

Student Progression and Employability

Recent changes in degree regulation were announced by a DfE press release issued on 17 July entitled **Crackdown on rip-off university degrees** which went on to explain that courses with poor employment prospects and high dropout rates will be subject to strict controls. There is understandable public and governmental concern about students who leave early or find themselves unable to find a good job. But are young people 'being sold a false dream' as the launch publicity stated?

This is a complex area with many factors influencing graduate progression including family connections and employer recruitment practices. Risk 12 of OfS Equal Opportunities Risk Register is concerned with progression and provides the basis for HEIs to build on existing good practice in employability and careers support as part of their Access and Participation Plans. This NERUPI event will:

- ◆ explore some of the wider issues affecting student employability and progression,
- ◆ provide up-to-date, research based information on the value of a degree in the current labour market,
- ◆ present examples of interesting practice from NERUPI members tackling the issues
- ◆ identify key elements of an effective intervention strategy for student progression.

09.15 Virtual Coffee and Registration

09.30 Welcome and introductions

Annette Hayton, NERUPI Convenor, Senior Research Fellow, University of Bath

09.35 Value for money? Undergraduate degrees in England and the factors that influence their worth

Professor Matthew Dickson, Professor of Public Policy, University of Bath

Recent policy discussion has focused on low-value courses and the danger that young people are being sold a false prospectus when it comes to higher education in England. In this presentation Matt will examine the early career and lifetime earnings returns to undergraduate degrees, exploring the extent to which they vary by subject and institution. He will go on to look at the socio-demographic and other factors that influence returns and the chances of gaining a graduate job, drawing out the implications for widening participation policy and practice.

10.00 Classed based inequality in graduate employability and progression outcomes: Lessons from the Paired Peers project

Professor Richard Waller, Professor of Education and Social Justice, UWE Bristol

Awareness of people's access to, experience of, and outcomes from higher education being informed by their social class background is nothing new. Yet despite decades' worth of policy initiatives and interventions, significant inequalities remain between working- and middle-class young peoples' chances of going to university, the institution attended, and graduate outcomes. The Paired Peers project was a longitudinal study (2010-2017), with a 2021 follow-up questionnaire, tracking a cohort of 88 undergraduates studying at either of Bristol's two universities.

The project matched pairs of students by social class, gender and subject discipline both within and between the two institutions, following them from induction to graduation, and beyond into post-university lives and careers. Paired Peers explored the class-based inequalities existing in university access, experiences, and transitions into work, revealing the processes by which these significant inequalities were established and maintained.

In this presentation Richard will focus on the project's final phases, exploring classed inequalities experienced during graduate transitions into work. He concludes with observations on universities' roles in challenging and/or reproducing existing social inequalities, and the value of university study for working-class young people.

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10.25 Questions, Answers and Discussion

10.45 SHORT BREAK

11.00 **Barrie Grey, Head of Student and Graduate Employability, York St John University**

In this presentation Barrie will be examining how a curricular embedded approach to Work-related Experiential Learning can remove the deficit for those in higher education who have to choose study, part-time work, caring commitments or other factors in their lives above extra-curricular opportunities that might boost their career development. It will also discuss what evaluation methods and data informed approaches are needed to determine whether this approach is impactful in a way that ensures equality and accessibility of opportunity.

11.30 **Amy Whiting, Careers Consultant and Alex O'Driscoll, Student Inclusion Manager, University of Bristol**

The University of Bristol aims to ensure that students of all backgrounds can access the University, thrive and succeed and that they are supported in achieving their potential. Amy and Alex will discuss the progression gaps identified in the University's last access and participation plan and how they have worked to address these through a range of targeted initiatives. They will also discuss the challenges that they have faced, their approaches to supporting students from under-represented groups to overcome barriers to their career planning and share their thoughts for the year ahead as they plan for their university's next access and participation plan.

12.00 **Julie Kouamo, Enterprise Manager, Queen Mary University of London**

Queen Mary University of London has a unique position in the university landscape: being a leading research-intensive university and having one of the most diverse student population in the most deprived borough in London. Julie will discuss the progression gaps identified in the University's last access and participation plan and how Careers and Enterprise are working to address these through a range of targeted initiatives. She will also discuss how the Enterprise team is addressing the gender and ethnic representation gap in Entrepreneurship.

12.30 **Group Discussions:** What would a strategic intervention look like for employability given everything that we know?

13.00 **Roundup**

13.30 **Close**