



ESREA Access, Learning Careers and Identities Network
ESREA Working Life and Learning Network

First Call for papers

Learning careers, higher education and workplaces.
Supporting transitions in times of complexity



27-29 March 2025
University Rennes 2, Rennes, France

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have transformed across Europe and beyond as a result of economic, social and political factors resulting in the increasing expansion, globalisation and marketisation of universities. One effect of this has been the opportunity to widen participation and access to groups who would not have previously entered HE such as adult students (Scott, 2001; Fleming, Loxley and Finnegan 2017). Another change initiated by the Bologna process (EC2010) has been a policy push to enhance links between universities and employers with the emphasis to prepare students for the labour market by making them employable. The onus is on students to develop their employability skills and portfolio if they want to succeed in a competitive, individualistic world. As Tomlinson points out: 'It now appears no longer enough just to be a graduate, but instead an *employable* graduate'(2012: 25).

Adult students in universities experience a number of transitions on entering university and during their studies which impact on their learning careers and identity: for many it is a transformative experience but as Reay (2003) points out it can also involve the risk of making previous balances and relationships more unstable. In a similar way, transitioning into the graduate labour market can also bring with it benefits but also bring risks. Adult students, particularly working class students, do not experience a level playing field when it comes to transitioning into the labour market (Thompson, 2012; Merrill et al, 2020) as competing in the labour market with young graduates can highlight issues of inequality such as age, class, gender and race (Burke, 2014). Non-traditional adult students are taking a longer transition period than 'traditional' students to gain employment and when they do it is often at a lower and less meaningful level than graduate level. Such students, therefore, experience a mismatch between higher education qualifications and the demand of the labour market.

The transformations in higher education put an emphasis on the concept of transition in two different directions: on one side the experience of entering HE institutions was highlighted in order to better support the chances of a growing population (e.g. non traditional students), on the other side a focus on future professional contexts took a rising relevance in connection with the need of preventing over-skilling, skill mismatch and unemployment. These two processes (ingoing and outgoing) are deeply entangled as the movements from HE to workplaces and vice-versa are not linear and may reoccur at different times in a person's life. Career transitions are, in fact, a lifelong endeavor and many studies highlight their frequency and multiple configurations: 'both minor discontinuities and major interruptions in an individual career'(Chudzikowsk, 2012, p. 298) – for example a shift to a different work role, change a work setting (Greer & Kirk, 2022), experience retirement (Beehr, 2014) or a job loss (Gowan, 2014).

In a contemporary scenario characterised by 'protean' careers (Hall, 2004) and 'life design' (Savickas, 2021) but also by dramatic professional interruptions (e.g. the recent great resignation), the need of constantly re-imagining a multiverse of professional futures, alternative working contexts and multiple learning itineraries is on the fore. Unexpected effects, crises as well as a potential in terms of transformation (Akkermans and Kubash, 2017) are dimensions often connected to transitional experiences. Adult students entering university are an example of how the interconnection of identity issues, professional itineraries, training aspects and socio-economic

dimensions depicts – potentially – a multi-faceted and complex phenomenon. On the other hand the overarching predominance of assumptions still based on human capital theory (Becker, 1964) continuously generates the risk of adopting linear and reductionist perspectives. For example, transferable competences are often represented as commodities to be delivered on the market or as instruments equipping the subjects to navigate the uncertainty (Han, 2009). Holmes (2023), drawing on Macpherson’s political-economy theory, denotes a widespread use of a possessive approach in which the individual is conceived as ‘essentially the owner of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them’ (Macpherson, 1962, p. 3). A scenario where self-contained individualism (Sampson, 1988) pushes subjects to ‘invest’ in themselves, by engaging in life-long learning to develop their skills and attributes (Field, 2006). These common representations radically underestimate the systemic factors that are intertwined with individuals, higher education institutions, employers, policy makers etc. Researchers such as Tomlinson (2008), Kalffe and Taksa (2015), to contrast this mainstream perspective, have adopted a social positioning model which focuses on a relational and historical perspective. Other research has drawn on Bourdieu (1986) and his work on capitals (social, cultural and economic) in order to consider structural factors on graduate labour market outcomes, which continue to be differentiated particularly by class, ethnicity and gender (Merrill *et al.*, 2020).

Higher education institutions, specifically, are dealing with all these issues as they are more and more asked to support transitions towards workplaces through dedicated modules, tutoring activities and guidance services. Along this articulated net of interventions they are inevitably conveying a certain transition culture and triggering – from a Foucauldian point of view – certain kinds of subjectification processes.

The conference is dedicated to the exploration of proces-sual, contextual, theoretical and methodological perspectives on this phenomena in order to better understand how transitions from higher education (HE) to the labour market take shape and how career development and identities unfold across working life. A constellation of constructs and meanings are often connected to transitions when we start interrogating their configurations and the possibility to partially plan or foresee their effects. In this sense, the concept of flexibility, the notion of employability (De Vos *et al.*, 2021) and the complex domain composed by those competences that should allow smooth passages from one professional context to another (for example, transferable or cross sector competences) are part of our investigation.

The conference welcomes papers, roundtables, and symposia which address one or more of the following topics:

- Different ways of facing the “imperative of employability” both on HEIs and students' sides: are there spaces for cultivating critical and imaginative attitudes?
- Conceptual and theoretical approaches to employability;
- Employability schemes and strategies to deal with “nonlinear transitions” into HE and between HEIs and workplaces;

- Experiences of tensions between the multiple roles addressed to HE: e.g the community development inspired by social justice may be in contrast with employability discourses based on human capital development;
- Issues related to different generations in the transition from HE to workplaces;
- Gendered transitions from HE to work: challenges and responses;
- Innovative learning approaches and didactic strategies aimed at connecting with emerging complexity of workplaces; eg.: the need of developing DEI mindset (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) while acknowledging cultural differences across organizations and countries;
- The role of cultural and social capital and habitus in relation to transitions and employability;
- Methodological approaches to research/ career transitions.

References

- Akkermans, J. and Kubash, S. (2017). Trending topics in careers: A review and future research agenda. *Career Development International*, 22 (2): 586–627.
- Becker, G. (1964). *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education*. New York: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Beehr, T. A. (2014). To retire or not to retire: That is not the question. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 35(8): 1093–1108.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986).“The forms of capital”. In R. J. (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp.241-258). New York: Greenwood Press.
- Chudzikowski, K. (2012). Career transitions and career success in the ‘new’ career era. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 81, 298–306.
- Field, J. (2006). *Lifelong learning and the new educational order*. London: Trentham Books.
- Gowan, M. (2014). Moving from job loss to career management: The past, present, and future of involuntary job loss research. *Human Resource Management Review*, 24(3): 258–270.
- Greer, T. W., and Kirk, A. F. (2022). Overcoming barriers to women's career transitions: A systematic review of social support types and providers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 7: 77-110.
- Hall, D.T. (2004). The protean career: A quarter-century journey. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 65 (1): 1-13.
- Han, S. (2009). Competence: Commodification of Human Ability. In K. Illeris (Ed.), *International Perspectives on Competence Development* (pp. 56-68) London: Routledge.
- Holmes L. (2023). Graduate employability and its basis in possessive individualism. In Siivonen, P., Isopahkala-Bouret U., Tomlinson M., Korhonen M. and Haltia N. (Eds), *Rethinking graduate employability in context. Discourse, policy and practice* (pp. 29-50). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kalfa, S and Taksa, L (2015). Cultural capital in business higher education: reconsidering the graduate attributes movement and the focus on employability. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40 (4): 580-596.

- Macpherson, C. (1962). *The political theory of possessive individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Merrill, B, Finnegan, F., O' Neill, J., and Revers, S, (2020). 'When it comes to what employers are looking for, I don't think I'm it for a lot of them': Class and capitals in, and after, higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 45 (1): 163-175.
- Sampson, E. (1988). The debate on individualism. *American Psychologist*, 43: 15–22.
- Savickas, M. L. (2012). *Career adaptability*. Boston (USA): 48HRbooks.
- Tomlinson, M. (2008). The degree is not enough': students' perceptions of the role of higher education credentials for graduate work and employability. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 29(1): 49-61.
- Tomlinson, M (2012), Graduate Employability: A Review of Conceptual and Theoretical Themes, *Higher Education Policy*, 25: 412-431.

Call for papers, poster sessions, symposiums and roundtables

All abstracts for papers, poster sessions, symposium and round tables to be submitted by the 15th of December 2024. Notification of acceptance will be the 10th of January 2025. The deadline for submission of an extended abstract/paper will be the 1st of March 2025.

Please submit abstracts in two separate files: one including the paper title, the name, address, e-mail of each author and information on whether it is a paper, poster session, symposium or round table; and the second one including the paper title and abstract. Abstracts should be one side of A4 maximum with Arial, 12 points. The main language of the conference is English but abstracts will be accepted in languages where we have members of the committee who can translate such as in French, Spanish and Italian. Full paper must be submitted in English. Regarding presentations English is requested as well but, if necessary, we will try to offer support for translation where conference organization allows it.

After having created an account, the abstract should be uploaded in RTF-format to this website:

<https://esrea2025rennes.sciencesconf.org>

If you have any problems with the platform or the upload process please send an email to:

esrea2025rennes@sciencconf.org

Information for contributors of Abstracts/Papers

A paper is proposed and submitted in the form of an abstract by one person but other people can be named as co-authors in the abstract proposal.

For each participant, a maximum of two such proposals may be submitted in which the person is named as an author or co-author. The abstract proposal must indicate which of the named authors will be presenting the paper. All those authors attending must register for the Conference.

The author or one of the named co-authors is responsible for communicating with the ESREA Conference Organisers about the paper.

Bursaries and support to participating graduate students

As a way to support graduate students' participation in the conference, there will be three bursaries for this conference. To be able to apply, you need to be a graduate student (e.g. PhD-student, EdD-student, Masters' students); a member of ESREA (either individual or covered by an institutional membership) and you need to submit a paper to the main conference.

The bursary is 400 Euros per person and should be used to cover parts of the costs for travel expenditures and/or accommodation during the conference.

Applications for bursaries should be submitted no later than the 20th of January 2025.

Applications or questions regarding the application procedure should be directed to: Barbara.Merrill@warwick.ac.uk or elzbieta.sanojca@univ-rennes2.fr

Conference fees

ESREA member 130 €

Non-member 200 €

Student 80 €

The conference fees include the following :

- reception in the City Hall and/or visit of Parliament House (to be confirmed)
<http://www.tourisme-rennes.com/en/focus-on/the-parliament-of-brittany>
- lunch and dinner on Friday

The fees do not include :

- the visit of Mont Saint Michel, on Saturday afternoon (optional registration: 50€)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znNMDaq5TtE>
- Or excursion on the traditional boat "Le Renard" (on Saturday afternoon) (to be confirmed)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfaP_v7HvVI

Scientific Committee

Eric Bertrand, University Rennes 2, France

Jérôme Eneau, University Rennes 2, France

Pierre Faller, Columbia University, New York USA

Antonio Fragoso, University of Algarve, Portugal

Andrea Galimberti, University of Milano Bicocca, Italy

Trevor Gerhardt, University of Kent, GB

Bernd K pplinger, Justus-Liebig-University Giessen
Genevi ve Lameul, University Rennes 2, France
Irina Lokhtina, University of Central Lancashire - Cyprus
Barbara Merrill, University of Warwick, UK
Hugues Pentecoteau University Rennes 2, France
Elzbieta Sanojca, University Rennes 2, France

Organising Committee

Eric Bertrand, University Rennes 2, France
J r me Eneau, University Rennes 2, France
Anne France Hardy, University Rennes 2, France
Elzbieta Sanojca, University Rennes 2, France
And the following doctoral students from University Rennes 2, France: Marie Aymami, Lydie Dondelli, Delphine Grech, Gildas Grimault, Christophe Jegard, Bleuenn Lollivier, Vanessa Pleven, Rachel Metzger

Conference Venue

The conference will be held at the University Rennes 2, France:
<https://www.univ-rennes2.fr/service-communication/plans-acces>.
Rennes is situated in Brittany, France. Below is a link to tourist information.
<http://www.brittanytourism.com/discover-our-destinations/rennes-and-brittany-shistoric-gateways/unmissable-sites/rennes>

Conference Times

The conference will begin at 1400 on 27 March 2025 and finish at 1300 on 29 March 2025.