Approaches to Academic Roles across a Diversifying Workforce

Dr Celia Whitchurch, Dr Giulio Marini, Professor William Locke

The session will provide an update on CGHE Research Project 3.2 on The future higher education workforce in locally and globally engaged HEIs. It will report on a) a survey sent to all academic staff in five case study institutions across the UK in spring/summer 2018/19, and b) follow up interviews that took place with up to 40 respondents in autumn/spring 2019/2020, who were originally interviewed in autumn/spring 2017/2018. The survey provides a context for analysing the more in-depth findings of both sets of interviews.

The survey component of the project investigates the structure of current academic staff in British non-Russell Group universities. In addition to publicly available information (e.g. contracted roles) released from HESA, this analysis also sheds light on the employment sector origin of staff and their potential destinations, both within and outside higher education institutions. In particular, the paper analyses whether and, if so, how previous experience may predict current career tracks. Moreover, the survey helps to explore which previous experiences and current conditions predict an intention to leave higher education employment for other sectors. The findings illustrate the extent to which other education employment is seen as less desirable than higher education, but also a preference for employment outside education in the private sector. Key driving forces that influence individuals to leave higher education (staff attrition) are excessive workloads and previous experience of having worked outside higher education.

Analysis of the interviews will focus on movements that have occurred in the two-year period between 2017 and 2019 and, in particular, individuals who have moved between the three types of approaches to roles established from the first set of interviews, ie Mainstream, Portfolio and Niche approaches. Attention will be drawn to conditions that facilitate or frustrate individual aspirations, and also the sense of dislocation that can occur in relation to timelines, for instance between real-time working and assumptions in workload models; and in relation to space, for instance between an individual's disciplinary affiliation and the locale(s) in which they carry out their teaching, research and related academic activity. From this, some indicators will be drawn of strategies that individuals are likely to adopt in developing careers in higher education.