

Publish or Perish: Case of Latvia

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The aim of this article is to discuss the role of publication requirements and current challenges for academic positions and faculty hiring and promotion in Latvia.

Introduction

The requirements for academic positions are expanding rapidly all over the world. Faculty's scope of activities is already very broad: teaching locally and internationally, supervising student papers, participating in national and international projects, representing the interests of academic staff in professional organizations nationally and internationally, participating in international conferences, being members of scientific committees, and, of course, joining editorial boards of scientific journals, reviewing articles, conducting research, publishing research results in nationally and internationally recognized journals, etc. The above mentioned activities don't represent a full list of requirements. The minimum is defined by national legislation and additional criteria are set by universities themselves.

Publication Requirements for Faculty

During last decade, the focus shifted towards publications as the main indicator of faculty performance quality. The main rationale behind this is to improve the results of universities in different ranking tables or to get additional funding from the state.

There are no publication requirements mentioned in academic contracts in Latvia. The requirements for publications for associated professors and full professors are clearly set by governmental rules defining the minimum of publications. The requirements for other academic positions are set by universities themselves and are usually defined in internal documents according to institutional HR policies.

Governmental rule No. 391 of September 4, 2001, issued in accordance with Art. 34.1 of the Law on Higher Education, says that in order to be elected as associate professor, the candidate for the position has to have at least 3 publications within the preceding 6 years, and for the position of full professor — 5 scientific articles. Yet, professors are encouraged to deliver more than the required minimum as expectations regarding their research performance in the society and in universities are growing.

There is an additional criterion which says that scientific publications have to be cited in the data bases included in

the scientific publications list recognized by the Latvian Scientific Council.

Due to the changes in the legal status of universities and the Latvian Scientific Council, this list is not mandatory for universities anymore. The list of recognized publications includes articles and proceedings by the world's leading academic publishers, such as: Academic Press, ACM Press, Addison-Wesley, American Mathematical Society, Artech House, Birkhäuser Verlag, Cambridge University Press, Chapman and Hall, Digital Press, Ellis Horwood, Elsevier Science, Oxford University Press, Prentice Hall, John Wiley and Sons, Word Scientific Publishing, etc.

Legislation and Autonomy of Universities

The issue of whether setting detailed requirements for academic positions at national universities by the state is legal is not fully considered by all stakeholders. Previous governmental rules that specified such requirements were accepted when universities were organizations directly managed by state but due to the recent legal changes when universities became derived public persons (a specific Latvian legal entity, like municipalities), the government can only set guidelines to be used by universities' academic councils. Yet, the effective governmental rules limit the autonomy of universities to appoint their own staff. There is a need to update these rules to avoid inconsistencies between universities' legal status and the requirements set in the legislation.

Latest Developments

In spite of the legal issues mentioned above, in 2015 the Ministry of Higher Education and Science of Latvia invited different stakeholders to form a group that would draft new, extended requirements regarding scientific publications.

The Ministry's State Secretary suggested that minimum annual publication requirements in journals cited by Web of Science or SCOPUS should only be set for associate professor and full professor positions. For full professors, the number of publications will remain the same (at least 5) but for associate professors, it will increase to 4. Since only publications in specific journals count, it is clear that the pressure to improve research performance will increase. These requirements are currently being discussed by the working group as there are contradictory views on this proposal.

The main reason for raising the requirements is the prevailing understanding that this leads to higher quality of research and allows to better position Latvian universities internationally, as well to attract external funding. However, many faculty members remain critical because they believe that such an approach could lead to so-called "short-termism" as pressure to increase quantitative results could decrease the quality of research. Setting such requirements without taking into consideration the level of the whole research-related infrastructure (e.g. funding, time allocation, available equipment, motivation system, etc.) would

lead to demotivation and disorientation of academic staff. Therefore the focus has to shift from the outcomes to the whole process of research management and understanding the “bottlenecks” of institutional capacity to deliver the desired results.

Debates circle around the issue of whether such requirements are to be set at institutional or national level, especially keeping in mind that university professors who do not hold positions in research institutes don't receive any special funding to conduct research. Some universities are registered as research institutes and use the public resources originally targeted for supporting faculty-led research to co-finance different projects. Since the resources are limited, not all of the members of academic staff receive their fair share of research funding. There is also a number of fields where leading academic journals are not cited in Scopus, e.g. the study of Baltic languages. Discussions continue as there is no common understanding of how the new requirements will affect academic dynamics. All the parties involved agree, however, that a transition period will be necessary for everyone to adjust to new rules. Another issue on the political agenda these days is that professors can only be elected for a maximum period of 6 years without an opportunity to get a tenured position.

Financing Research at Universities

Universities' research funds are rather low in Latvia. They witnessed huge budget cuts (up to 60%) during the global economic crisis of 2008-2009. Due to budget constraints, not all universities (private or public) have access to Scopus and Thomson Reuter's data bases. The remuneration for publications can only be received after an article has been published, the pressure to attract research funds has shifted towards faculty members themselves, etc. The size of such remuneration is determined at institutional level, so it varies greatly from one university to another. It depends on the availability of finances, the amount of publications per academic staff, the level of journal, etc. For example, author(s) can receive up to 700 euros (gross) for an article in the field of social sciences published in Scopus journals.

A reform of higher education finance system has begun recently. It provides for additional research funding based on previous research performance (including publication results).

This leads to the conclusion that in the coming years, the pressure to publish in internationally recognized journals will only increase as university performance measures are heavily oriented towards quantitative indicators, such as grants or publication and citation count, rather than qualitative ones. So, despite the fact that different universities have different profiles, missions, and aims, there is no choice given: publish or perish!

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Introduction of Impact-Factor Publication Requirement for Faculty Promotion: Case of Kazakhstan

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One of the many challenges facing the educational system of contemporary Kazakhstan is the low level of research capacity among university faculty. Prior studies (Kuzhabekova, in press a) clearly show that Kazakhstani researchers produce a negligible number of articles in internationally recognized journals, and the articles that they do produce are not cited. In addition to that, most of the scholarly works by Kazakhstani authors which are included in international databases appear in predominantly Russian-language journals or in journals published in the countries of the former Soviet Union, which do not have a high impact compared with their counterparts from far abroad.

Viewing research and innovation as key ingredients of economic growth, the government of Kazakhstan has implemented a number of focused initiatives aimed at strengthening the country's research capacity, including the development of university faculty's individual capacity. In order to stimulate greater scholarly research and publication activity by faculty members and to encourage university research, the government of Kazakhstan has recently introduced an impact-factor publication requirement for promotion to higher academic ranks.

In a recent study (Kuzhabekova, in press b) carried out in order to inform policymakers about the effectiveness of introduction of the impact factor requirement we conducted a survey of university faculty. The online survey was conducted among 170 faculty members from six universities in Kazakhstan, including two national level public universities (Eurasian National University, located in the north, and Kazakh National University named after Al-Farabi, located in the south); two regional level public universities (East-Kazakhstan State University, located in the east, and Kostanay State University, located in the north); as well as two private universities (Karagandy University of Business, Management, and Law, located in the center, and Atyrau Engineering and Humanities Institute, located in the west).

Our research aims were: (1) to determine the extent to which the new requirement has been incorporated into university promotion and reimbursement policies; (2) to identify the difficulties that faculty face in producing