Precarious transitions? Doctoral students negotiating the shift to academic positions

Research report to the British Academy

July 2022

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The aim of the study was to understand how students who have recently submitted their PhD thesis (less than 18 months ago at the time of the interview) negotiate access to an academic position, with specific consideration of the role of the doctoral supervisor in this process.

The research investigated the following issues:

- To understand how PhD students negotiate the transition from doctoral student to academic and come to take up an academic position;
- To consider the role of PhD supervisors and institutions in enabling access to capitals and resources in relation to gaining an academic position;
- To explore how capitals are mobilised and converted in academic (employment-related) opportunities throughout the transition period, with specific reference to the student-supervisor relationship;
- To investigate how, during the transition process, intersections of gender, social class, ethnicity and age influence the mobilisation and conversion of capitals in academic opportunities in a context where the number of PhD holders outnumber the number of positions available.

This study focused on the traditional PhD due to the scale of the project and to acknowledge that this degree has long been viewed as leading to an academic career in some academic disciplines. The research was undertaken between October 2020 and March 2022.

Key Findings

- There are inconsistencies and inequalities in the support provided to Early Career Researchers (ECRs) who make the transition to an academic post.

- In particular, the study found some significant diversity in terms of the support provided by the supervisor, including in negotiating the transition from PhD student to academic or to other ('alt') careers. This raises equity issues as the study shows

that the support provided by the supervisor, as well as by the department and institution, is crucial in the outcomes experienced by ECRs.

- The extent and nature of the support provided through the supervisory relationship is also mediated by gender, ethnicity and social class. As a result, the supervisory team represents a crucial, yet understudied, mechanism in challenging or reproducing inequalities in terms of access to academic and other jobs constructed as desirable by doctoral students and ECRs.

- The above findings also have implications for institutions, the wider sector as well as the broader societal context, as some PhD holders fail to receive the support they need to enter the academic labour market or do not wish to pursue a career in academia because of precarity at early career stages and a lack of career paths to long-term positions. This is particularly the case of graduates from the less privileged backgrounds.

Recommendations

Our project focused on the traditional PhD as this is by far the most popular pathway taken by those seeking a career in academia. The following recommendations are relevant therefore to those doctoral students seeking to work in the academy upon successful completion of their PhD.

- Institutions across the UK should consider implementing a 'minimum offer' that clearly states the research methods training, access to professional networks and support with developing a publication profile made available to post graduate students.

- The institutional offer should also indicate U/G teaching and/or dissertation supervision opportunities available.

- There should be a clear indication of the number of meetings a PT and FT student will hold with their supervisory team and an indication of the type of feedback and broader support that will be provided throughout the supervisory process.

- Supervisory teams should be made aware of the institutional minimum offer to ensure that they support doctoral students in all areas of career development in equitable ways.

- The opportunities open to students during their PhDs and their destinations should be monitored at national and institutional level so as to address any form of inequity.

- Supervisory teams should be given access to material and training emphasising the need for inclusive supervisory practices, which meet the needs of a diverse population of PhD students.

Introduction

With higher education expanding and academic careers becoming increasingly precarious, the returns of a doctoral degree, once a guarantee of an academic career, are more uncertain (Leathwood and Read, 2020). This research was undertaken to examine how students enrolled on a PhD programme in the UK build up to an academic career. The study explored how they navigate the transition from PhD student to academic, drawing on their symbolic, social, cultural and economic capitals (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986). Particular attention was drawn to the role of supervisors and institutions as gatekeepers, all of whom were able to give and withdraw opportunities, and to how this transition process is framed by gender, social class and ethnicity.

The aim of the study was to understand how early career researchers who have recently submitted their PhD thesis negotiated the challenging context in building an academic career during their studies and at post-doctoral stage, with specific focus on the role of the doctoral supervisor in this process. This study concentrates on the traditional PhD due to the scale of the project and to acknowledge that this degree has long been viewed as leading to an academic career in some academic disciplines, e.g. the social and natural sciences.

The project's specific aims and objectives were to:

- Understand how PhD students negotiate the transition from doctoral student to academic and come to take up an academic position;
- Consider the role of PhD supervisors and institutions in enabling access to capitals and resources in relation to gaining an academic position;
- Explore how capitals are mobilised and converted in academic (employment-related) opportunities throughout the transition period, with specific reference to the student-supervisor relationship; and
- Investigate how, during the transition process, intersections of gender, social class, ethnicity and age influence the mobilisation and conversion of capitals in academic

opportunities in a context where the number of PhD holders outnumber the number of positions available.

Using a qualitative method of inquiry, research was conducted with 26 participants who had gained a PhD from a UK-based institution in the past 18 months and six PhD supervisors employed by a UK university. In the report, we start by setting up the context, before presenting the methodology and the main findings, with the conclusion providing some recommendations for key stakeholders. The appendices include a participant consent form (Appendix 1), an information sheet (Appendix 2), the interview aide-memoire (Appendix 3), as well as a list of dissemination activities so far (Appendix 4).

Context

The current UK higher education context is characterised by an increasing level of financial and political uncertainty. This context is linked to changes to the funding mechanisms of higher education, of increased national and international competition for students, including doctoral students, and of the UK exit from the European Union (Blanden and Machin, 2013; Carpentier, 2004; UCAS, 2021). The expansion of higher education, the multiplication of doctoral routes (including Professional Doctorates and PhDs by publication) and the increased precarity of academic jobs have been associated with more uncertainties regarding the returns of a PhD and the transition to a permanent academic position (Le Feuvre, 2015; Leathwood and Read, 2020). A significant body of evidence shows how the 'returns' of doing a PhD are gendered, classed and 'raced' (*ibid*.). These uncertainties and the rise in the costs of higher education borne by doctoral students, a significant proportion of whom are self-funded (House, 2020), have well-identified effects on the well-being and mental health of doctoral and early career researchers (Moreau and Robertson, 2019).

Despite the many challenges faced by doctoral students and those who have recently gained a PhD, most research focuses on undergraduates (Scandone, 2018; Wilcox et al, 2005). In comparison, there is a scarcity of research exploring how doctoral students make the transition to academia and the influences that enable these transitions. Work in this area often provides practical advice to doctoral candidates and, occasionally, to their supervisors.

With few exceptions (e.g. Boden et al, 2004; Burke, 2010; Hoskins, 2012; Leonard, 2001), this work tends not to offer theoretical insights and to minimise the way equity issues affect the transition process. Extant literature also fails to acknowledge that the transition to academia is rarely a straightforward, linear process (Skakni, 2019). Indeed, this process is subject to interruptions and can be complex and messy, with the boundaries between being a doctoral student and an academic increasingly blurred at a time when postgraduate students are constructed and expected to operate as 'productive employees' as soon as they enter postgraduate programmes (Macoun and Miller, 2014). Moreover, there is limited consideration in the literature of the influence of the supervisor on future academic trajectories, despite the fact that academia is a highly structured and differentiated field and a site of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986), and that academics themselves sit at the intersection of multiple power relationships which frame the resources they can utilise to support others (Reay et al, 2009).

The Research

This report is based on a project conducted between October 2020 and March 2022 across the UK. The underpinning study employed a qualitative approach and data were collected in three stages.

Stage 1: an analysis of a sample of blog posts about the transition from PhD to an academic or non-academic position. We conducted an online search of blogs reporting on the experiences of individuals who have

recently gained their PhDs and are writing about their experiences of securing academic positions. These data enabled us to broaden the range of voices were able to hear and was subjected to a discourse analysis, with the findings informing the development of the interview schedule and data analysis.

Stage 2: 26 in-depth interviews with ECRs who gained a PhD from a UK higher education institutions (including pre-1992, and, within that category, Russell group institutions, and post-1992 universities) and across a range of subject areas (including the social sciences,

arts and humanities and STEM). Participants have been enrolled part-time or full-time. All were interviewed within 18 months of submitting their doctoral thesis.

Among the ECRs who participated in this study, 18 identified as female and eight as male; Age varied, with five participants aged 25-29 (three females, two men), nine aged 30-34 (8 women, one man), four aged 35-39 (one woman, three men), and two (both women) aged 40 and above (six participants did not state their age). In terms of ethnicity, 18 identified as White or White British, three as White 'Other', three as Asian and two as Black Africans. While providing a description of the sample of the table would have enabled a more subtle understanding of the intersectionality of participants' identity, we opted against this to avoid their potential identification.

Participants represented a broad array of disciplines, including Arts and Humanities (e.g. Archaeology, English Literature, Geography, History, Law and Politics; eight participants in total), Social Sciences (e.g. Anthropology, Education, Psychology, Religious Studies and Sociology; 12 participants), STEM subjects (e.g. Health Studies, Life Sciences and Medicine; five participants) and Business (one participant). Four participants had gained a PhD from a post-1992 university (all females), 22 from a pre-1992 (14 females and eight males), including 12 from a Russell group institution (four males and eight females). Twenty-one ECRs had completed their PhD in an English institution (16 females, five males), one in Northern Ireland (female), two in Scotland (one male, one female), two in Wales (both males).

Stage 3: Six in-depth interviews were conducted with supervisors, to understand whether and how they support students seeking a career in higher education. The supervisors interviewed had no relationships to the ECRs in the sample for ethical reasons and represent a diverse group in terms of gender, subject and institutions. Four supervisors identified as female, two as male; one was based in Business (male), two in Education (one male, one female), one in history (female), one in Biology (female) and one in Religious Studies (female). Three were based in a post-1992 institution (one female, two males), with the reminder (three) in a Russell group university (all females). Four were based in England (two males and two females), one in Scotland (female) and one in Northern Ireland (female).

The interviews with ECRs and doctoral supervisors took place on Zoom or MS Teams. They lasted between 45 and 80 minutes and were audio recorded and professionally transcribed. They were analysed through a thematic content analysis combined with a discourse analysis. Specific attention was given to the influence of two overarching themes: the support ECR receive and how it translates into privileges, through the mediation of social class, gender and ethnicity.

Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and the informed consent of all participants was sought prior to the interviews. Those who took part in the research were assured that their comments would be treated in confidence and any quotes used would be anonymised. The research complies with the ethical protocols set out by the British Education Research Association (BERA) (2018) revised ethical guidelines; the BSA (2017) ethical guidelines; and Anglia Ruskin University and Brunel University London's ethical guidelines (see Appendix 1 and 2).

The study is informed by two sets of theories. First, we draw on Bourdieu's (1977) theoretical concepts of habitus, field and social, economic, symbolic and cultural capitals to provide analytical consideration of the way the participants are disposed towards pathways linked to their identities and biographies, and how capitals are mobilised and converted in this process. Second, we also bring in the notion of discourse, as a heuristic tool to understand how individuals are performed in academic discourses, how they negotiate these discourses, and how these discourses are gendered, classed and raced, to cite only a few identity markers (Mendick, 2006).

The findings are presented in the two following sections, with the first section focusing on Objectives 1 and 2, the second section on Objectives 3 and 4.

How PhD students negotiate the transition from doctoral student to academic and the role of PhD supervisors and institutions in this process

This section is organised by themes identified through the data analysis and the key research questions under investigation, as follows:

Obj. 1- To understand how PhD students negotiate the transition from doctoral student to academic and come to take up an academic position;

Obj. 2 - To consider the role of PhD supervisors and institutions in enabling access to capitals and resources in relation to gaining an academic position.

A key part of this study involved exploring how privileges and inequities play out in how ECRs tell their stories. Our analysis of the narratives of participants highlights how they embody privileges and equity in distinct ways.

The reproduction of these privileges simultaneously depends on the institution and on gender, class and ethnicity, e.g. students who are privileged (White, male, middle-class) are more likely to study for a PhD in an elite institution and as a result to accrue their privilege (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970). While this phenomenon is well established on a structural level, our study shows that the effect of the institution extended well beyond the viva stage as students can build the relevant capitals through access to research and teaching opportunities and networks. ECRs with a PhD from an elite institution were more likely to be routinely given access to teaching undergraduates, while also getting access to an array of formal and informal networks as part of the supervisory relationship and the broader institutional support available. Some subjects which concentrated in elite institutions were described as 'small worlds' where everyone knew each other and where the potential supervisor would already have an established relationship with the funder and, as a result, some insiders' knowledge of the process involved. Such differences in terms of the support received were also dependent upon the subject. For example, in the Natural Sciences it was common for doctoral researchers to get research project work and publish with their supervisors and within wider teams. This supported them with publications and, in turn, was useful for accessing posts.

The differences we noted also related to provision for doctoral researchers within their university, the department, as well as within the dynamics of the supervisory team. There were very mixed experiences as might be expected. In terms of the supervisory relationship, one participant noted that:

I think your supervisor matters more than anything else. Like it matters more than institutional status, it matters more than what department you're in. (Rachel)

This supports the rationale for further empirical studies and theorisation of the role of the supervisor during and post-doctorate. The divergence of experience was reflected across our sample and is maybe best reflected by the contrast between the two following quotes:

There were times when I was like crying in my room, I thought I'm never going to finish because like you need the support to finish a PhD. So, to have supervisors who either never respond or we had monthly meetings and we knew that, well the graduate school said that these monthly meetings, you have to come unless there's something urgent. And, so except for my director of studies, the other supervisor would kind of cancel last minute without even notice, reschedule so I thought is it that they don't really think that's worth it what I'm doing? Or is it just they have too much on their plates? So, it's, I guess it was a lot of guessing, I mean why supervisors don't help. I mean they had the choice to not supervise, why did they supervise in the first place if they couldn't take that on board? And, I get that some of that, you kind of have to do that for their professional careers but it just doesn't feel right, especially for a PhD candidate with so much that you need to do. (Sofia)

I've actually known her for a long sort of time now, so it is someone who, she's definitely been a major mentor for me who's… I don't know if I would have thought something like a PhD would be possible for me without her, someone, she's definitely someone who's advised and guided me through it and someone who I trust as well. (Grace)

To make sense of the divergent experiences, we developed the concepts of sponsorship and mentorship. Mentors offer guidance, advice and counsel to junior colleagues and their institutions often provide them as an aspect of formal career support. Mentors offered the participants 'a helping hand', 'someone to talk things over with' and opportunities for 'working together' to produce 'meaningful publications'. Mentors were described as being particularly useful for 'getting on' and progressing through the academy (Hoskins, 2011: 80).

In contrast, sponsorship refers to the actions of a more experienced or senior colleague who selected one of the student or ECR and provided advice and strategic counsel. Participants saw sponsorship as a process of 'talent spotting' and as a 'political project', driven for

example by perceived class or gender allegiances, as well as being a 'pleasurable exchange for both parties'. They identified sponsorship as 'very useful' and 'very helpful', particularly for 'getting in' to an academic post, committee or research group and was even cited as 'necessary for [academic career] success' (Hoskins, 2011: 80).

Through an examination of our participants' stories, we noted that those who felt most supported and perceived a more straightforward transition into academia were sponsored by their supervisor(s), with the blog analysis confirming this.

How capitals and identity matters influence access to academic positions

In this second finding section, we address the following objectives:

Obj. 3 - To explore how capitals are mobilised and converted in academic (employment-related) opportunities throughout the transition period, with specific reference to the student-supervisor relationship;

Obj. 4 - To investigate how, during the transition process, intersections of gender, social class, ethnicity, age, disability, nationality and sexuality influence the mobilisation and conversion of capitals in academic opportunities in a context where the number of PhD holders outnumber the number of positions available.

Concern about equity matters and how these frame the transition are often expressed in participants' narratives, although at various extents which reflect their sitting at the crux of intersectional relationships. The absence of a 'backlash' discourse (Faludi, 1991) or simply of a discourse denying the influence of gender and other identity markers on PhD experiences and outcomes was surprising to us, having conducted research touching on discourses of equity among students several years ago and found some very distinctive findings (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). This is equally surprising in a context where the renewal of feminist and civil rights movements (e.g. #metoo and Black Lives Matter) have coincided with the rise of far-right and misogynistic ideologies (e.g. Incel groups). This finding is not easily generalisable from such a small sample and there is indeed vast evidence that backlash discourses circulate in academia as elsewhere. Indeed, some participants shared how they had experienced acute instances of discrimination, based for example on gender and

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ethnicity. ECRs could be described as reflexive subjects when it comes to equity matters and how they saw these as shaping their experiences.

Yet, simultaneously, participants mobilised discourses of academic as meritocratic. 'Hard work' in particular was an important explanatory discourse deployed by doctoral researchers who noted their own academic capability and diligence. Moreover, their understandings and experiences were clearly shaped by their own positionality. In making sense of their education and career paths, students from more privileged background showed some 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2011) – showing some awareness of the challenges of academia yet not doubting their ability and sharing a strong sense of belonging with other academics, supervisors included, seen as peers. In comparison, other students mobilised a discourse of luck, talking for example of being very fortunate and surprised that they 'made it' to a PhD and then to an academic job, no matter how precarious this job was. This discourse of 'luck' appears more characteristic of minoritized groups, particularly working-class and female students. This sometimes coincided with some acute, painful awareness of the injustices they experienced while navigating their studies and then ECR stages.

For example, Gillian, who reported her family background as working-class described her supervisory relationship as follows:

Yeah, so no I hadn't [met supervisors before starting PhD], […] I was really naïve going in to the PhD, I didn't really understand how it worked and all the things that were kind of important and that you should ask about before such as who your supervisor is and those really fundamental questions which seem so obvious but actually you think, "Oh god, someone has accepted me to do a PhD and they're willing to pay me to do this research" that's, you just feel like you should just feel so lucky about it. So, no, I hadn't met my supervisor; I think if I had I would have, I'm not sure that I would have done the PhD. So yes, and I found it a very different experience to the other uni I attended which had been a really kind of caring personable, person-centred. (Gillian)

Indeed, in our doctoral research with female professors, one of us found that luck was perceived to be one of the most important ingredients in the participants' perceptions and constructions of their career success – but this is problematic, as some women are inclined

to play down more 'assertive' behaviours like careerism, managerialism and power (Hoskins, 2012).

Another key finding from the study is that while ECRs are constructed in policy texts as global, mobile academic citizens (Kim, 2017; Tzanakou and Henderson, 2021), this discourse ignores students' intimate lives and how these affects their career decisions. While many participants are internationally mobile, in contrast with the neoliberal discourse of global hypermobile academia, our study shows that their personal lives represent a key aspect of the decision-making process. This includes consideration such as choosing a destination country for a postdoctoral position perceived as relatively safe, linked to one's gender, ethnic or faith identity. One participant, for example, shared how her experience of religious sectarianism, as a member of a minority faith group, made moving abroad appealing (although she then faced sexual harassment and xenophobia, as a young, minority ethnic, female migrant). ECRs also often talked of limiting or focusing their academic job search on a specific country because their partner already lived there or was planning to move there. In the case of those with a partner in an academic job or seeking to secure one, this was referred to as the well-known 'two bodies problem', with living with their partner viewed as equally important or even as more important than an academic career:

I have the two bodies problem as well in that my girlfriend is coming to the end of her PhD so we do have to think in detail about what countries we actually want to live in and what she wants to do next as well. So, that's why all of this is kind of, is probably because actually there is a bigger strategic thing about trying to find a way of living together which is more important to us than what our careers are, at least over short-term contracts. (Simon)

Yet policy texts seem to neglect intimate lives, focusing instead on macro-social issues, framed in terms of imbalance between PhD holders and academic positions or between PhD holders' skills and employers' needs, ultimately reproducing the model of the 'care-free' academic who can submit to the global mobility imperative (Henderson and Moreau, 2020). This mismatch between policy expectations and ECRs' aspirations has clear incidence in terms of who can perform the subjectivity of a mobile global and, ultimately, successful academic (*ibid.*).

ECRs' navigation of academic labour market is mediated by their personal relationships. While this is not per se surprising in the light of a rich body of work highlighting the way productive and reproductive work, professional and intimate lives interact and, sometimes, conflict, what is however surprising is the fact that policy discussion often ignores this matter. This apparent distinction between 'the personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure' (Wright Mills, 1959, pp. 8-11) needs to be bridged upon so that policy texts consider researchers' private lives, especially as the issues they face in their private lives are often compounded by academic norms and imperatives (such as the mobility imperative).

While supervisors' experiences were not the focus of the research (our interviews with them focused on how their practices compounded ECRs' doctoral and post-doctoral experiences), interviews with both doctoral supervisors and ECRs showed that support practices expanded well beyond the academic aspects of the supervision and into care and reproductive work (Acker and Dillabough, 2007) as well as in creating opportunities for future employment. From the supervisors' description of their own practices and from the ECRs' interviews, it appears that this support had a strong gender component, with women expected to and often providing a broad range of support although men were often in position of gatekeepers, and as such were able to facilitate access to academic credentials. This gender difference can be linked to the gendered segregation of the academic labour markets and of men occupying a disproportionate number of positions associated with academic excellence, e.g. as professor or journal editor (Leathwood and Read, 2009).

Overall, interviews with ECRs show how performing an independent academic subjectivity is classed, raced and gendered process. The narratives of middle-class participants from the global North are characterised by a prevailing sense of easiness in the way they talk about navigating HE which is absent from other narratives. When trajectories are interrupted, this is often framed through a discourse of 'identity crisis' or personal choice. As one participant commented: 'when I finished my first degree I had a bit of an identity crisis about whether history really mattered or not and then over the next few years I decided that it did. So, I went back to [University]' (Simon). This sense of relative easiness is linked to the passing on of capitals through networks which are both extensive and provide access to 'the right capitals', both in and outside academia. It was not unusual for the more privileged students

to get support from relatives, a partner, supervisors and other academics in the field in securing some research and teaching opportunities, including paid academic work during and post-PhD. Other participants also received some support. But, as well as the support being less extensive and directly relevant to their academic endeavours, they were also more likely to frame their experience in terms of struggle, not dissimilar in this to research on minoritised undergraduates' experiences (Leathwood and Connell, 2003). For example, Susan, despite self-identifying as middle-class, had to rely on her extended family support, a bursary and at some stages during her PhD juggled three jobs: 'So I tried to make my own money and stuff, but it I was in quite precarious situations not having food and stuff'.

The study also found some considerable differences related to the way students talk about getting support. For the most privileged students, this support is often normalised, presented in individualised terms that fail to fully acknowledge privileges, for example framing the relationship with colleagues, supervisor included, in terms of intellectual affinities:

I was already quite an independent minded person, so our relationship works very well because I go and do stuff and then every now and then I say, 'Hey [Max], is this okay?'. (Simon)

Others were more likely to frame the support in terms of inter-individual, sometimes intersectional, solidarity: 'maybe she would kind of understand what it feels to be left out. So she would relate or be encouraging and supportive and checking in with me a lot' (Susan). Yet both types of support are political in the sense that they are shaped by power relationships, although their framing in inter-individual and, often, apolitical terms hinders capacity for transformative justice when it comes to the support available to doctoral students and ECRs.

Conclusion

Our research highlights some considerable diversity and inequalities in doctoral and postdoctoral experiences, including in terms of networks of support. These experiences, and the supervisory relationships in particular, are mediated by gender, class and ethnicity.

Policy texts and supervisor training often constructs doctoral students and ECRs as care-free, disembodied scholars, giving limited consideration to intimate lives and questions of privileges and equities. Yet institutions and supervisory teams can challenge or reproduce inequities in terms of the support provided pre- during and post-PhD. We need to ensure equity in the support and opportunities provided to doctoral students and postdocs. We suggest that this can be achieved through a minimum offer as set out above, provided by institutions to those candidates seeking a career in academia.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of the project: **Precarious transitions? Doctoral students negotiating the shift to academic positions**

Main investigator and contact details: Professor Marie-Pierre Moreau (marie-pierre.moreau@aru.ac.uk). Other members of the research team: Dr Kate Hoskins, Dr Ellen McHugh.

1.   I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet (9/9/2020, version 1) for the study. ▯

2.   I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. ▯

3.   I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason. ▯

4.   I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study. ▯

5.   I understand what information will be collected from me for the study. ▯

6.   For the purposes of the Data Protection Act (2018), if this project requires me to produce personal data, I have read and understood how Anglia Ruskin University will process it. ▯

7   I understand what will happen to the data collected from me for the research. ▯

8.   I understand that quotes from me may be used in the dissemination of the research. ▯

9.   I understand that the interview will be recorded. ▯

10.   I have been informed how my data will be processed, how long it will be kept and when it will destroyed. ▯

11.   I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet (dated 2/10/2020, version 2) ▯

Name of participant (print)…………………………

Signed……………….….

Date………………

PARTICIPANTS MUST BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP

2/10/2020, VERSION 2 OF CONSENT FORM.

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY.

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please speak to the researcher or email them at marie-pierre.moreau@aru.ac.uk stating the title of the research or send them this withdrawal slip.

You do not have to give a reason for why you would like to withdraw.

Please let the researcher know whether or not you are happy for data that has been collected up to this point to still be used. You are completely free to ask for any data to also be removed should you wish it to be, as long as the data is not anonymised. When data is anonymised, it means personal data relating to it has been permanently removed, so the researcher will not know which belongs to you.

Date 2/10/2020

Version 2.

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Section A: The Research Project

Precarious transitions? Doctoral students negotiating the shift to academic positions

Brief summary of the study:

The project investigates how students enrolled on a PhD programme in the UK build up to an academic career. We plan to interview 25 students who submitted their thesis within the past 18 months and five doctoral supervisors, all located across a range of UK institutions and subject areas (including the social sciences, arts and humanities and STEM). We also plan to search blogs and media articles reporting on the experiences of academics who have recently gained their PhDs and are writing about their experiences of securing academic positions.

The project team is composed of Prof. Marie-Pierre Moreau (Principal Investigator, Anglia Ruskin University) Dr Kate Hoskins (Co-Investigator, Brunel University) and Dr Ellen McHugh (Anglia Ruskin University). The project is funded by a British Academy/Leverhulme grant. We will treat the information you share with us as confidential and nobody outside the research team will have access to it.

Why have I been asked to participate?

As part of the project, we would like to interview some students who have completed their thesis within the past 18 months as well as some PhD supervisors (these will not be the supervisors of the students we interview). If you fall under one of these categories, we would be happy to speak to you

with your consent. If you agree to participate, you will be invited to take part in a 30 to 45-minute interview, taking place by phone or online, at a time convenient for you.

What are the likely benefits of taking part?

We are hoping that the study will provide some understanding in the experiences of students who have recently completed their PhD and have gone or are trying to go into an academic job. We also hope that it will generate some more equitable practices in the sector in terms of the support PhD laureates receive early on in their career.

Can I refuse to take part?

Yes, you can refuse to take part without giving a reason and without any repercussion.

Has the study got ethical approval?

The Study has received ethical approval from the School of Education and Social Care Research Ethics Panel within the Faculty of Health, Education Medicine and Social Care at Anglia Ruskin University.

Source of funding for the research, if applicable.

The research is funded by the British Academy (2020 British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grant, reference: SRG20\201284).

What will happen to the results of the study?

The data will be stored on the research team's work computers only and password-protected. Data storage will comply with the relevant legal and ethical requirements.

Findings from the research may be presented at conferences and seminars, and published in the form of articles, book chapters, books, media article or blog posts. When writing or talking about the research, we will ensure that the information included is fully anonymised. This will involve using pseudonyms and withdrawing any specific detail that would allow your identification.

Contact for further information

If you have any query, please contact the project's Principal Investigator: marie-pierre.moreau@aru.ac.uk. Thank you.

Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

What will I be asked to do?

We would like to conduct an interview about your experience during and following the completion of your PhD or of working with students during and in the aftermaths of their PhD. We expect interviews to last from 30-45 minutes and to be conducted by phone or online, at a time convenient for you. We will only interview you once. With your consent, we will audio-record the interview.

In relation to this specific research project, we need to make you aware of the following:

☐	We do not need your personal data at any stage of this research project		
We are responsible for the personal data you give to us as a:			
v	**Data Controller** (We are in sole control over the research)	Who are we?:	Anglia Ruskin University
☐	**Joint Controller** (Where ARU and another organisation are working together on research)	with:	
☐	**Data Processor** (Where the data will belong to another organisation and ARU is being engaged under contract/ agreement to conduct the research and provide an outcome but has no rights over the personal data)	on behalf of:	

I will be asking you for the following information:

	Personal Data				Sensitive Personal data
v	Name/ Contact details	☐	Image (Photo or video)	v	Racial/ Ethnicity data
v	Age	v	Experiences	☐	Political/ Religious beliefs
☐	Address/ location data	☐	Opinions	☐	Trade Union membership
v	Employment & Earnings	☐	[Other]	☐	Genetic/ Biometric data
☐	ID Numbers (e.g. NHS)	☐	[Other]	☐	Health
☐	Online identifier	☐	[Other]	☐	Sex life/ orientation data

What will happen to your data?

We will follow the requirements laid down by Anglia Ruskin University in order to ensure the security of data, as detailed below. The data management plan will also be compliant with GDPR. All data will be anonymised, with the use of a pseudonym and the withdrawal of details allowing your identification. We will adhere to this principle throughout the research, including in publications from this project. We do not plan to take the research data outside the EEA (the EEA includes EU member states and also Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway).

Storing hard copy project information: Hard-copies of data or documents such as consent forms will be stored in locked filing cabinets with access restricted to the research team. Consent forms will be stored separately from interview files in order to protect participants' confidentiality. We will ensure that documents containing personal information are not left unattended for any significant time on desks. At the end of the project all data and relevant research documents will be provided to administrators for storage. All categories of data will be logged and recorded when they are stored. All data will be retained for a minimum period of 10 years.

Electronic information and digital files: Access to electronically held information relating to project participants will be limited to those who need it through the use of passwords and permissions. Portable storage devices containing transcripts or digital files will be kept in locked cabinets. Digital recordings, interview transcripts, and data analysis files will be kept on a shared network drive in a secure folder with access restricted to the research team. As well as being secure, this will enable ongoing back-up.

Information in transit: We will use a secure, password-protected means of transmitting audio files and transcripts. Recordings will be uploaded to a secure shared folder. Transcripts will be password-protected so that their content can only be accessed by the transcriber and members of the research team. Passwords will be established at an early stage of the project and used consistently thereafter.

Will I receive any payment to take part in the research?

No, participants will not receive any payment for taking part in the research.

Are there any possible disadvantages or risks to taking part?

We have conducted a risk assessment for this project. One potential risk to the participant is that the interviews lead to emotional distress. However, this is unlikely to happen as the research team does not anticipate to ask you some sensitive questions and as we are all experienced with interviewing. Please, note that, in any case, you will be able to take regular breaks and withdraw from the research project up to two weeks after the interview without having to justify your decision. Agreement to participate in the study does not affect your legal rights.

What are the likely benefits of taking part?

It is unlikely that there will be any direct benefits to individual participants although the study will contribute to a better understanding of the transition from a PhD to an academic position.

Can I withdraw at any time, and how do I do this?

You will able to withdraw from the study up to two weeks after the interview and without giving a reason. This can be done through email. Should you decide to withdraw from the study after the interview, I can only remove your data if you ask me before we anonymise it. After this, I won't know which is your data so will not be able to do this. You will have the option to withdraw from the study and have your data removed or to withdraw, but still be happy for us to use the anonymised interview data that we have collected up to that point.

Please note that throughout the interview, you will not have to answer any interview questions you do not wish to answer.

What will happen to my data?

Our general privacy notice explaining our use of your personal data for research purposes is available here:

https://www.anglia.ac.uk/privacy-and-cookies/research-participants

Please visit this link for information about how long we keep your data, how we keep your data secure, how you can exercise your rights over your data, and make a complaint over our use of your data.

Can I withdraw my data from the study?

I can only remove your data if you ask me before I anonymise it. After this, I won't know which is your data so will not be able to do this.

Whether there are any special precautions you must take before, during or after taking part in the study

No, you do not need to take any specific precautions.

#Will I pass onto anyone else what you have told me?

We will adhere to the principles of confidentiality throughout the research. However, there are exceptions, for example If we feel that you are at risk or if you reveal anything illegal.

Summary of research findings

Once the project has been completed, we will email you a copy of the final report, inclusive of a summary of the research findings (Spring 2022).

Contact details for complaints

If you have any complaints about the study, you are encouraged to speak to the research lead (marie-pierre.moreau@aru.ac.uk) in the first instance to try and reach an informal resolution. Should you wish to submit a complaint to the University, please use the following contact details.

Email address: complaints@aru.ac.uk

Postal address: Office of the Secretary and Clerk, Anglia Ruskin University, Bishop Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1SQ.

Version control

Date 2 October 2020

V2

Appendix 3: AIDE MEMOIRE
New beginnings? Doctoral students negotiating the shift to academic positions

- **Can you tell me a little bit about your family background? (Probe class, ethnicity and aspirations)**
  - What were your parents' occupations?
  - Do you have any siblings? What are their occupations?
  - What about your current family circumstances?

- What is your field of study?
- How does supervision operate in your field and institution?
  - E.g. how many supervisors?
  - How much contact are you expected to have with your PhD students?
  - Is this consistent with other fields/institutions?
  - Does your institution have a written policy for supervisors? Would you be able to share it with us?

- **Turning now to your PhD students, how do you decide who to work with?**
  - Was it planned, or was it happenchance?
  - Can you sum up your relationship with your students?
  - What are some of the challenges in supervising doctoral students/researchers?
  - How are these challenges navigated?
  - What sort of departmental support is on offer?
    - What are the limitations/gaps in the support?
  - What sort of wider institutional support do your students benefit from?
  - What sort of access to networks do your students have access to?
    - Formal – i.e. professional organisations/bodies
    - Informal – peer group/other students/family/partner

- **If and how do you support your students' early career transition – so from PhD to post?**

  - Did they have the chance to work on a research project whilst completing their PhD?
    - If yes, who helped them with that opportunity?
  - Did they have the chance to teach and supervise (e.g. BA/MA) whilst completing their PhD?
  - Did they have networking opportunities? If so, who provided these?
  - Are there inequalities related to identity? If so, what are they?
    - Class/gender/ethnicity? Other inequalities – age, sexuality, disability?

- How do you see your role as a supervisor?
  - E.g. how do you support your students during their PhD?
  - After their PhD?

- **What do you are think are the key factors which influence access to an academic position?**

- **If you were to give advice to a doctoral student starting out on their studies what would you say?**

- **In general terms what helps to make early career academics successful in the academy?**
    - Publishing/researching opportunities?
    - Teaching opportunities?

- **Is there anything else you'd like to tell me that hasn't already come up?**

Appendix 4. Dissemination of Findings

This chapter/section provides an overview of the dissemination of the findings from this study.

During the period from October 2020 to March 2022, the authors presented the Precarious Transitions' research project at the following events:

Conference presentations:

- *Becoming an academic: intersections of gender, class, and race,* ELP Seminar Series, School of Education, University of Glasgow, 23 May 2022. (invited)
- *Precarious Transitions into academia: Troubling discourses of gender, race and class,* Opening Seminar Gender and Education Association: 25th Anniversary, 28 February 2022. (invited)
- *Precarious Transitions? Doctoral students negotiating the shift to academic positions,* Keynote Lecture, NERUPI Convention, 16 September 2021. (invited)
- *Precarious Transitions? Early findings from a British Academy-funded project,* Education, Identities and Society (EIS) Seminar Series, Brunel University London, 29 June 2021.
- *Making Connections, Going Places? Equity and privilege in access to academic positions,* SRHE conference, 10 December 2021.
- *Talent spotting, political projects and finding affinities: Precarious transitions into academia,* SHRE conference, 7 December 2021.