

Academic Salaries and Contracts: What Do We Know?

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Salaries and the terms of faculty appointments and promotion are central to the well-being of the academic profession and its contributions to the university. If salaries are inadequate, the “best and brightest” will not be attracted to academe, and those who do teach will be obliged to moonlight, diverting their attention and dedication from their academic work. Additionally, without appropriate contracts and appointments, there is a limited guarantee of academic freedom or expectation of either a stable or satisfying career. Furthermore, in a globalized world, salaries in one country affect academe elsewhere, as professors are tempted to move where remuneration and working conditions are best.

Yet, only limited research is available about these issues, within a specific country or comparatively. Comparative studies on academics in many countries are complex, as data are often difficult to obtain; and exchange rates and the standard of living vary across countries. The research provided data using purchasing power parity, which permits more realistic salary comparisons. The project reveals key trends in 28 diverse countries on all continents.

SALARIES AND REMUNERATION

This research, not surprisingly, found significant variations in academic salaries worldwide. As a general rule, salaries were best in wealthier countries, although there are significant variations among them, with the English-speaking academic systems generally paying more than those in continental Europe. Russia and the former Soviet countries pay quite low salaries, even when their economies are relatively prosperous. There were a few surprises. India ranks comparatively high in salaries. China, on the other hand, has invested heavily in its higher education system, particularly in its research universities; yet, average academic salaries rank at the bottom.

It was also learned that, in many countries, salary alone does not convey a complete picture of compensation. Academics also depend on other payments and subsidies, from their universities, and other sources—to make up the total remuneration package. Chinese universities, for example, provide a complex set of fringe benefits and extra payments to their academic staff for publishing articles, evaluating extra examinations, and for other campus work. In North America and western Europe, salaries are the main academic income—while elsewhere this does not seem to be the case.

In many countries, salaries are too low to support a middle-class lifestyle locally, and other income is needed. In many of these places, moonlighting is common. Many academics teach at more than one institution. Indeed, the burgeoning private higher education sector in many countries depends on professors from the public universities to teach most classes.

CONTRACTS

The terms and conditions of academic appointments and subsequent opportunities for advancement available to the academic profession are also of central importance. Among the group of 28 countries, few offer formal tenure to the academic profession, thus perhaps weakening guarantees of academic freedom and providing less job security. Tenure arrangements, awarded to academics after a careful evaluation of performance, seem largely limited to the United States, Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, and South Africa in the study. In one country, Saudi Arabia, local academic staff receive permanent appointments, at the time of hiring. Some continental European countries provide civil service status to academics in the public universities, and this also provides significant job security. In fact, in most countries, few are fired and few are seriously evaluated. There is a kind of de facto tenure that provides long-term employment for most, without either a guarantee or any means of careful evaluation.

A number of important variations exist in requirements to enter the profession or (when available) to qualify for a tenured-like position. In many countries, a doctoral degree is requisite to become a university professor. In certain European countries (Czech Republic, France, Germany, and Russia) a

habilitation—similar to a doctoral dissertation—is needed, in addition to the doctoral degree, to achieve the rank of professor. In other countries, a simple bachelor’s degree is sufficient to be hired as a university teacher. In countries where a PhD is not required, there is a trend to demand higher qualifications; and the master’s degree is becoming the minimum requirement, even if it is not mandatory by law.

INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY

Among the countries that pay the best salaries, some benefit based on an inflow of academics from less-wealthy countries. Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, and the United States benefit the most from the migration of academic talent. In contrast, many of the countries paying the lowest salaries are considered “sender” countries and some (Armenia, Ethiopia, Israel, and Nigeria) have implemented programs, in which better salaries and working conditions are part of the strategy to attract or retain national and international scholars. In their quest to build world-class education systems, China and Saudi Arabia are aggressively pursuing international faculty, mostly from English-speaking countries, as well as their own expatriates. In the Chinese case, that process has resulted in a big gap between the salary of local professors and international/repatriated ones. Finally, some countries are both “senders” and “receivers.” For example, South Africa attracts professors from other African nations, but at the same time it frequently suffers brain drain to English-speaking countries—such as, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States.

CONCLUSION

This research shows a range of realities for the academic profession. Some countries offer reasonable salaries and secure and transparent career structures for academics. The English-speaking countries included in this research—Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, to some extent South Africa, and the United States—fall into this category. Western European countries that offer civil service status to academics typically provide decent working conditions and compensation. But even in these nations, the professoriate is inadequately compensated when compared to other highly educated professionals. For the rest, and this includes Russia and the former Soviet Union, China, Latin America (except Brazil), and Nigeria, salaries are low and contracts often lack transparency. India offers reasonably good salaries.

A global comparison presents an array of realities—few of them extraordinarily attractive—for the professoriate. This situation, at least for the 28 countries examined in this research, is certainly problematical for countries at the center of the global knowledge economy. For academics in those countries with quite low salaries—such as, China, Russia, Armenia, or Ethiopia—the academic profession faces a crisis. In general, it seems like professors are not considered the elite in the knowledge economy. Rather, they tend to be seen as a part of the skilled labor force that such economies require.