

EuroScienceJobs
Research and Postdoc Jobs In Europe



SUPPORT EUROSCIENTIST

Organisations: support us

Sponsor a post!

Individuals: donate

Reuse our content

JOIN EUROSCIENCE

CAREER

HOW WOULD NATIONAL SURVEY ON ACADEMIC STAFF SATISFACTION DRIVE CHANGES IN POST-92 UNIVERSITIES?

We are using cookies to give you the best experience on our website.
You can find out more about which cookies we are using or switch them off in settings.

Accept Reject

13 FEBRUARY, 2023 EUROSCIENTIST LEAVE A COMMENT

Part 1: Academic staff satisfaction: From University league tables to driving forces of motivation

By Dr Solomon Habtemariam

1. Introduction

Home to around 108 higher education institutions (HEIs) of the old (Russel Group) and modern (post-92's) kinds, the London region has the highest concentration of universities in the world. The 2020/21 data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) shows that there were 485,020 students studying in universities/colleges in the London region as compared to Scotland (282,875), Wales (145,170), and Norther Ireland (66,245). No single region in England has student population as high as London, the closest being the South East (397,735). The traditional old universities in London are among the most recognised in the world ranking of universities with Imperial College, Kings College and University College London (UCL) and The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) among the top 100 in any listing. The UK's share of the most cited researchers in the world are almost exclusively owned by the Russel Group HEIs of which UCL, Imperial College and King's College in London are among the top six in the UK (others are Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh) which host 44% of these elites. The clear distinction between the UK's research elites old, and newer/modern (post-92) universities in the volume and quality of research can be demonstrated in the London HEIs. In the recent REF2021 ranking for 129 UK universities, the top three in the country were the Russel Group London universities (Imperial, LSE and Institute of Cancer) and within the top ten were Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) and UCL. Of the London post-92s', the top performer in REF2021 ranking was Roehampton (49th) while most are at the bottom end of the table. In this ranking, the worst performers were London Metropolitan University (110th), followed by University of East London (106th) and Middlesex (101th). The student's population

Discover the benefits of being a EuroScience member

GET EUROSCIENTIST NEWSLETTERS!

You will only receive the latest news and articles from EuroScientist.

Your email address

Subscribe

MOST POPULAR POSTS



Top 10 YouTube science channels to enlighten and entertain
under Science communication



Scientists design new solar cells to capture energy from rain
under Innovation



The evolving relationship between business and science
under Innovation

Big



Data is so large, it's raising privacy & ethical issues
under Science in society



Trust
under Special Issue

destined to these old and new universities are distinctively different too, as shown by entry standard higher in the older research elites. Several independent studies in recent years further highlighted that the Russell Group graduates find work faster, they less likely need work experience, and have far higher earning potential (Adzuna's 'ValueMyDegree). In addition, most of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students who are known to have lower job prospects than the white group are destined to post-92 universities. Variation in graduate job prospects within the post-92 universities are also noted. While all UK universities are obliged to charge the same fee for all undergraduate courses, the true value of studying at the various universities is demonstrated in international market and postgraduate studies. Simple ranking of such tuition fees would show the top ranking by highest fees goes to the Russel Group irrespective of some even not achieved the best Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) rating. In one ranking in 2022, for example, LSE was the third most expensive with bronze rating in TEF and UCL 8th with silver TEF rating. Given the rich HEIs data of statistical significance in just one geographical location, the present perspective is based on comparison of data for academic staff investment in the two groups of London universities.

- **University league tables**

University league tables are compiled on the basis of performance measures mostly centred at students (entry standards, satisfaction, value added, and graduate prospects). Some leagues use research quality from REF data (e.g., The Complete University Guide) while world rankings such as that by the Times Higher Education (THE) claims to use around a dozen of performance parameters to assess teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook. Universities do care about their league position and respond by investing lots of time and money. Those who are deemed to be underperforming are subject to scrutiny by the public and future customers (mostly students). Not surprisingly, the headline news of each university following the publication of league tables year after year captures even the tiniest improvement (some not even

newsworthy) in these performance measures. Whether or not competition based on league table positioning improve education quality is debatable, but it is one major driving force for change in the UK HEIs. Some universities have even gone as far as using improvement in league ranking as performance measure in their strategic vision plan. Although we do not have one nationalised or governmental league for our universities, the parameters assessed on student progression, completion, etc will continue influencing regulations/policy in the future. The emphasis of the leagues remains however on students and to some extent academic outputs (e.g., research) with little emphasis on the academics themselves. We have not yet seen university leagues based on academic staff satisfaction, their wellbeing survey, their salary, or prospect of career progression. In fact, staff surveys are held routinely in many HEIs but their result is hardly available for public scrutiny. We can argue that academic staff would have been looked after better if university leagues give them the same attention as students. In this direction, the drive for change in investment in academic staff would have been felt more in the newer (post-92) universities as assessed in the present analysis.

- **Lessons learnt from the *National Student Survey* (NSS)**

Run by the Office for Students (OfS), the *National Student Survey* (NSS) in the UK is form of students' feedback, their learning experience or opinion on the quality of their courses. One can argue that NSS is among the few competitions (e.g., TEF and REF) in our HEIs that give greater emphasis to funders and students as customers who pay for a service than autonomous teaching/research excellence. As a major source of information for potential students to choose degree programmes/universities, however, the NSS is a major performance measure that all universities are forced to respond to. There is now even a worry of some taking it as gaming with possible outcome of lowering academic standard and degree inflation. The NSS is not only used to judge teaching quality but components of its performance measures such as students' entry, progression and employment destinations feed into TEF. Using NSS as a measure of teaching quality, universities have

been ranked by the OfS into three groups: above benchmark, not significantly different from benchmark, and below benchmark. Surprisingly, there is no divide in this measure between the London Russel Group and post-92 universities. In the 2022 NSS data, for example, Imperial College and St Mary's Twickenham were on the same group (> benchmark); Kingston, LSE, Roehampton, Royal veterinary, UCL and University of Greenwich equal their benchmark; and Birkbeck, City, Goldsmith, King's College, LSB, Middlesex, QMUL and Westminster were below their benchmark. Given the significant resource disparity between the two university groups, it begs a question how the post-92 universities outscored the Russel Group. Is it because of:

- Best students?
- Best educators?
- Best resources?
- Best managers of customers' expectation?

Data on resources, students (entry standard and employment prospect), and academic staff (expenditure) do not favour the post-92s and hence the model of customer management may be a good lesson to move forward to academic staff satisfaction. For post 92s, achieving equity in students' satisfaction must have come at a high price as shifting customers' opinion in a market driven system requires lots of hard work and investment. While the pressure of the NSS, TEF and REF as well as league tables based on them is felt across all institutions, the post-92s are *coping to do far more than expected with less resources*. Inevitably, the negative consequences of such market driven HE system on academic staff work practice (academic freedom and professionalism) and wellbeing may be felt more in post-92 universities. If we must live with the NSS, then, a similar nationalised survey on academic staff satisfaction can be adopted to guess and address the extent of mental health and wellbeing deterioration in our HEIs.

- **What are the driving forces of motivation for academics?**

The primary roles of academics in HEIs are to teach and research in their specialist field. As they progress through their

career from lecturer to professor positions, they also encounter admin responsibilities which could take considerable amount of their time. Academics supervise research students and post docs and are expected to publish their findings. How much of their time is devoted to teaching, research, knowledge exchange or admin duties vary by role, or depending which HEI they work for. The time allocated to do these competing activities could also considerably vary by HEIs as with recognition of the time required to do them, or values given to output in the various activity areas. Career progression to professorial position (reward/recognition) depends not only on performing these tasks at local level but also on the academic's international standing in their subject fields by various measures. It is thus inevitable that those who are successful in academia are mostly working well and above their allocated time in their contract. Given the motivation or happiness score of academics is influenced by money invested in them and/or recognition they get for their work, the driving power of league tables based on academic satisfaction for changes in post-92 universities can be assessed. For this exercise, data on career progression to professorial level (recognition) and university financial data including salary expenditure for the major London Universities are scrutinised.

The opinion expressed in this article is solely the author's.

Dr Solomon Habtemariam is a principal Lecturer at the University of Greenwich

URL: https://www.herbalanalysis.co.uk/

Twitter LinkedIn Print Facebook

LIKE THIS:

Loading...

ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS CAREER UNIVERSITIES

LEAVE A REPLY

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment *

Name *

Email *

Website

☑ Get EuroScientist delivered in my mailbox!

Post Comment

This site uses Akismet to reduce spam. Learn how your comment data is processed.

SPECIAL ISSUE

PODCAST

INTERVIEWS

CAREER

SCIENCE IN SOCIETY

COMMUNICATION

POLICY

INNOVATION

FUNDING

ETHICS

RESPONSIBLE SCIENCE

SCIENTISTS' LIFESTYLE

EUROSCIENCE

BALKAN SCIENCE BEAT

GET EUROSCIENTIST DELIVERED IN YOUR MAILBOX!

You will only receive the latest news and articles from EuroScientist.

Your email address

Subscribe

Donate

PARTICIPATE

EuroScientist is an independent participatory magazine offering a discussion platform to help progress current issues affecting the European research community.

It is a publication of **EuroScience**.

Find out more here on how to take part to the EuroScientist community.

Write Opinion Pieces

Sponsored posts on EuroScientist

Support our organisation

Donate

Distribute our content



EuroScience
1, Quai Lezay-Marnesia - 67000 Strasbourg
Tel: +33 (0) 3 88 24 11 50

Become a member !

Disclaimer: Material in EuroScientist does not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor or of EuroScience, and Contributors are solely responsible for the material they submit to the magazine.

SUBSCRIBE TO EUROSCIENTIST VIA EMAIL

You will only receive the latest news and articles from EuroScientist.

Your email address

Subscribe

2014 - EuroScience - All rights reserved