

November 2023

Benchmark study

**Publication output in
Development Studies Institutes
2018-2022**



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IOB | Institute of
Development Policy

The following document reports on a benchmark study conducted in 2023 by IOB, comparing the institute's research publication output and impact for the period between 2018 and 2022 to those of 6 similar European institutes.

The objective of the study is to establish a benchmark of publication output for researchers currently working in development studies institutes, and to compare IOB's publication output against this benchmark. The study also allows to compare publication output and scientific visibility over time, as a previous study was carried out in 2018.

1. Methodological choices

1.1. Identification of sample

For the identification of the sample of 2022, the benchmark study carried out by IOB was conceived as an update of the Development Studies institutes sampled in the benchmark study we carried out for the period 2013-17. We contacted all the still existing institutes who participated at that time to ask for their cooperation and consent in carrying out this study. Most institutes agreed to participate.

For the selection of development institutes included in the study, the main condition for selection was that the institutes are European research institutes specialized in development studies, and that they host widely recognized postgraduate programmes focusing on development studies. We worked with a slightly reduced sample in 2023 compared to 2018, as, in the meantime, some (smaller) peer entities integrated in bigger wholes (IUED Geneva, CIDIN Nijmegen) or didn't respond to our invitation notwithstanding several requests. We ended up with this list:

- University of Sussex (Institute of Development Studies - IDS)
- University of Antwerp (Institute of Development Policy - IOB)
- Erasmus University Rotterdam (International Institute of Social Studies - ISS)
- London School of Economics (Department of International Development - DID)
- SOAS (Department of Development Studies - DDS)
- University of East Anglia (School of Global Development - SGD)
- University of Manchester (Global Development Institute - GDI)

The population of the sample is comprised of all 296 individual researchers who are currently employed by their respective institutes. Each institute was asked to present their list of staff members, with the exclusion of the following groups:

- PhD students;
- post-doc researchers;
- emeritus professors and other retired staff¹;
- affiliate staff not on the payroll;
- teaching fellows;

¹ In actual practice, retirement policies may differ quite substantially, to be sure. To the extent possible we looked up people's age, year of PhD and earliest publication reported in Google Scholar. The oldest staff member in the dataset was born in 1944 (or aged 78 in 2022). We took institutes' reporting on their contracted staff at face value.

While this way of defining “list of staff members” allows to better compare performance of institutes over time as it controls for differences in researchers’ status, this also evidently implies that it leads to a seriously constrained definition of ‘institutional performance’ as such.

Table 1.
Characteristics of sample of researchers

Peer entity	Number of researchers	% born in EU	% with EU PhD	% PhD in economics	% Female
Sussex (IDS)	77	70%	71%	19%	53%
UAntwerp (IOB)	13	92%	92%	46%	31%
EUR (ISS)	49	55%	80%	35%	41%
LSE (DID)	30	48%	68%	31%	57%
SOAS (DDS)	28	74%	89%	30%	43%
UEA (SGD)	41	80%	98%	33%	50%
UManchester (GDI)	58	66%	86%	33%	37%
Total	296				
Average	42	68%	81%	30%	46%

With a total of 296 researchers specialized in development studies, the average number of researchers per institute is 42. With a staff of 13 lecturers, or *less than one third of the average*, IOB has now become the smallest entity in the sample. In the previous exercise, this average was still 28, which partly reflects the integration of smaller entities into more encompassing departments, and partly the increase in number of staff in other entities: indeed, while the number of IOB staff members remained constant, all other entities in the sample saw their number of staff increasing.

Of all researchers in development studies, 46% are female (42% in 2018). IOB scores below average. On average, less than one third earned their PhD in economics while this ratio approaches 50% for IOB. About 68% of researchers are born in the EU (76% in 2018) and 81% of them have a PhD from a European university (85% in 2018). At IOB, 92% is born in the EU and has a European PhD degree.

1.2. Period under study

All data were retrieved during the month of August 2023.

The objective of the study is to compare the output and impact of *recent* publication output. A benchmark study that looks at the whole publication output of institutes’ academic staff assesses the overall performance of the researchers’ often extensive academic career, which is not necessarily a good indication of the *current* performance of the researchers working in development institutes. The IOB benchmarking study tries to overcome this problem by comparing the researchers’ publication performances during the last five years: it focuses on publication output and citations of different staff members in the period 2018-2022. Citations

(of this time-restricted number of publications) are evidently evolving over time, we measured these in August 2023.

1.3. Criteria of researchers' publication output and impact

As noted above, the first criterion for selection of relevant publications is that they were published in the period between 2018 and 2022. We also restrict our citation analysis to what was published during this time window.

A further selection criterion for this comparative analysis is the public availability of the relevant data. As a consequence, this benchmark study could not adopt the research valuation system that was introduced by CERES and recognized by EADI in 2005. The CERES/EADI research valuation system involves five graded categorizations of research output, including output in carriers of information that are not visible in Google Scholar. The calculations that determine the CERES/EADI ranking of a given publication are also too complex to be adopted here, as they require information that is not publicly available. As a consequence, the measures of publication output we are using are implicitly giving more weight to multi-authored articles (an entity's output is calculated as the sum of all its individual staff members' output, whether or not papers were written by multiple authors, or even authors from the same entity). Further, in contrast to the CERES/EADI-valuation exercise, no attempt is made to discriminate between articles and book publications (i.e. give more weight to books).

The benchmark study compares the parameters based on data retrieved from two programmes that calculate the output and impact of selected publications – namely Harzing's *Publish or Perish*, which is based on Google Scholar, and *Web of Science*.

Google Scholar is a very (and, we noticed, increasingly) inclusive academic search engine. The results presented include a large variety of academic output and, increasingly, output for a broader audience. Differences between articles and books, or between single-authored and multiple-authored publications, are not taken into account. The instrument is not free of error: promotion for other discussion papers may for instance wrongly be considered as a reference and hence counted as a citation, and self-citations are not excluded either. We have corrected for these elements to a certain degree by combining double listings of the same publication into 1. We also tried to filter out publications that Google Scholar accredited to the wrong researcher by checking the subject of the papers where possible.

Web of Science (formerly Web of Knowledge) is a more exclusive academic platform than Google Scholar. In order to preserve certain scientific academic standards, it only features peer-reviewed articles from a limited range of journals -arguably too limited, as some international peer reviewed journals – some of these being edited in the Global South – are not included. Yet it has the advantage that the data it provides (both publications and citations) is freely accessible through the university library.

Both *Publish or Perish* and *Web of Science* allow extracting the number of publications, number of citations and h-scores of individual researchers for a particular time-period. For each parameter, we calculated the average for each institute as well as the overall average for

the 296 researchers. Further, we calculated, for each institute, the percentage of researchers in the top 50%, the top 30% and the top 10% of the sample.

1.4. Limitations of the comparative benchmarking analysis

Given that a limited number of parameters is included, the results of this study reveal only part of the academic performance of the individual researchers and the institutes of which they are part.

All institutes have their own history, which is function of their academic, political and development policy environment. Academic environments largely determine the difference in emphasis given to particular publications as compared to other kinds of research and academic output. Although it is unlikely that academia will ever reach a consensus on what is an exemplary academic performance, there is probably a consensus that “academic performance” is more comprehensive than producing the largest number of the most cited papers of which we find an electronic trace in either the Google Scholar or Web of Science datasets. This is especially important for development departments or institutes, whose mission is often much broader than purely academic, and whose funding often also depends on activities which can only indirectly be recycled into scientific publication output. Further, a lot depends on the research time allotted to researchers. This study does not attempt to control for differences in research time use between institutes. Finally, as already mentioned above, by limiting itself to a particular category of staff members only, even for the limited dimension of publication output the study does not allow to evaluate the total academic entities’ performance.

The results have to be interpreted with these caveats in mind.

2. Google Scholar 2018-2022 publications & citations

Table 3.
Number of publications (2018-22) in Google Scholar

Entity	2013-17	2018-22			
	Average	Average	% >median	% >30%	% >10%
			(14)	(24)	(40)
Sussex (IDS)	23,1	22,6	62%	43%	16%
UAntwerp (IOB)	36,2	41,4	92%	92%	38%
EUR (ISS)	19,1	20,7	49%	31%	6%
LSE (DID)	21,3	16,1	37%	13%	10%
SOAS (DDS)	21,9	12,1	32%	18%	0%
UEA (SGD)	21,8	12,4	27%	10%	5%
UManchester (GDI)	16,7	18,5	48%	29%	12%
Total	21,5°	19,2			

° average for the total sample

All researchers in development studies reported in the dataset published, on average, 19,2 papers over the 5-year period 2018-22, which is a slight decrease compared to the period 2013-17, though the decrease is the net result of both negative and positive changes over time. In any case, taking into consideration the group of researchers in development studies as a whole, the cutoffs to determine above-median, top 30% or top 10% performance also slightly decreased, from 19 to 14, from 26 to 24 and from 44 to 40 respectively. Realizing an increase from 36 to 41 publications, IOB belongs to the group of entities who saw their number of publications increase. IOB also remains the top performer in the sample for this indicator. More than 90% of staff members perform in the top 30% category and almost 40% perform in the top 10% category.

Table 4.
Number of citations (2018-2022) in Google Scholar

Entity	2013-17	2018-22				
	Average	Average	Gini	% >median	% >30%	% >10%
				(130)	(413)	(815)
Sussex (IDS)	181,8	327,2	0,51	49%	30%	10%
UAntwerp (IOB)	138,2	321,5	0,39	62%	31%	0%
EUR (ISS)	178,9	397,1	0,71	39%	20%	6%
LSE (DID)	460,1	298,8	0,56	50%	20%	7%
SOAS (DDS)	131,7	195,9	0,55	46%	11%	0%
UEA (SGD)	234,9	288,4	0,66	37%	22%	12%
UManchester (GDI)	247,8	549,1	0,48	72%	60%	26%
	209,5°	360,3	0,59			

° average for the total sample

Whereas in 2018, Google Scholar publications realized in 2013-7 were cited 210 times on average, this average increased to 360 in 2023 for the papers and books published in 2018-

22. Except for LSE, all entities saw the number of citations increase. This result can in part be explained by the fact that there was a larger time period between the publication window and the period at which citation data were retrieved (March 2018 for the 2013-17 window, versus August 2023 for the 2018-22 window), but this difference seems too slight to explain the change, particularly as the number of publications itself slightly decreased.

The citations do show quite an uneven distribution however, as shown by the large difference between the mean and the median (130 citations). IOB performs below average (while it publishes substantially more than average), though 62% of its researchers perform in the top 50% (only their colleagues in Manchester perform better in this respect): these figures reflect the relatively equal performance of IOB’s staff compared to its peer institutes. Indeed, while the sector average Gini coefficient is 0,59, IOB scores a sectoral minimum of 0,39 in this respect.

3. Web of Science 2018-2022 publications & citations

Table 5.
Number of publications (2018-2022) in Web of Science

Entity	2013-17	2018-22				
	Average	Average	Gini	% >median	% >30%	% >10%
Cut-off				(7)	(10)	(16)
Sussex (IDS)	5,6	7,3	0,43	48%	31%	9%
UAntwerp (IOB)	6,4	10,3	0,27	69%	62%	8%
EUR (ISS)	6,2	7,5	0,50	37%	29%	8%
LSE (DID)	6,4	6,6	0,39	33%	17%	7%
SOAS (DDS)	5,6	3,6	0,45	18%	4%	0%
UEA (SGD)	9,6	7,0	0,50	44%	24%	10%
UManchester (GDI)	6,3	8,9	0,46	50%	34%	19%
Total	6,5°	7,3				

° average for the total sample

On average, researchers in development studies publish 7,3 papers over a 5-year period in a Web of Science-rated journal, compared to 6,5 papers in 2013-17, which signals an increase in visibility of output among academic peers. IOB researchers perform substantially better than this average (10,3), which was not the case in the previous period. With 70% of all researchers publishing at least 7 WoS papers over a 5-year period, and with 62% publishing at least 10, IOB scores also highest in the top 50% and top 30% groups respectively. Its researchers are only (slightly) underrepresented in the group of top 10% researchers (from 16 WoS papers per year). This again reflects the relative equality in performance among IOB researchers.

Table 6.
Number of citations (2018-2022) in Web of Science

Entity	2013-17	2018-22				
	Average	Average	Gini	% >median	% >30%	% >10%
Cut-off				(51)	(122)	(302)
Sussex (IDS)	30,5	100,7	0,65	48%	22%	9%
UAntwerp (IOB)	23,4	101,9	0,50	62%	38%	8%
EUR (ISS)	30,5	92,5	0,68	49%	18%	6%
LSE (DID)	57,8	85,9	0,58	43%	17%	3%
SOAS (DDS)	21,5	58,7	0,67	32%	18%	4%
UEA (SGD)	71,5	101,8	0,69	39%	22%	15%
UManchester (GDI)	36,7	190,5	0,49	69%	69%	21%
Total	37,7°	111,4	0,64			

° average for the total sample

Just as in the case of Google Scholar citations, also WoS citations (of papers published in 2018-22) considerably increased, i.e. almost tripled between the two benchmarking exercises. In the case of IOB, the number of citations even more than quadrupled. The sample average is also pushed upwards by one extremely well-performing entity, the Global Development Institute at UManchester, which causes the IOB, ranked second, to perform below average. Citations are not just unequally distributed between institutes but also within them, between researchers themselves, as testified by the Gini coefficient of 0,64. With one of the lowest levels of inequality (though still at 0,50), 62% of IOB's researchers are overrepresented in the top 50% category but underrepresented in the top 30% and top 10% categories.

4. Summary & conclusion

1. This benchmarking exercise has been carried out to compare IOB with a limited sample of Development Studies Institutes that can be considered as 'guiding' in the field. The exercise is **restricted to publication output** and uptake as measured by a publication's citations, of the senior research staff members. While the sample was restricted to 7 Development Studies Institutes, Centres, Schools or Departments in total, it covered 296 research staff members – which makes this exercise comparable to the benchmarking exercise carried out in 2018 (312 researchers).
2. IOB is a **'big small' institute**: it is one of the biggest institutes in development studies in Belgium, yet with a senior research staff of less than one third of the average of guiding European Development Studies Institutes it is very small. Whereas IOB's number of staff did not change over time, all other DS institutes have also seen their staff increase between the previous and the current benchmarking exercise, while some other institutes disappeared or were integrated into a bigger entity between 2018 and now.
3. Overall, we observe an **increase in output** over time for the field of development studies as a whole in WoS though not in Google Scholar. This signals an increasing orientation of output towards academic peers in the field. IOB's senior researchers' performance significantly improved according to both criteria and remains the highest performer of the sample.
4. **Uptake of publications** has substantially improved for the field as a whole, even if this can partly be explained by a difference in the timing of the current benchmarking study, compared to the previous one. IOB also follows the general trend but also goes beyond it, more than doubling Google Scholar citations (233% compared to 70% on average) and a quadrupling of WoS citations (443% compared to 290% on average).
5. Both indicators of publications and uptake also indicate that **inequality in performance** between researchers is substantially lower in IOB compared to all other institutes. This is also reflected in the fact that in most indicators, IOB researchers are over-represented in the categories of top 50% and top 30% researchers but not in the category of top 10% researchers.
6. **Why such low inequality?** We can only formulate some speculative hypotheses on this point. One probable explanation for the relative equality in performance at IOB compared to that of other institutes may be that other institutes allow some of their senior researchers to specialize in one of the three academic roles of teaching, research and societal service delivery and/or give less attention to others. Their bigger size, and probably also the higher ability they have to negotiate pay levels of senior staff, would also give more leeway to such an approach -and constrain inequality in publication/citation performance at IOB. The recent hiring of (3) research professors at IOB might however also result in higher inequality.
7. Would there be a **connection between low inequality and relatively high publication/citation performance and would that be important?** Again, this study doesn't allow to specify the causal connections between both. As mentioned in the introduction, a strategy to maximize publication/citation performance is also not necessarily something to value, as it would ultimately also enter into competition with other core academic roles of Development Studies Institutes.