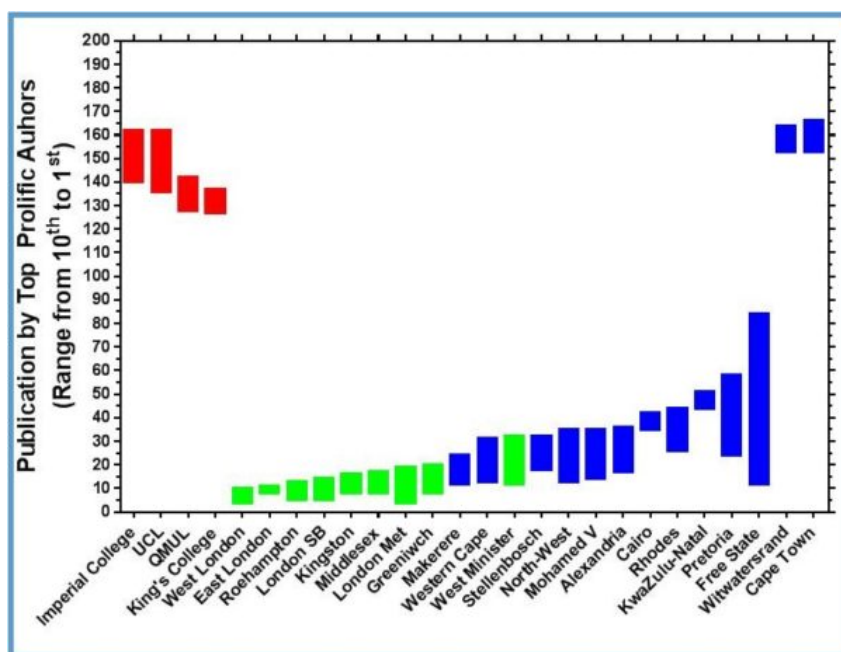
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In the last decade, numerous articles (e.g. [UNESCO report](#)) have been published to show the insignificant level of the African continent contribution to global scientific knowledge. For example, the contribution of the sub-Saharan Africa region which is home to 12% of the global population to the world research output was reported to account [less than 1%](#). Ironically, the contribution of some of the top-African universities appear to be far higher than the London post-92 universities (see Figure 1 above).

under Innovation

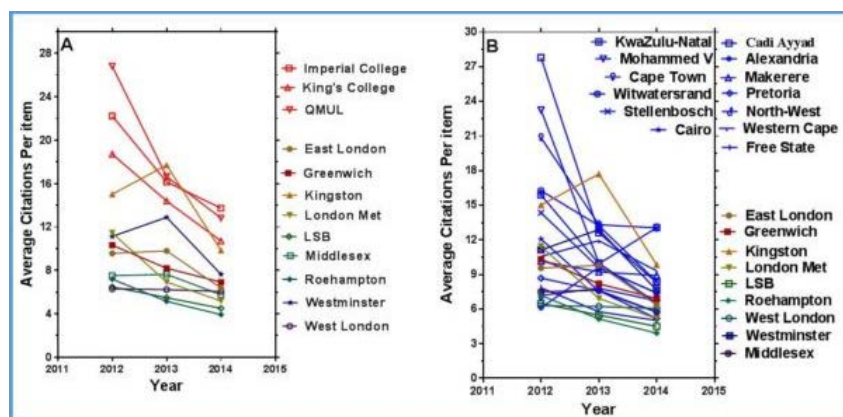
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The Web-of-Science analytic data for the top ten publishers from each institution for the year 2016 also showed that the post-92 universities are not endowed with prolific authors associated with their addresses and their performance once again is even inferior to many top-African Universities (see Figure 2 below).



The impact of the published articles by the universities as assessed, for example, by their average citation per published item is shown in Fig 3 (below). Kingston and Westminster appear to be the best performers of the post-92 London universities in the H-Index analysis but they all fall far-short to be comparable with the top traditional London to universities as well as many top-African Universities. The average citation per published items is not any different though a clear profile of parity was not

demonstrated.



Post-92 London universities are far behind in innovation measures

Looking into the [HESA data](#) on number of new patents filed in the year 2016, the post-92 universities had only 20, mainly due to 15 coming from the University of Greenwich, while that of the elite universities were 311.

Even though scientific literature contribution is a gold-standard university performance measure at global level (e.g., [THE](#)) where the UK elite universities have demonstrated their punching power, the post-92 universities appear to be far behind in this quality measures. Methods for addressing research output parity and/or research-led teaching in the two-tier systems of the UK universities need to be addressed. This can bring some interesting food for thought for the newer universities in the rest of Europe. In the absence of significant research capacity, continued pressure to maintain financial stability and unforgiving culture of league-driven competitions, contribution to global scientific literature may not be taken as a core value in newer universities.

[Solomon Habtemariam](#)

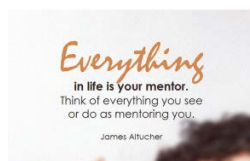
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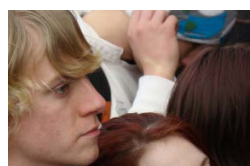
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