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Title A PhD in motion: Expected and unexpected processes and outcomes of short-term academic mobility schemes for doctoral students

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Submitter Dr. Emily Henderson

A PhD in motion: Expected and unexpected processes and outcomes of short-term academic mobility schemes for doctoral students

Abstract:

This paper explores two doctoral mobility schemes funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council as opportunities available to funded PhD students: Overseas Institutional Visits and the PhD Partnering Scheme. The paper explores these schemes as forms of short-term academic mobility. Short-term mobility (days or weeks rather than months or years) has been neglected in the academic mobilities literature, which tends to focus on longer stays such as study abroad or entire degrees. While short-term mobility may appear to constitute less of an upheaval and potentially less of a learning and networking opportunity for those involved than a longer stay, there is substantial overlap between these forms of mobility. For example, processes of accountability and value-for-money for mobility funders still apply, even with a short visit. This paper presents three different analyses of the two schemes: the guidance and application process; the lived experience of mobility; the un/expected outcomes.

Paper:

Introduction

Short-term doctoral mobility schemes (measured in days and weeks rather than months and years) appear to be relatively low-cost, potentially high-value investments for the development of researchers. However these schemes, while seemingly manageable and measurable, are more difficult to manage and measure than it may appear. This paper focuses on two case study doctoral mobility schemes: the Overseas Institutional Visit (OIV) scheme and the PhD partnering scheme (PPS), both of which were available for ESRC-funded doctoral students in 2013-2015. This paper contributes to current research on academic mobilities on three levels. Firstly, the paper focuses on short-term academic mobility, which has not received as much scholarly attention as longer term mobility. Secondly, the paper draws together research in the field of mobilities studies and research on academic mobility, which are surprisingly operating as discrete areas of study. Finally, the paper seeks to present an innovative perspective on mobility schemes by producing multiple analyses of the same schemes from different research orientations. The paper responds to the following research questions: (i) how do funders construct doctoral mobility schemes? (ii) what are the lived experiences of the schemes? (iii) what are the outcomes of mobility schemes?

Short-term academic mobility

In Fahey and Kenway's (2010) typology of academic mobility types, the doctoral mobility schemes analysed in this paper are type 4), 'being away for short periods' (p. 572). This differentiates short-term mobility schemes from being 'always on the move' or 'going and staying away' (ibid.), for example. However it is important to understand these schemes as both characterised by going away from and coming back to the same place, and as integral to the formation of a "transnational" academic mobility, where 'academics mov[e] "between" or "above" territorial boundaries' (Kim, 2009, p. 395). Both of the case studies include in

their aims the development of international links, and as such a clear relationship is drawn between a low-cost, short-term investment in the present moment, and a projected long-term transnational pattern of academic work. Understanding the relationship between this investment in mobility, the processes that are involved in mobility, and the outcomes of mobility (such as long-term international connections) are key challenges of current research into academic mobilities. Because of a dearth of literature on the types of schemes focused on in this paper, the paper draws on literature from longer-term academic mobility, whether for the entirety of a qualification (Bilecen, 2013; van Oorschot, 2013) or for a study abroad programme (Green *et al*, 2014; Pitts, 2009; Trower and Lehmann, 2017), as well as literature on short-term mobility of different kinds, such as conferences or study visits (Chaput, O'Sullivan and Arnold, 2010; Henderson, 2015; Parker and Weik, 2014).

Researching short-term mobility schemes

The two schemes are framed as cases in a case study approach (Stake, 1978). Case study research is a valuable approach for higher education studies (Harland, 2014), as the orientation of this research approach towards gathering detailed and thorough data from one or a small number of sites means that 'the unexpected should emerge' and that as a result there is the 'potential to make a useful contribution to knowledge, theory and practice' (*ibid.*, p. 1120). This comparative case study research into two mobility schemes uses the 'ethno-case study approach' (Parker-Jenkins, 2016, p. 8), which is rooted in ethnographic research. Acknowledging the overlap between ethnographic and case study approaches, Parker-Jenkins (*ibid.*) defines the ethno-case study as including multiple forms of data collection, centred around the study of people. This paper modulates the ethno-case study further by introducing the 'autoethno-case study'. The two doctoral mobility schemes are analysed using documentary analysis of the schemes, but they are also analysed through the field notes and retrospective analyses of the researcher's own participation in the two doctoral schemes. The inclusion of autoethnographic analysis (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011) in this study brings a unique depth to the analysis of the schemes, through longitudinal reflections on the outcomes and continued importance of the schemes in relation to the researcher's career development.

Three perspectives on two doctoral mobility schemes

(i) Both schemes were constructed in similar discourses by the funders, with similar expected outcomes. The framing reflected the 'neoliberal' and 'market-framed' discourses identified by Fahey and Kenway (2010, p. 569). Both schemes refer to network-building to enable future career development, where links and networks become somewhat commodified. However the schemes were very different in their material construction of mobility; PPS was more flexible and included more resources and the participation of the doctoral supervisor/s as well as the student, while OIV was more restrictive, involved fewer resources and no supervisor presence.

(ii) These material differences resulted in very different experiences. Working in mobilities studies, Cresswell (2006) stresses the importance of researching the *processes* of mobility, stating '[t]he line that connects ['A to B']...is both meaningful and laden with power' (p. 9). The researcher's experiences of the two schemes show a contrast along the lines of living conditions and insertion into the research community. For example, for the OIV the researcher stayed in an unheated flat and struggled to arrange meetings with academics, who instead invited her to sit in on their classes. For the PPS the researcher stayed in a hotel which was booked by the research centre, and a colloquium was organised to coincide with the visit.

(iii) The expected outcomes of the mobility schemes as stated above are difficult to measure, and it could be suggested that they reflect what Robertson (2010, p. 642) refers to as the 'overly romantic rendering of mobility'. The reality of making and sustaining international connections is challenging and unpredictable. While outputs can be recorded, such as funding applications or publications or conference papers (all of which have emerged from PPS), there are more complex personal dynamics that determine the future of international links. The outcomes of OIV are less measurable in terms of outputs, but the intellectual development was comparable to PPS, despite the differences in material conditions.

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