

Higher Education, Lifelong Learning and Graduate Employment

HERG's research locates HE within a discourse of lifelong learning and as a key aspect of the changing relationship between education, economy and society. Within the HE, lifelong learning and graduate employment area, members have explored graduates':

- transitions from HE to work
- attitudes and orientations to future careers
- management of employability, nationally and internationally.

This research is placed in a policy context that emphasises the enhancement of students' and graduates' employability. Adopting a broadly socio-cultural perspective, it has examined how they approach the labour market and invest in future career development. It has studied their engagement in lifelong and initial work-related learning, how they develop labour market profiles and credentials and the value they place on their HE experiences.

HERG has also examined how these processes intersect with social class, gender and ethnicity, the impact of mass HE in this process and how these shape diverse graduates' differential experiences and outcomes in the job market. This agenda has also considered the influence of globalisation on graduate employability in terms of:

- student mobility to different HE contexts
- global transfer of HE qualifications
- international graduates' opportunities in the labour market.

Research has also focused on employer engagement and the responsiveness of HEIs to employers' learning and training demands, building a picture their interaction with universities. A key aim is ultimately to enrich theoretical understanding of the HE-labour market dynamic, and to develop existing concepts in:

- human, social and personal capital
- identity and agency
- skills and work-related learning
- credentials and positional competition
- class and cultural reproduction.

Access, Participation and Transitions to Higher Education

The focus of activity in this area is on changing patterns of access and participation in HE and understanding how and why. Research has investigated young people's and adult learners' changing attitudes towards participation in HE and the wider role of social networks and other cultural influences in shaping decisions around participation in future education. Drawing on life-course perspectives on participation, this research has examined the development of individuals' learning trajectories and the socially embedded nature of educational decisions. This includes research on decision-making and its key influences, as

well as experiences of non-traditional students (and increasingly international) who are considering participating (or not) in HE. This research has enabled a broader understanding of the patterns and determinants of participation in HE, and the potential impacts of policy on choices and transitions. It has also explored vocational education (VET) learners' routes from vocational provision to HE, their experiences of straddling 'vocational' and 'academic' pathways and the how they manage the transition from and between different learning contexts.

Research has also analysed how young people approach HE and their perceptions and attitudes towards changing student fee policies. It has engaged with how prospective students perceive the potential values and risks of HE participation and the extent to which they view university participation as an investment, consumption or as personal development. This has enabled a more nuanced understanding of the transition process, the on-going development of people's learning trajectories and their key influences on this progression towards higher education.

Work on access and participation in HE has provided a broader understanding of the impacts of policies on access and widening participation and some key influences. It has enabled a richer conceptual understanding of student decision-making and attitudes and the significance of learners' pre-existing networks and social capital.

Higher Education Policy, Management and Leadership

HERG is interested in the nature of HE policy and its impacts on HEIs, particularly in the light of new mechanisms of accountability, quality and performance in universities. Members have researched management and leadership in HE, including the characteristics of its leaders and diversity issues as well as leaders' role in policy mediation and leading change. This research has engaged with their perceptions of their role as 'change agents' in universities and their work in orchestrating both local level and externally-driven change. It has also examined HE leaders' attitudes and engagement with leadership development and its perceived impacts on their beliefs and practices as leaders. Research has also explored European HE managers' responses to governance and corporate responsibility.

The Group is interested in national and pan-national governance of HE, particularly processes of policy convergence in HE within Europe. A key focus is on understanding HE as broader cultural, political and economic processes and how key policy decisions are brokered at a pan-European level. It considers the changing 'public role' of universities in widespread neo-liberal reform and the broad social and economic impacts of the university system, including delivery of so-called *Third Mission* agendas.

Research on HE management has also examined the nature and role of performance and data management and how this can be used to enhance institutional transparency and effectiveness. This has explored the impact of research assessment on universities' performance mapping and its impact on wider departmental and institutional relations.

Higher Education Learning, Pedagogy and Student Experience

HERG has researched a wide range of matters relating to teaching and learning in HE. This includes students' engagement with academic study, their development of criticality and their engagement in skills development and other work-related forms of learning. It has examined how these skills are embedded and mediated through course provision and different pedagogical modes of delivery, and how this can be applied to different educational and professional contexts.

Research on teaching and learning in HE has also looked at innovation in curricula and pedagogy in universities. This strand has investigated the ways in which digital technologies are being used and developed within HE learning environments. Work has involved exploration of HE teachers' beliefs around the applicability of digital technologies and their effectiveness in HE students' learning and experiences, as well as the promotion of effective strategies for the implementation of digital technology and its access by diverse learners. The group has explored the role of e-learning in improving engagement and learner identity and for promoting supportive learning communities, and well as facilitating frameworks for high-impact technology transfer.

Globalisation and Internationalisation of the Higher Education System

A strong research theme in HERG is the impacts of globalisation and internationalisation on HE systems. This includes:

- the global flow of students and graduate across different national HE systems and their experiences in different national contexts
- the co-ordination, and mobilisation, of shaping of pan-national policy
- the rise of HE as a global commodity and market lever.

This focus is closely linked to members' research on policy brokerage and leadership and its relationship with multiple contexts. Researchers are engaged in comparative analysis on how national states and institutions co-ordinate HE policies and how graduate job opportunities are nationally regulated.

HERG's work has developed a distinctive approach to developing a *spatial* lens for consideration of transformations in HE, apparent in its concern with:

- the developing national and transnational spaces of HE policy, implementation and experience
- specifying the shifting *spatial scales* of governance
- production of new *virtual* institutional forms for teaching, research and innovation in HE
- places and processes of supra-national policy formation for HE in the EU.