

Academic work and careers in local, national and global contexts (0159)

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Academic work and careers are becoming more internationalised, as the flow of talent across borders quickens, the pressure to undertake research with international impact grows, and the incentives to attract international students mount. However, universities operate in national and local contexts as well as globally, and their policy, funding and regulatory environments are largely shaped by more local concerns, arrangements and traditions (Finkelstein and Jones, 2013). For example, there are national differences in employment conditions, regional variations in labour markets and institutional divergence in career structures. Local, national and international academic labour markets overlay and interconnect with each other (Musselin, 2010).

Groups of academics and individuals are located differently within these complex arrays, depending on their role, the type of institution they work in and their career trajectory, for example (Locke, 2014). Some who are orientated mainly towards teaching or the exchange of practical knowledge may be more locally focused on meeting the needs of their regional (sub-national) communities. Others, for example, may operate within international networks of researchers, investigating global phenomena. Both may co-exist within the same institution, and even in the same academic department.

This paper will explore some of the implications of these multifaceted relations for academic work and careers in increasingly competitive and managed environments in UK higher education. In doing so, it will make connections with the three other papers in this proposed symposium, with their complementary emphases on undergraduate education, doctoral studies and higher education spaces.

### **What are the meanings of local-national-global and the relations between them?**

The dimensions of 'local', 'national' and 'global' are ways of thinking about and understanding, for example:

- how institutions promote their reputations among prospective student and staff recruits
- the needs of HEIs to attract, retain and develop their workforce, including their academic staff
- how academic labour markets operate and connect (in some ways complementing, and in other ways conflicting) with each other
- the laws, customs, values, beliefs and practices that impact on academic work, HE career patterns and individuals' trajectories.

A good example of how these various meanings relate with each other is the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF). The REF assesses research 'excellence' using criteria based on a particular kind of international/global evaluation of research outputs, from 'world-leading' to merely 'recognised nationally'. However, the review panels include very few international peers and barely any conversant with research published in languages other than English. The REF results in the undervaluing of local and national research that may be of less interest outside national boundaries. It also excludes the impact of research on the education of students within the institution that produced it. Alongside other drivers, it has reinforced the separation of research and teaching, and often set one against the other in academics' career progression (Bexley *et al*, 2011). It appears to be generating an increase in the proportion of those on teaching-only contracts at one end of the (pay) scale and producing an elite cadre of research stars at the other (Locke *et al*, 2016). And yet the REF also seeks to evaluate the impact that research has had on the economy, society and the environment, largely as a result of the ways in which universities have engaged with public, private and charitable organisations and local communities. In these different ways, the REF exemplifies the simultaneous influence of local, national and global forces and dimensions on academia in the UK.

### **What are the challenges of the relations between local-national-global?**

One result of globalisation and technological advance is that the opportunities for international research collaboration are increasing, and this includes research into HE itself. International studies of the academic profession are producing large, cross-national datasets (e.g. Teichler *et al*, 2013); but there are dangers in making simplistic comparisons when local and national contexts are so different (Finkelstein & Jones, 2013). As already illustrated by the REF, the global can come to predominate and undermine the value of national and local interests and concerns.

Given the increasing influence of the national and world rankings, and the isomorphism that these encourage, there might seem to be a tendency towards

homogenisation and policy borrowing, and a concomitant 'world view' among researcher networks of the changes happening in academia, including in doctoral study and the early stages of academic careers. However, it is important to retain a nuanced understanding of the contextual aspects of academic workplaces, labour markets and career patterns. Investigating local differences and institutional and subject variations tends to reveal a range of different experiences, perceptions and trajectories. Nowhere is this more apparent than in universities' undergraduate teaching and students' engagement with curricula.

On the other hand, there are dangers in overemphasising the distinctions between the local, national and global, and particularising national and local contexts so much so, as to suggest that no comparisons are possible.

### **What possibilities do these relations present?**

Exploring the relations between the local, national and global dimensions of academia can shed light on where these combine, where they are mutually beneficial and complementary, where they conflict and constrain, and where they simply co-exist. This will enable a more nuanced and contextualised comparisons between national systems, between HEIs within a national system, and between various parts of an institution and the individuals within it.

Several writers have attempted to construct conceptual frameworks to help us understand the ways these dimensions intersect with each other. Marginson and Rhoades (2002), for example, developed the 'glonacal agency heuristic' in order to extend analysis *beyond* the nation state to address the global forces that shape national HE systems, *and beneath* the national level to emphasise local responses and variations, including the global activity of local and national institutions and agents. A more recent example is Jean Francois (2015), writing about 'glocal' HE in reference to the interplay between the global and local and the indigenous accommodation, adaptation and resistance to global frameworks and perspectives. One of the aims of this paper is to explore how useful these conceptual frameworks are in understanding current shifts in academic work and careers.

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