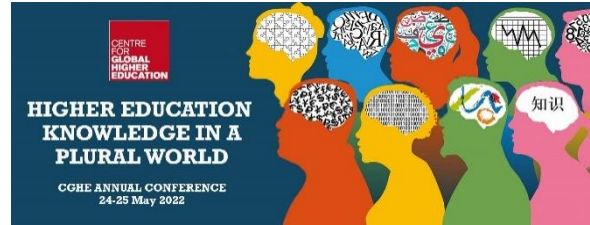


## CGHE Annual Conference 24-25 May 2022: Session details



### **PANEL – It’s about more than employability: Critical views of higher education and the economy**

25 May 2022, 11.50am-12.50pm (UK)

*Chair: Ka Ho Mok*

*Speakers: Stephanie Allais, James Robson, Phil Brown, Nicola Ingram*

In the last two decades, there has been a significant increase in higher education enrolment not only in the global North but also in the global South, and this has become associated with a perceived oversupply of graduates for local and global labour markets. Intensified competition and mismatched job fit have created new challenges for graduates. Drawing from comparative and international perspectives, this panel critically discusses issues related to higher education and the economy, with reference to graduate employment and youth transition issues. Speakers will critically examine human capital theory for overpromising that individual investment in higher education would result in prosperous career development and advanced social mobility for graduates.

The four speakers will each briefly introduce the topic, followed by discussion. As **Nicola Ingram** will remark, there are many different ways of being a graduate in ‘the degree generation’, but the term graduate is laden with particular social meanings and often conjures notions of career success defined through financial reward. In the UK, the concept of ‘graduate success’ is realised through the social construction of the ‘graduate job’ where the contemporary graduate is brought into being through policy frameworks (such as Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)) and measurement tools (such as the DLHE and Graduate Outcomes surveys), with their emphasis on narrowly circumscribing success. The symbolic implications of being a graduate are often overlooked and there is a lack of recognition that success means different things to different people. Moreover, the complexity of the graduate labour market transition *process* rather than *outcome*, and attendant implications for race, class and gender based inequalities, is rendered invisible in the metrics game that universities are lured into through the demands of higher educational policy. **Stephanie Allais** looks at ‘employability’ from the South and specifically from Africa, finding it an unhelpful way to think about the education/employment relation. She will highlight the trite use of employability in the interventions of donors and development agencies in developing countries; the large differences between elite and non-elite jobs/work in African countries; and the small changes in the structure of African labour markets during the period in which primary, secondary, and university enrolments have rapidly increased. To improve higher education as a preparation for work we need to understand how national economies, labour markets, education and training systems, including the knowledge and skills produced are shaped by the location of those national economies in the global economy. Thinking about the role of universities, graduates, and skilled work through a Eurocentric reading of development

ignores the history and ongoing structure of capital and wealth accumulation through transfers of value from 'underdeveloped' to 'developed' countries.

**Phil Brown** will consider different interpretations of the fourth industrial revolution and the role of digital technologies in (re)shaping the future of work, higher education, and employability. He will outline a theory of 'job scarcity' rather than 'labour scarcity', challenging many cherished public policy assumptions about higher education, employability, and the 'graduate' labour market. **James Robson** will argue that while the relationship between higher education and the economy is crucial, we need a new way of thinking about the economic purpose of HE that moves beyond flawed and outdated assumptions of orthodox economics. The economic role of higher education should be to take a deliberately disruptive approach to the economy, invert traditional models of supply and demand, and seek to drive economic change in a way that benefits society. Through the transformative value of learning new knowledge and skills, higher education should support students to become agents of change, demanding meaningful, value-driven, and purposeful work and a 'purposeful economy'. Through individual graduate agency, higher education can become the mechanism of macro-economic transformation.

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*Stephanie Matseleng Allais is Research Chair of Skills Development and Professor of Education at the Centre for Researching Education and Labour at Wits University. She is an educational sociologist, focused on education/ work relationships. Her books include Knowledge, Curriculum, and Preparation for Work (2018, Brill/SENSE, with Yael Shalem), and Selling Education Out: National Qualifications Frameworks and the Abandonment of Knowledge (2014, Sense). She has worked in trade union education, worked in government, taught high school and adult basic education and training, and led a student organization. She served on many committees by appointment of Ministers of Education in South Africa, and served as special advisor to the current Minister of Higher Education and Training. She was a fellow at the Centre for Educational Sociology at the University of Edinburgh, and has conducted research for the ILO including into qualifications frameworks in over 20 countries.*

*James Robson is Co-Director of Oxford University's Centre for Skills, Knowledge, and Organisational Performance (SKOPE), Lecturer in Tertiary Education Systems, and leads Oxford's MSc in HE. He is a CGHE co-investigator on Project 3, 'The role of research in higher education and research assessment'.*

*Phillip Brown is a Distinguished Research Professor, Cardiff University, UK. Phil has extensive experience studying the future of work across advanced and emerging economies. He has interviewed many leading transnational companies and senior policy makers in countries including America, China, Germany, Singapore, and United Kingdom. He's given keynote presentation in over 20 countries and authored a number of books including The Death of Human Capital?: Its Failed Promise and How to Renew it in an Age of Disruption (2020). He Chaired a Review for the Welsh Government on digital innovation for the economy and the future of work in Wales (2019), and is Research Director for an international programme on Digital Futures Work that seeks a rethink of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.*

*Nicola Ingram is Professor of Sociology of Education and Director of the Education and Social Research Institute at The Manchester Metropolitan University. She is a sociologist of education with research expertise in class based inequalities, higher education, social mobility and critical policy analysis.*