PUBLISH OR PERISH OR NEITHER: WHAT IS HAPPENING IN ACADEMIA

Peter Blunt

INTRODUCTION

The article brings together a range of research findings in the business/social sciences area which are pertinent to the following questions:

(1) How much research and publication is being done by academics?
(2) To what extent do such activities have an impact on them?
(3) How involved are they in the publication and promotion process?

In a world of rapidly shrinking job opportunities for academics, the above questions are of increasing importance. This is particularly the case in North America and the United Kingdom. It may be that the early consideration of these problems by academics in countries not so drastically affected would be of benefit.

A great deal has been written on this topic. Therefore, it is not intended to provide an exhaustive review of the literature here but simply to present evidence that is relevant and representative of the American and British higher education systems.

There is a tendency to oversimplify the issues involved. For example: the simple of this is provided by Van den Berghe (1970). "Publishing has become a career." The average academic author spends 30% of his time writing since he has something to say, because he hopes to contribute to knowledge. However, if the author does not write, he cannot publish, and if he does not publish, he cannot be considered for promotion to full professor. Teachers cannot realistically hope for a chair. Teachers cannot reasonably expect reference; it is the passport to academic success; publication is the criterion of a "great man." A single work that has been recognized and read will throw some light on its validity.

HOW MUCH IS BEING PUBLISHED?

Straus (1971) in the USA, found that of the 3000 economists with 10 years experience, only 4 out of 100 publish something in the Journal of Political Economy. However, if you turn to the National Register of Scientific and Technical Personnel, 61 per cent had something printed in the Index of Economic Journals.

Glenne and Vilemson (1970) considered 45 US departments of Sociology with graduate students. Using a weighting system for articles in 22 journals, monographs, and books, they found that the average productivity per person was equivalent to one article in a non-prestige journal every three years. However, in better institutions the rate increased to one article every two years. Even if one acknowledges the fairly limited coverage in this study there is still a lot of leeway to be made up if academics are to be thought of as &quot;productive publishers.&quot;

Krohn (1971) in a study of a group of physical biologists found that the top producers had a profile that included: 93 per cent of their sample had published 50 or more articles, but their average production was an astounding 173 articles each (for a group of up to 44 articles). Hansen and Weisbrod (1973) found that two articles per year would have been sufficient to qualify for an economic for the Top Ten for Most Articles Published During Lifetime, 1888-1967.

This brief review indicates that most academics do not publish; of those that do relatively few are prolific.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROMOTION, SALARY AND SELECTION DECISIONS

Skeats and Fairbanks (1968) found a clear relationship between position and publication in their study of a 25 per cent sample of American Economic Association members teaching in American Colleges and Universities in 1963. Halsey and Trow (1969) state: &quot;Researchers (i.e., academics with doctorates) are more likely to publish than are associate professors,&quot; and claim that &quot;an academic career is not possible for a scholar who does not publish.&quot; This, however, is the only publication criterion that educators who do publish succeed can make claim to. Skeats and Fairbanks found a statistical correlation between publication and promotion but this was not as strong as that for tenured status. The publication bug is not as widespread as commonly believed. To that extent equalizing publication does not ensure promotion and perishing is an over dramatized view of the present situation. However, there is evidence that some of the criteria for promotion are rewarded both financially and professionally, although there is agreement about the correlation between greater and lesser publications.

To that extent equating publication with prestige is a reasonable approach to salary negotiations, but once again the criticism that publication does not ensure employment is valid. Prior contact stands out as the most important selection criterion; sometimes publications are read, sometimes they are not. It seems reasonable to suppose that in a situation of open job competition publications would be a decisive advantage.

CONCLUSIONS

The publication bug is not nearly as widespread as commonly believed. To that extent equalizing publication does not ensure promotion and perishing is an over dramatized view of the present situation. However, there is evidence that some of the criteria for promotion are rewarded both financially and professionally, although there is agreement about the correlation between greater and lesser publications. To that extent equating publication with prestige is a reasonable approach to salary negotiations, but once again the criticism that publication does not ensure employment is valid. Prior contact stands out as the most important selection criterion; sometimes publications are read, sometimes they are not. It seems reasonable to suppose that in a situation of open job competition publications would be a decisive advantage.

Typical selection decisions are based on the curriculum vitae recommendations and interview. These are conflicting views as to whether publications are read; Caplow and McGee say they are not whereas Weinstock and Coo suggest the opposite. Recommendations according to Leger (1971) tend to emphasize personality rather than competence or ability. Brown (1966) found that where interviews were conducted, in 60 per cent of cases the man hired was the only one interviewed

THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

Grubb and Brown (1970) assign most importance to the teaching function. However, there is a hint that in many larger faculty members are asked to place more emphasis on research (Klapper, 1969; Kelly and Hart, 1971). There do not appear to be differences between institutions in the USA with regard to the importance attached to teaching, but in the better institutions more research is expected and carried out.

For example, Parsons and Platt (1967) found that at better institutions about one third of the week was spent researching whilst teachers at less important institutions devoted one sixth of their time to this activity.

COLISSON AND WEBB (1971) have shown that in the period 1965-1970, 18 per cent of authors (in three British sociology journals) were aged 50-54 and 23 per cent 55-59. From 1965 to 1970 the percentages were 26 and 23 respectively. One can safely say that there is a trend toward more publication generally but particularly amongst younger faculty.

References:

THE JAPAN SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF SCIENCE

C. H. L. Kennard*

Recently I was awarded a visiting professorship by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. This enabled me to spend part of a recent study leave at the Institute for Protein Research, Osaka University with Professor M. Kakudo.

I was so impressed by this society that I have taken this opportunity of writing a short note to outline some of its activities.

It was initially founded by the Emperor in 1932 as a private foundation for "contributing to the advancement in the sciences through extension of grants in aid for scientific research, support to researchers, promotion of international co-operation in science", etc.

Its activities include the support of international scientific programmes such as fellowships for foreign research workers. This allows research for a period of up to a year at a Japanese University. Applications must be made through a Japanese host scientist with the consent of the head of the host institution and accepted in September-November of that year. The fellowship covers the return air fare, living expenses in Japan and a small maintenance budget. The applicants must be a national of a country with diplomatic relations with Japan, be under 40 years of age, in good health and hold a doctorate degree. There have been 187 fellows for the period 1964-1974, with three from Australia.

The visiting professorship programme allows senior scientists to visit Japan for a period of up to four months to do research with host scientists and to give lectures, etc. Applications must be made through a Japanese scientist and not directly to the society through diplomatic channels. Similar conditions and benefits apply to those for research workers. A total of 54 foreign scientists have been invited between 1959 to 1974, with 16 from Australia. A partial list is given in Table 1.

The society looks after Japan's interest in international Joint Projects like the U.S.-Japan cooperative programme on DDT, Social Science, Cancer and Particle Physics, and US French efforts with CNRS and INSERM. It also arranges bilateral programmes for the exchange of scientists with foreign academic institutions of England, Germany, France, Hungary, and Korea. It offers to Japanese scientists overseas fellowships in the U.S., Germany, Italy, France, and Iran, as well as supported international meetings with less than 100 participants. Recent meetings have been the International Symposium on the Mathematical Problems in Theoretical Physics at Kyoto and a joint Japan-Soviet seminar on Electrochemistry in Tokyo.

It has a domestic programme to encourage science through doctoral fellowships, visiting professorships. It arranges seminars, publishes scientific books and organises industry-university research committees. It is supported mainly by the Government but receives some private contributions.

More information may be obtained from the society."

Notes:


TABLE 1.

Visiting Professors (Australian Awards)

1963 Professor G. H. Ayward, Univ. of N.S.W.-STUDIES IN ELECTROCHEMISTRY OF COMPLEX COMPOUNDS, with Professor M. Takasu, Tokyo University.
1968 Professor P. Guillemot, University of Pennsylvania-RESEARCH IN ORGANIC ELECTROCHEMISTRY, with Professor T. Taya, Tokyo University.
1971 Dr. R. H. Taylor, Div. of Tropical Diseases C.S.I.R.O.-A SURVEY OF THE POSSIBILITIES FOR SUBTROPICAL GRASSES AND LEGUMES IN THE WARMER DISTRICTS OF JAPAN, with Professor M. Shinmoto, Kyushu University.
1972 Dr. S. A. Bult, Saranamahata Station, University of California-STUDY ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE EARTH'S INFERIOR AND THE EARTHQUAKE SOURCE MECHANISM, with Professor M. Warm, University of Tokyo.
1973 Mr. H. Ikeda, Div. of Tropical Diseases C.S.I.R.O.-A SURVEY OF THE POSSIBILITIES FOR SUBTROPICAL GRASSES AND LEGUMES IN THE WARMER DISTRICTS OF JAPAN, with Professor M. Shinmoto, Kyushu University.
1974 Dr. S. A. Bult, Saranamahata Station, University of California-STUDY ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE EARTH'S INFERIOR AND THE EARTHQUAKE SOURCE MECHANISM, with Professor M. Warm, University of Tokyo.
1975 Dr. S. A. Bult, Saranamahata Station, University of California-STUDY ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE EARTH'S INFERIOR AND THE EARTHQUAKE SOURCE MECHANISM, with Professor M. Warm, University of Tokyo.
1976 Dr. S. A. Bult, Saranamahata Station, University of California-STUDY ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE EARTH'S INFERIOR AND THE EARTHQUAKE SOURCE MECHANISM, with Professor M. Warm, University of Tokyo.
1977 Dr. S. A. Bult, Saranamahata Station, University of California-STUDY ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE EARTH'S INFERIOR AND THE EARTHQUAKE SOURCE MECHANISM, with Professor M. Warm, University of Tokyo.
1978 Dr. S. A. Bult, Saranamahata Station, University of California-STUDY ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE EARTH'S INFERIOR AND THE EARTHQUAKE SOURCE MECHANISM, with Professor M. Warm, University of Tokyo.
1979 Dr. S. A. Bult, Saranamahata Station, University of California-STUDY ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE EARTH'S INFERIOR AND THE EARTHQUAKE SOURCE MECHANISM, with Professor M. Warm, University of Tokyo.
1980 Dr. S. A. Bult, Saranamahata Station, University of California-STUDY ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE EARTH'S INFERIOR AND THE EARTHQUAKE SOURCE MECHANISM, with Professor M. Warm, University of Tokyo.

*Department of Chemistry, University of Queensland.