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How to cite:

Schofield, Cathy; Kneale, Pauline; Cotton, Debby; Gresty, Karen and Winter, Jennie (2014). Collaborate, publish or be damned? Patterns of academic publishing between institutions offering higher education. In: Annual Conference for the Society for Research in Higher Education (SRHE), 10-12 Dec 2014, Newport, Wales.

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Version: Version of Record

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Collaborate, publish or be damned? Patterns of academic publishing between institutions offering higher education

Schofield Cathy¹, Kneale Pauline², Cotton Debby², Gresty Karen², Winter Jennie²,

¹Truro College, UK, ²Plymouth University, UK

Introduction

Publication is an immensely important part of the career trajectory of most academics internationally, with publication in high-level journals often holding the key to future individual and institutional reward and recognition ([McGrail, Rickard, & Jones, 2006](#)) through performance-based research funding systems, such as the UK's Research Evaluation Framework (REF). Such factors have driven the competitive nature of the higher education market, leading to an increase in the number of papers published in peer reviewed journals from all types of higher education institutions (HEIs).

Patterns of academic publication are continually evolving, with collaboration becoming more frequent, and variation within research partnerships becoming more diverse ([Godin & Gingras, 2000](#)). However, despite a considerable interest in research development in the academic literature, relatively little is known about patterns of publication between individuals and institutions.

Through scientometrics, the measure of scientific research, it is possible to see how much research publication has grown over the last few decades, and the disproportionate rise in collaborative research. A longitudinal survey of Norwegian scientific publishing trends showed an increase in publications per academic, possibly enhanced by the increase in co-authorship, and an increase in international collaboration ([Kyvik, 2003](#)). Academics working within institutional research groups or with departmental colleagues may produce *intramural* publications, but *extramural* publications are becoming more frequent with collaborations between different universities and with partners in government, commerce or industry (Glänzel & Schubert, 2004).

The aim of this paper is to examine the publication trends within the humanities and social sciences for a range of UK educational institutions, from

teaching-intensive colleges through to research-intensive universities and to investigate publication and collaboration patterns.

Methodology

Content analysis was undertaken on eight issues of a sample of twenty-one academic journals publishing research in the social science and humanities. To establish the patterns of publication, three sets of variables were identified; publication type (*pedagogic*, *discipline-based pedagogic* and *discipline-specific*), publication quality (ranked A, B or C), mode of publication (sole authors or collaborative) and the affiliation of authors to either *old* (pre-1950), *intermediate* (1950-1990), *new* (1992), and *emergent* universities (post-1992 to present), or Further Education Colleges (FECs).

Results

In total 1244 articles were reviewed, of which 474 articles that were published by authors that were affiliated to UK educational institutions, where 37% were single UK authors, 27% intramural, 19% extramural and 17% international collaborations involving UK institutions.

Old and *intermediate* universities dominate the higher ranked and *discipline-specific* journals. *New* and *emergent* universities dominate the pedagogic-based journals featuring more frequently in the B and C ranked publications. FECs are barely visible within this landscape generating less than 2% of UK content and only publishing in pedagogic-based titles.

The construct of collaborations differs dependent upon the distance of the collaboration, where a significantly higher number of authors collaborate extramurally than intramurally, and significantly more internationally than domestically. Similarly, more institutions are involved in international than domestic collaborations. Perhaps unsurprisingly the older universities were the most likely to engage in international collaboration, but were equally likely to publish alone, intramurally or extramurally. Authors from the *new* universities were less likely to engage in international collaboration except within the *discipline-pedagogic* journals where they dominate in international collaboration. Those from *emergent*

institutions were more frequently sole authors or collaborate with other *emergent* institutions.

When considering the patterns within journal type the *old* universities dominate the *discipline-specific* journals with intramural, extramural and international collaboration. There was also a high degree of collaboration between the *intermediate* and *new* universities, and *new* universities were the most likely to work with outside agencies. Overall there was little representation from the *emergent* institutions. In the *discipline-pedagogic* journals international collaborations were more frequently observed with *new* universities. Domestically, the *new* universities were the greatest collaborators with *intermediate* institutions, and the *emergent* institutions undertook the highest degree of intramural collaboration. Within the *pedagogic* journals the *intermediate* universities were the most prolific collaborators, extramurally and internationally.

Discussion

Perhaps unsurprisingly it appears that the older the institution, the more prolific are the publishing habits of its staff. Establishing causality here is problematic as it is not clear as to whether this is the product of a highly engrained research culture with more resources being available. Alternatively it may be that their reputation and connections lead to a higher proportion of their papers being accepted for publication, not necessarily more productive *per se*, but more successful. The same explanation might be made of their international collaborations, where institutional and individual reputation may increase the likelihood of international collaboration which in turn may increase the likelihood of acceptance for publication.

The more pedagogic focus of the *new* and *emergent* institutions may be explained by [Hewitt-Dundas \(2012\)](#) who suggested that social scientists affiliated to institutions that have within the last twenty-five years changed from those with vocational and educational focus to an academic institution are more likely to be publishing pedagogic papers than their older, more traditional counterparts. Whether this is the product of a continuing cultural focus on matters educational or

alternatively indicates barriers to publication in the more *discipline-specific* journals due to lack of reputation or resources, is unknown.

With respect to *FEC's* research productivity, the few articles found within this data set were *pedagogic*. Although many FECs have been providing HE courses in the UK for more than a decade their volume of research output in no way resembles the trends of the *emergent* universities. This suggests that there may be issues within the institutional culture, rather than lack of reputation, holding back academic staff from increasing their individual and institutional research profile. The most likely reasons why this may occur are that FEC tend to offer teaching-only contracts and in addition the teaching hours at FECs are generally substantially higher than in most other institution types.

Although only a snapshot in time, this study offers evidence to support long-held assumptions on publishing behaviour, and may act as a benchmark for future research where the impact of research assessment and commodification may be assessed.

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