PG R EMPLOYABILITY IN 2020 AND BEYOND: NEW AGENDAS AND DEVELOPING PRACTICES

Online Seminar | 24th April 2020
Schedule

11.00: Welcome & Seminar Briefing (Angus Burns)
11.05 Introduction: ‘Barriers to PGR Employability – Perceived and Real’ (Steve Joy and Jasmine Hunter Evans)
11.20: Small Group Discussions: Barriers to PGR Employability – Perceived and Real
11.45 ‘It’s not just cardigans and counselling’: using hard data to support research students in their career journey (Holly Prescott and Kate Murray)
12.15 Questions & Discussion
12.30 Lunch Break
13.15 Supporting PGR Employability: Skills Development & Work Placements (Katie Hoare)
13.45 Questions & Discussion
14.00 Small Group Discussions: Solutions, Actions and Changes in Practice to Support PGRs
14.35 Sharing Practice Slides from group discussions
14.55 Final Summary (John Strachan)
‘Barriers to PGR Employability
- Perceived and Real’

Dr Steve Joy, Head of Researcher Development, University of Cambridge
Dr Jasmine Hunter Evans, Researcher Development Manager, Bath Spa University
‘Roberts era’ employability narrative

transferable skills

education → employment
Is there a PGR employability problem?

3%
‘Roberts era’ employability narrative

- Does this encourage divisions between expectations and reality?
  - single career vs. portfolio career?
  - perfect role vs. breadth of choices?
  - immediate success vs. long-term plans?

education transferable skills employment
‘Roberts era’ employability narrative

- Does this narrative suggest that employability is an attribute pertaining to individuals?
- What about structural factors?

Diagram:

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transferable skills
education ----> employment
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Luck
Change over time
‘Roberts era’ employability narrative

- Does this narrative perpetuate unhealthy views of academia relative to other careers?

  success (getting an academic job) vs. failure (leaving HE)

  i.e. transferable skills are for those ‘not good enough’ to stay on

transferable skills

education \[\rightarrow\] employment
‘Roberts era’ employability narrative

- Does this narrative perpetuate fears around the value of the PhD outside academia?

Worries about being in a liminal position post-PhD – feeling ‘overqualified for graduate roles’ but ‘under-experienced for direct hire’
‘Roberts era’ employability narrative

- Does this narrative entrench an academic model of employability?
- Perpetuate an ‘academic echo chamber’?

Rather than, for example, exposure to different communities, sectors, and their variant models of work and career development?
Summarising challenges

• Are we comfortable with the word ‘employability’? Is our language representative of the diversity of career forms and pathways?

• Do we do enough to help PGRs understand what really influences employment outcomes?

• What more can we do to challenge unhealthy narratives of success/failure (academia as vocation) or the devaluing of the doctorate?

• How do we encourage students (and their supervisors) of the importance of acquiring diverse experiences?
Small Group Discussion: ‘Barriers – Perceived and Real’ (20 minutes)

You will shortly be placed into online groups to share and discuss your thoughts.

In your group’s Google Folder you will find a list of questions to consider. Please record your discussion on the document – you may wish to return to this later in the day.

**TASK**: From your discussion draw 2 key points that you would like to share (very briefly) with the plenary.

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*Please use this document to record your discussion; you may want to return to these notes later.*

In your discussion you may wish to cover:
- From your perspective, and the perspective of your institution, what are the central barriers around PhD employability?
- In what ways might these be ‘perceived’, ‘real’ or neither?

You may also wish to reflect on (and critique) the challenges posed in the introduction:
- Are we comfortable with the word ‘employability’? Is our language representative of the diversity of career forms and pathways?
- Do we do enough to help PhDs understand what really influences employment outcomes?
- What more can we do to challenge unhealthy narratives ex. success/failure (academia vs vocation) or of the devaluing of the doctorate?
- How do we encourage students (and their supervisors) of the importance of acquiring diverse experiences?

**TASK**: From your discussion draw 2 key points that you would like to share with the plenary.
- You will only have 1 minute to share these thoughts.
- You will need to decide which of you will unmute your microphone to share these when we return to the plenary.
Small Group Activity:  
‘Solutions, Actions and Changes in Practice to Support PGRs’ 
(35 minutes)

You will shortly be placed back into online groups to discuss your thoughts over the areas covered today.

In your group’s Google Folder you will find some prompts in a slide for you to consider, but please shape your discussion on your interests and the ideas you have generated.

**TASK:** From your discussion draw 3-5 key actions or suggestions to take forward that you would like to share with the plenary. Please lay these out on your blank slide – you will use this to present and then it will be circulated to everyone after the session.