

Towards a new narrative of postgraduate career.

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Abstract

This chapter examines the relationship between the postgraduate taught (PGT) student experience and career development. It argues that career development is a critical theme which draws together all aspects of the PGT experience. PGT students overwhelmingly choose to undertake postgraduate programmes for career reasons. Their participation on programme is best understood as a space through which they can pursue their career development. Finally, their transition from PGT study to the labour market is explored. Whilst PGT study offers a clear advantage in the labour market this is neither inevitable nor equally distributed.

The chapter argues that despite the complexity of the return on investment, PGT programmes continue to offer an important opportunity for individuals to develop their careers. This is true for both continuers, who move straight from undergraduate study, and returners, who re-enter higher education after a period in the workforce. However, it also notes that access to PGT study is structured along familiar lines of social advantage.

The paper discusses the implications for higher education providers of this picture of PGT as a career development intervention. It is argued that providers need to embrace the focus on career development and to ensure that their programmes help students to realise their aspirations and to transform their PGT qualifications into real world opportunities.

Introduction

This chapter explores the student experience of engagement in postgraduate taught (PGT) study. It argues that the process of PGT study is best conceptualised as part of a process of the individual's career development. We use the term 'career development' to describe the process by which individuals navigate through their life, learning and work in order to achieve the best outcomes that they are able to within the structural constraints in which they are operating. Career development is not simply about hierarchical progression in terms of money and status. While some individuals taking PGT courses may be seeking to increase their economic bargaining power through the development of their human

capital, others will be seeking to retrain, engage in career switching, or find their way to a more personally meaningful or ethically satisfying life. Career development is a process rather than a particular outcome and we argue that the decision to study at PGT level represents a purposeful investment of time by individuals in their careers. Understanding this career motivation is therefore critical for higher education providers (HEPs) that are involved in the provision of PGT study.

Our focus on career development should not be understood as a narrow utilitarianism. We are not seeking to situate postgraduate higher education as a link in the production chain whereby individuals are transformed into ideal workers to the specification of employers. The fact that individuals undertaking PGT study have a legitimate need to think about how their programme of study fits into their wider aspirations can reinforce rather than negate the ideals of liberal education. Such education should encourage individuals, through a close engagement with their subject, to consider who they are, what they want from life and to make a critical assessment of the world. Such a view of PGT study fits with Pring's (1995) conception of 'liberal vocationalism' which acknowledges the idea that education needs to prepare people to contribute economically through work and argues that this engagement with the vocational context of learning can offer a profound passageway into the kind of knowledge and expanded imagination that liberal education seeks to foster.

The chapter will argue that HEPs involved in the provision of PGT study need to have a clear understanding of how such programmes contribute to students' career development. Research suggests that PGT students are strongly motivated by the expectation of enhanced career opportunities, of increasing their employability (Purcell, et al., 2012) and that programmes need to be designed in ways that support students to integrate PGT study with their existing careers (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014).

The link between career development and PGT is threefold as: (1) most students undertake postgraduate degrees because they want to develop their careers; (2) their engagement on course is strongly influenced by their career motivations; and (3) they are keen to move quickly from the end of their course into work. This raises three corresponding questions for HEPs: (1) how should PGT study be marketed and what information should be provided to support potential PGT students to decide whether to pursue a PGT degree and to integrate such a decision into their wider career building; (2) how should PGT degrees be organised and integrated into institutions to ensure that individuals can maximise their chance of career building whilst they are on course; and (3) how should institutions attend to the destinations of their PGT students following graduation and what kind of ongoing relationship should be built with these students.

Despite the critical importance that issues of career play in PGT study the career development of PGT students has rarely been written about and there is a lack of theoretical and evidential underpinning to the career development approach that is taken within PGT. Furthermore, it is important to note that the level of career support that is offered to PGT students is often very limited in comparison to their undergraduate counterparts. There may be many reasons for this, including the relative length of postgraduate courses compared to undergraduate courses; the opportunity that postgraduate study provides for vocationally-oriented specialisation; and the assumption that postgraduate students are already decided upon their career trajectory. However, given the centrality of career development to PGT study we will argue that it is important that higher education providers increase their focus on this issue.

This chapter will explore the student experience pre-course, on-course and post-course and then examine how HEPs can best respond to this. The chapter will principally draw on data and examples from the UK as well as on the wider literature to explore some ways forward.

Background: Understanding postgraduate taught study in the UK

Postgraduate qualifications in the UK are aligned to descriptors established via the Bologna Process (Quality Assurance Agency, 2008) and captured in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA). The FQ-EHEA consists of three cycles of higher education, each of which has generic descriptors and specific abilities and achievements associated with completion of that cycle. While the nomenclature of these cycles varies across countries they are commonly known as (1) undergraduate/bachelors degrees; (2) postgraduate taught degrees (including Masters degrees) which we refer to in this chapter as PGT; and (3) research/Doctoral degrees. While the FQ-EHEA only formally describes the three cycles of higher education within Europe, these three cycles are also recognisable in most higher education systems outside of Europe. This chapter will focus on the second of these cycles (PGT) and will explore how career development intersects with this postgraduate cycle.

For HEPs to successfully strategise their approach to PGT study they need to understand the complexity of the PGT population. Postgraduate students in the UK are not a homogenous group pursuing a single type of postgraduate qualification; the diversity of their personal characteristics and the courses they undertake present real challenges for higher education administration.

PGT study in the UK is concerned with courses leading to qualifications that are not obtained primarily by research. Taught postgraduate courses typically lead to a Masters qualification (e.g. Master of Arts (MA) or a Master of Science (MSc)) and often comprise staged or single awards (e.g. postgraduate certificate or diploma) for those who do not want to continue to full Masters qualification. Some postgraduate courses are designed to achieve a postgraduate certificate or diploma and the continuation of study to a Masters qualification is optional or achievable at a later stage, with or without formal accreditation of prior learning. Taught postgraduate courses are often designed to prepare for a vocationally-oriented specialism (e.g. Master of Education (MEd)). Some Masters courses are integrated with undergraduate study and may confer the qualifier with entry to or credit towards a professional qualification (e.g. Master of Engineering (MEng)).

Bowman et al. (2005) describe PGT courses under three main headings: (1) vocational courses linked to or required for a specialised occupation (e.g. interpreting - where skilled linguists train students in interpreting); (2) semi-vocational courses relating to a broad occupational area (e.g. business) and (3) non-vocational courses (e.g. philosophy). It is also important to note that many PGT programmes which do not appear to be vocational actually serve as a testing and training arena for those wishing to pursue an academic career.

In addition to the different types of postgraduate qualification that exist it is also clear that participation in PGT study is influenced by range of academic and non-academic characteristics. There is considerable debate about a number of these characteristics, with researchers disagreeing about the patterns in relation to things like gender and ethnicity (possibly due to changing patterns over time). However, there is also some agreement, with most research (e.g. D'Aguiar and Harrison, 2016; DBIS, 2016; HEPI

and The British Library, 2010; Purcell et al., 2012; Stuart et al., 2008; Wakeling and Kyriacou, 2010) suggesting that the PGT cohort is more likely, than the general student population, to:

- be high attaining;
- have had attended a high entry tariff/elite institutions or other specialist institution for their first degree;
- be drawn from certain academic subjects with applied and applied/vocational subjects being less likely to be studied at postgraduate level;
- be from a higher socio-economic background;
- have access to greater financial resources;
- have both parents who have a degree; and
- be an international student (i.e. non-UK domiciled).

Such findings suggest that those students who enter their undergraduate degrees in a more privileged position are more likely to progress to postgraduate studies. Research also suggests that there are complex interactions between these features with, for example, the country of origin of the student and the subject that they study at PGT level clearly associated (Artess, et al., 2008).

There has been increasing concern in the UK about fluctuations in the number and types of graduates progressing to postgraduate study. Figure 1 shows how postgraduate numbers have changed in the UK over the last 15 years. There is considerable fluctuation in the numbers of both full-time and part-time students. It is not clear what is driving the shifts in these numbers, however, it seems likely that both policy changes such as the introduction of fees and the health of the wider graduate labour market are likely to exert an influence.

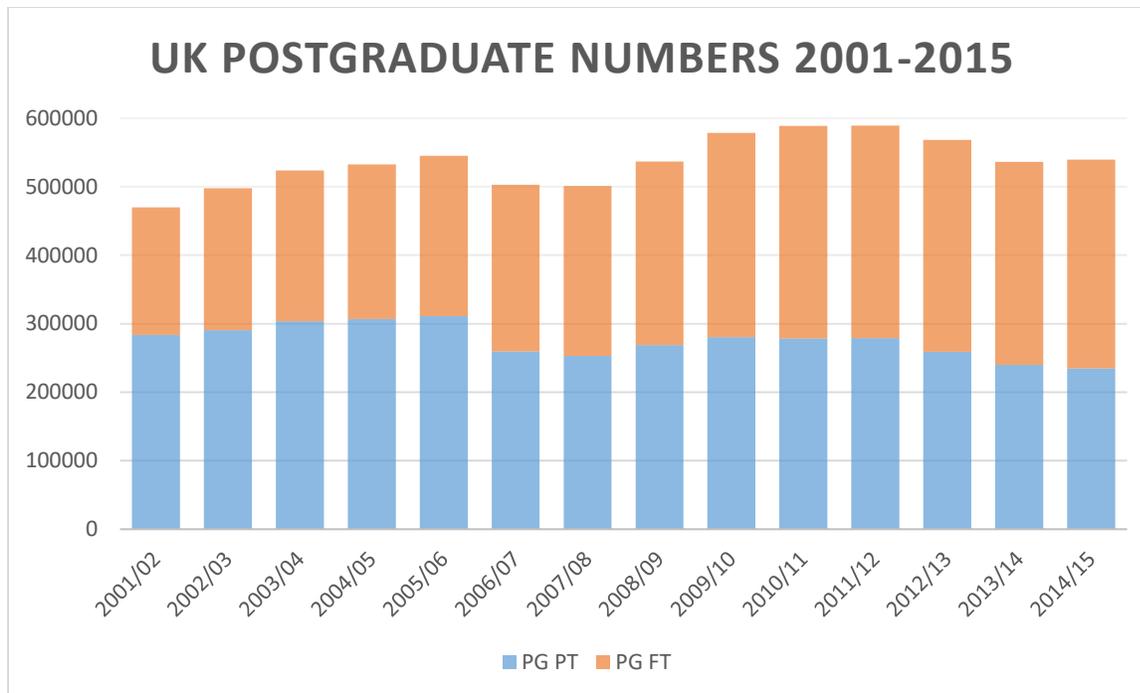


Figure 1: UK postgraduate student numbers 2001-2015. Data taken from HESA (2016).

The concern about stagnant or falling numbers of postgraduate (and particularly part time PGT) students has developed momentum in the light of changes in student fees and a corresponding increase in the levels of graduate debt. The number of PGT students is of concern to government which has a policy interest in increasing the skill level of the population. In response to this concern the UK government has introduced government-backed loans for PGT students. Previously postgraduate taught students have been predominantly self-or family-funded, wholly or partly funded via institutional bursaries and/or employer contributions, or funded via a private sector loan at commercial rates of interest. The move to a state loan entitlement for postgraduate taught students has been welcomed by the higher education sector but there is concern that students from lower socio-economic groups are more likely to be risk averse and so less willing to add further to an already substantial undergraduate student loan debt. It remains to be seen whether the availability of postgraduate student loans will be the magic bullet that was hoped for to stop falling or flat-lining enrolments and encourage access to further study.

For HEPs the concern about PGT numbers is business critical. Postgraduate students and PGTs in particular have been an important income source for HEPs. A fall in PGT numbers has the potential to harm the viability of some HEPs. Consequently, HEPs need to focus on continuing to grow PGT study or at least ensuring that they are able to gain the largest share of the PGT market possible. In order to do this they will need to clearly understand the motivation of prospective students and to develop both their marketing of programmes and the student experience to fall in line with this.

Why decide to study at postgraduate taught level?

Much of the literature which has examined students' decision-making about higher education has focused on how students choose between different institutions, subjects, and courses. Such accounts (e.g. Al-Fattal, 2010; Padlee et al. 2010) tend to focus on the choices of prospective undergraduates and tend to view educational decision-making as a rational and linear process. However, it is possible to argue that this literature on undergraduate decision making is of limited usefulness in relation to PGT study. The decision to study at PGT is still only taken by a minority and so the key decision moves from *where* and *what* to study to *whether* to study at PGT at all? Access to the PGT level is not equally distributed across the population as in the UK at least, more advantaged students' typically progress to the PGT level. We have also noted that the level of engagement in PGT study rises and falls with changes in the economy and policy. It would therefore be dangerous for HEPs to assume that there is a stable PGT market which can be relied upon regardless of circumstance. Deciding to pursue a PGT programme is something that most people do not decide to do and so it is important for HEPs to think carefully about how they engage with prospective PGT students and what kinds of messages they offer them.

PGT decision-making is therefore very different from most undergraduate decision-making. Most students undertaking an undergraduate degree are guided through a well-established school to work transition process which is underpinned by a strong cultural assumption that undergraduate study confers access to clear labour market advantage. Those considering postgraduate study are not offered the same kind of supported transition and there is no clear set of cultural understandings about what PGT study will offer. Although there is broadly a positive relationship between participation in postgraduate study and future employability this relationship is neither straightforward nor linear (Artes et al., 2014). Consequently, prospective students often have to be engaged and persuaded that PGT is worthwhile.

For the cohort of students who are considering moving directly from undergraduate to PGT study (continuers) the process of decision making is a dynamic one (DBIS, 2016). The DBIS analysis of longitudinal data collected through the Futuretrack project concluded that undergraduate students frequently change their minds about the idea of progressing to PGT as they approach the end of their studies. Some students who intended to study at PGT do not progress whilst others who did not have that intention earlier in their undergraduate degree ultimately did move into PGT courses.

Amongst those who did proceed directly to postgraduate study, motivational factors expressed in their final year of study indicated that they felt that postgraduate study was essential for their future career (54.7 percent) and to access better career opportunities (61.5 percent). They were also motivated to develop more specialist knowledge and expertise (65.1 percent) and to continue studying at a higher level (69.9 percent). Some wanted to use postgraduate study to change direction (48.7 percent) or simply to defer getting a job (68.1 percent).

There is also a very important cohort of 'returners' who come back to university for a PGT degree following a period in the labour market (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014). Some evidence suggests that returners are typically under-employed and returning to study in an attempt to boost their earning potential (D'Aguiar and Harrison, 2016). However, while upskilling may be an important motivation it is clearly only amongst a number of reasons why students may return to PGT study later in their career. While some students may be upskilling others will be reskilling in order to facilitate career and or

lifestyle changes. Whether they are relatively higher or lower earners many returners re-enter higher education with work experience, an established career trajectory and with greater assets and earning potential than their undergraduate peers, but also with considerable responsibilities typically including work, family and home ownership. So while this returner group typically has greater financial resources, they also typically have less time, mobility and willingness to experiment.

Just as with the undergraduate cohort, career decision-making for the returners seems to be a complex process. Mellors-Bourne et al., (2014) highlight the careful iterative process that returners go through when choosing postgraduate study. As with undergraduates it is common to move back and forwards between different decisions, however, for returners one of the key issues is whether a particular programme can satisfy a number of factors which determine the viability of a fit between the programme and the individuals existing work and life. Prospective returners are only able to conceive of undertaking PGT study if key enabling factors are present, in particular the funding necessary and also a set of personal circumstances that were conducive to study. Many prospective returners are highly constrained by their existing commitments to family, home and employment, and any PGT choices have to take these into account (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014; Stuart et al., 2008).

Mellors-Bourne et al., (2014) draw on Hertzberg (1966) and Maslow (1954) to identify two kinds of factors that need to be in place for individuals to consider PGT study, firstly 'hygienes' (referring to factors that have to be present to allow for a particular behaviour to occur) and secondly 'motivators' (referring to factors that make that behaviour more likely when they are present). The distinction between hygienes and motivators is useful in understanding postgraduate decision-making and fits with other research in the area such as Bennett and Turner (2012) and i-graduate (2013) who all suggest that a key area of concern for prospective postgraduates is how PGT study will fit with, and enhance, their working lives.

This need to solve the practical issues (hygienes) is likely to mean that prospective postgraduates want fairly specific information about the courses that they are considering (i-graduate, 2013). Kallio (1995) suggests that the critical information for postgraduate decision making includes the characteristics of the academic environment of the institution and its programmes, the availability of financial aid, residency status, spousal considerations, the social environment of campus life, and work-related concerns. Hesketh and Knight (1999) found that postgraduates often ignored directories of graduate study opportunities and began the process of making choices with strong preconceptions about which course and institution they were likely to choose. Both Bennett and Turner (2012) and Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) also looked at the process of choosing an institution. These studies found that postgraduates typically focused on three main factors when making decisions:

- the reputation of the institution;
- the availability of the subject and the institution's reputation within that subject; and
- the location of the institution.

When asked why they were considering PGT study both returners and continuers are likely to cite 'personal interest' as a rationale (Leman, 2015; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014). This suggests that not all postgraduates are simply pursuing career objectives; a fact highlighted by Morgan (2013a, 2013b). However, for most this personal interest often overlapped with career motivations (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014). Bennett and Turner's (2012) discussion of the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey also

suggests that both career development and personal interest in the subject are important and overlapping motivators for PGT study. Pires (2009) traces the interplay of intrinsic motives (e.g. the desire for new knowledge, experiences and relationships) and extrinsic motives (e.g. the desire to increase earning power or status) amongst Portuguese postgraduates. In practice it is often difficult to separate individuals' personal interests from their professional ones and both are clearly at play in motivating people towards PGT study.

Other work by i-graduate (2013), Leman (2015), and Stuart et al., (2008) also finds that career plays a central motivating factor for students to seek out postgraduate programmes. The decision to invest in career development can be about increasing quality of life or status, as well as earnings, and can relate to career change as well as linear progression. Mellors-Bourne et al., (2013) found that the longer the returner had been in the labour market following their undergraduate degree the more likely they were to be motivated to study at PGT level by a desire for 'career change' rather than by a desire for career progression (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014).

It is therefore clear that PGT decision making is both very different from undergraduate decision-making and strongly intertwined with prospective students' career aspirations. The framework of looking at both hygienes and motivators is useful because it helps to clarify two kinds of messages that HEPs need to signal to prospective students: (1) this programme will work for you; and (2) this programme will help you to move forward your career. However, highlighting the need to address hygienes also illuminates a number of issues with social equity which relate to PGT study. It is clear that not all students experience the same barriers and that both the barriers experienced and the capacity to overcome these barriers is contoured by a range of factors of disadvantage. Lindley and Machin (2013), DBIS, (2016), and Wakeling (2009) argue that participation in PGT is strongly shaped by social class with financial, cultural and institutional factors all contributing to the way in which PGT is skewed towards the more privileged.

Perhaps most obviously the cost of PGT study serves as a major constraint for many prospective students. This is particularly the case when it is added onto the debts that students have incurred in achieving their undergraduate qualifications. Purcell et al. (2012) found that levels of personal debt at the end of an undergraduate degree varied substantially by ethnicity, socio-economic background, gender, subject of study and age at the commencement of their course and that such demographic factors also impacted on students' likelihood of agreeing with the following statements.

I wanted to do a postgraduate course but did not want to add to my debts

I had to apply for a postgraduate course where I could live at home rather than where I would have preferred to study.

The career advantages that are afforded by PGT study are unevenly distributed. This has been picked up in numerous studies including Morgan and Direito (2015) who also found that debt and social class impacted on progression to PGT. Similarly, a study of 'paired peers' attending different types of institution from contrasting socio-economic backgrounds (Bradley et al., 2013) found that more socially disadvantaged students were less likely to progress to Masters. This picture of social inequality in the composition of the PGT population is something which merits a response from institutions and from policy makers.

Implications for higher education providers

Decisions about entry to PGT courses are therefore (1) integrated into the complex lives of the prospective students; (2) strongly motivated by career aspirations; and (3) influenced by a wide range of demographic features particularly related to indebtedness, access to financial capital and social class. Each of these issues raises questions that HEPs need to consider in relation to their strategy around PGT.

With respect to the complexity of the lives of prospective students it is important that HEPs are clear and transparent about all aspects of the student experience. The nature of the PGT cohort means that it is important for such information to include both a description of curriculum but also some clarity about how this curriculum will be realised. For example, the viability of pursuing PGT courses will vary for students depending on the day and time that teaching typically takes place. Some students may find it easy to attend in the evening, whilst others may find it easier to attend classes every Monday for example. However, if this kind of information is not known it may convince prospective students that not all of the hygiene factors have been met. This kind of practical information about courses currently forms the basis of much of the pre-entry information provided by HEPs but there is often room to deepen it and make it more detailed (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014).

With respect to the career motivation of prospective students it is important that HEPs are able to articulate what kind of return on investment postgraduate programmes offer. Mellors-Bourne et al. (2016) found that in general HEPs were not able to do this. PGT students understand that they are making a considerable investment of time and money and would like as much information as possible about what they might get in exchange for this. At present many prospective PGTs are provided with relatively limited information about how postgraduate study fits into individuals' longer term career development. One option is for HEPs to make the case that PGT qualifications confer clear labour market advantage for those who achieve them. We will investigate this claim in more depth later in this chapter. However, the prevalence of career motivation suggests that it is important for HEPs to offer as clear an articulation of the career advantages of taking the course as possible.

Provision of information about the career outcomes attached to courses is likely to need to be fairly specific to the individual. PGT study is something that individuals approach at a relatively late stage in their educational careers. By the time individuals undertake such programmes much of their capacity and capital is already established. Individuals who enter programmes with strong career relevant networks and skills can be expected to have different outcomes from those who enter fresh from undergraduate degrees. Such heterogeneity reduces the value of summative statistics like the percentage of graduates in employment or the average salary. In such cases the provision of a range of qualitative case studies of former graduates may also be useful in concert with more statistical labour market information.

Finally, institutions need to think carefully about whether they are happy to simply accept the social equity issues that attend access to postgraduate study. Institutions should at least have an idea about the demographic balance of their current PGT student cohort and consider whether this is defensible. The issue of widening participation to postgraduate study is under-theorised (Wakeling and Kyriacou, 2010) but it is possible to imagine a range of interventions that might help including bursaries and other forms of cost-sharing and mitigation, the provision of money and debt advice, the provision of advice and guidance about the career costs and benefits of PGT study, and the conscious targeting of non-traditional PGT students in marketing (Strike and Toyne, 2015).

Career building through postgraduate taught study

The movement from either undergraduate study or work into a postgraduate course is a career transition. Tobbell, O'Donnell and Zammit (2010) highlight that this transition is little remarked upon and often assumed to be straightforward. Mellors-Bourne et al., (2016) noted that institutional responsibility for PGT transitions is often unclear and frequently neglected. However, Tobbell et al., found that transitions were frequently complex and described the complex process of identity renegotiation that new postgraduates have to go through as they develop an idea of what being a PGT student requires.

Despite the challenges inherent in the transition to PGT, most students' experiences of their programmes are generally positive (Leman, 2015). Leman makes the point that what makes the biggest difference to PGT students' positive engagement with their programme of study is the quality of the teaching and learning. Students also appreciated the opportunity to develop their career skills, but this did not predict their overall satisfaction with the programme as strongly as good teaching. Nonetheless it is clear that career development is both a strong motivation for participating at PGT level and something which contributes towards satisfaction with PGT programmes. Given this there is a strong incentive for HEPs to ensure that programmes meet students' career development needs.

However, meeting PGT students career development needs is not straightforward. Research by Bowman et al., (2005) highlights the heterogeneity of a PGT cohort, their career aspirations, and their interaction with the programme. Both choice of PGT course and the experience of participating in it are influenced by dispositions and prior experiences. They identify four ways in which PGT programmes interact with the career identity of the student.

- *Confirmatory and socialising transitions*: where the PGT programme reinforced students' original decision and socialised them into the norms and expectations of the labour market they were targeting.
- *Confirmatory transitions*: where students' attention was shared between the PGT programme and other interests (e.g. work), reinforcing their identities through both.
- *Contradictory/evolving transitions*: where students had experienced problems within the PGT programme, giving them a sense of 'not fitting in' and causing them to reconsider their career options.
- *Dislocated transitions*: in which students found their course to be very stressful.

This model is useful but under-estimates the complexity of the way in which PGT programmes interact with students' career aspirations. Merely recognising the different perspectives that returners and continuers bring to each of these categories helps to highlight the complexity of the career identities of some of the students. For example, a student who has recently left the army and is retraining as a teacher has two career identities which participating in a PGT course can help him to negotiate between. While a teacher who has left the profession to pursue a Masters in Palaeontology may be using the degree to offer her both a career gap and a space for exploration of her post-teaching career.

Given this it is worth considering how activities undertaken as part of PGT study might support an individual to develop their career. These can be described as intra-curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Intra-curricular activities are embedded within the normal part of a student's course of study and are usually assessed. In the context of PGT intra-curricular career support is about building a consideration of career development into the heart of the programme itself. This might include involving employers in

curriculum design, including assignments that build employability skills, or using the curriculum to clarify understanding of the relevant labour market. However, Skinner (2011) argues that academics are often resistant to attempts to vocationalise their programmes or to introduce elements which are strongly focused on employability and career development. Addressing this is likely to require some leadership from institutions as well as changes of attitudes within academic programmes. It is also worth noting that a consideration of how to embed career development at the heart of the curriculum may also lead HEPs towards the development of new types of programmes that are more closely aligned to the labour market (Artess et al., 2014).

Co-curricular activities are outside of the normal curriculum and unlikely to be assessed. Although they are commonly voluntary, topics are usually linked to the subject area of a student's programme. So the provision of voluntary enrichment activities such as visits, networking opportunities and placements that allow students to explore the careers associated with their discipline are examples of co-curricular approaches.

Extra-curricular activities fall outside of the normal curriculum and are not necessarily linked to a student's programme. They are usually non-assessed, can be of a voluntary nature or include paid employment. Many of the opportunities offered by institutional careers services e.g. CV workshops and opportunities to access advice and guidance would fall into this category. Many HEPs now signpost the careers support available for PGT students but very little information exists exploring the nature or efficacy of postgraduate career support. However, Bowman, et al., (2005) found that despite the fact that many students would have benefitted from career guidance it was unusual for the PGTs in their sample to have accessed institutional career support services.

It is also worth noting that many PGTs also continue to develop their career whilst working outside of the context of their programme of study. For returners this might include continuing to work within their previous job or career area, perhaps undertaking some consultancy to aid with the financing of their PGT programme or to keep their professional skills sharp. Other students, most usually under-capitalised continuers, may seek lower skilled part-time work to help them to finance their studies. However, as Martin and McCabe (2007) suggest even low-skilled work can help students to hone their employability and career management skills.

Implications for higher education providers

Career development is an ongoing and active processes. It is important that HEPs attend to the career development of students whilst they are on programmes and do not simply view it as a transition issue which matters only when students are entering and leaving programmes. Rather HEPs should consider how the whole student experience supports PGT students to develop their careers. This is particularly important as engagement with career development whilst on programme is a contributing factor to overall student satisfaction.

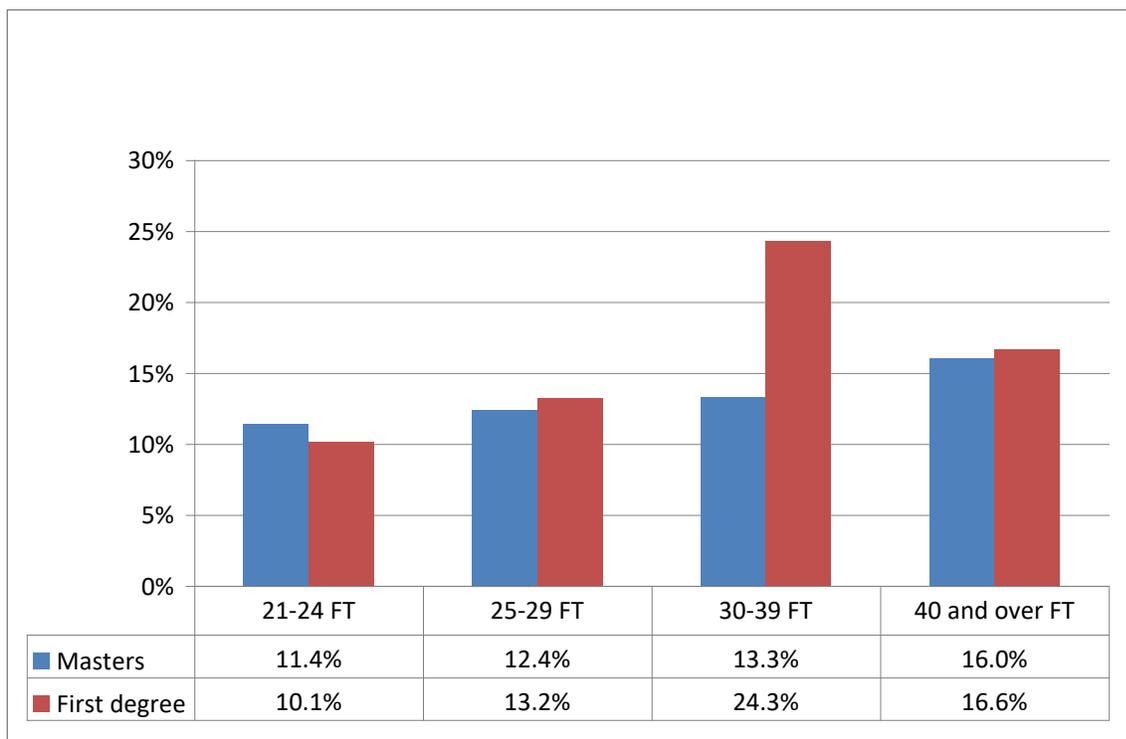
The framework of intra-, co-, and extra-curricular activities provides a framework against which HEPs can map their provision. Artess, et al., (2014) argue that a key way to approach this is through close attention to the signals that are being sent by the labour market. They argue that close engagement with employers on a number of levels including curriculum design and development, the provision of networking opportunities, and the orientation of students to focus on career outcomes, are all components of successful PGT provision.

Where does postgraduate taught study take you?

We have argued that career development considerations are central to the motivation of most individuals who are purposing PGT study. We have also argued that HEPs need to take career development seriously, to build a marketing narrative around the capacity of PGT programmes to advance individual careers and to review programmes to ensure that they actually support students' career development needs.

At the heart of the focus on career development within programmes is a recognition that the acquisition of qualifications alone is insufficient to develop an individual's career. Career development attends to the challenge of articulating skills and qualifications in ways that support employability.

There are also other major challenges for graduates of PGT programmes. The graduate labour market in the UK is largely unregulated meaning that graduates of any subject discipline can enter a wide range of occupations. Furthermore, with a few exceptions most PGT qualifications do not confer access to new parts of the labour market which are not open to those with undergraduate degrees. Indeed in some disciplines, PGT study does not appear to confer labour market advantage over undergraduate study. Nonetheless career prospects for postgraduates are generally good as evidenced in first destinations data (HEPI and The British Library, 2010; Lindley and Machin, 2013; Ball, C., 2014). However the devil is in the detail. Artess, et al., (2014) noted (Figure 2) that the risk of unemployment on graduation from Business and Management degrees was higher overall for those graduating with an undergraduate degree than for those graduating with a Masters, thus confirming the labour market advantage of PGT



study, but amongst younger graduates this is reversed. This suggests that young PGT continuers might be at higher risk of not achieving a job than their more experienced peers.

Figure 2: Incidence of unemployment amongst Business and Management graduates at six months following graduation by age group. Source Artess et al., 2014:27

Artess et al. (2014) used UK first destinations data to report on the employment outcomes of Masters graduates and found that the relationship between postgraduate study and employment (and unemployment) outcomes is complex and varies by mode of study, subject discipline, and age. One interpretation of Figure 3 below is that part-time Masters graduates are more likely to be in employment six months following graduation than those who studied full-time, and that full-time mature graduates may experience more difficulty finding employment. However, the underlying reasons for these outcomes needs to be explored – for example, mature students may be less mobile.

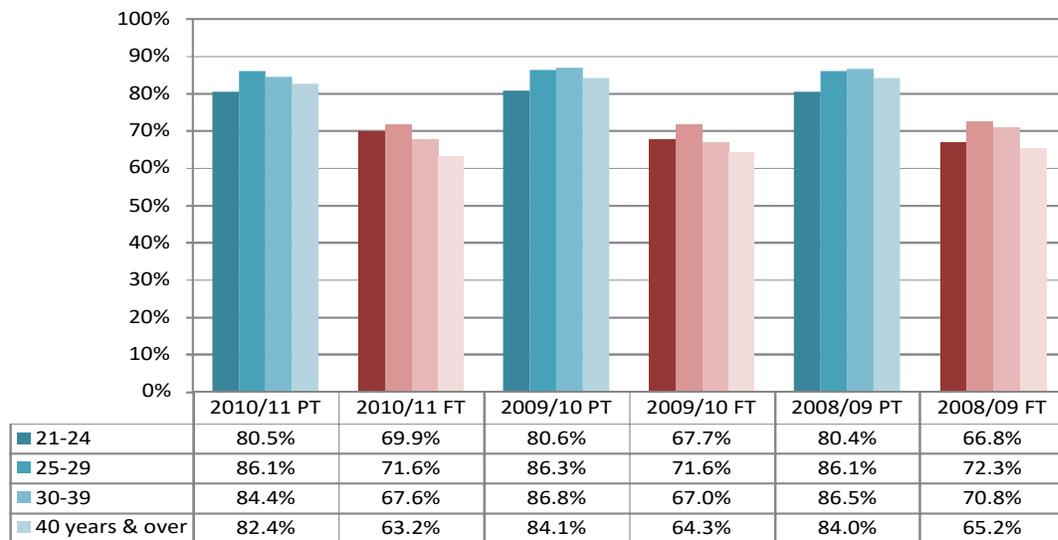


Figure 3: Employment rates for Masters qualifiers, by age and mode of study in 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11. Source: Artess, et al., 2014:16.

There is considerable interest in not only whether postgraduates obtain employment on completion but also whether that employment is commensurate with postgraduate study. Prior to 2012 in the UK a system of categorising jobs into: traditional (e.g. lawyers), modern (e.g. primary teacher), new (e.g. marketing manager), niche (e.g. sports managers) and non-graduate (e.g. sales assistant) was used to express whether the graduate had obtained a *graduate job* (Elias and Purcell, 2004). More recently employment destinations data have been classified more simply into jobs that are professional/managerial or non-graduate. There is some evidence that non-graduate employment at six months following graduation is increasing. Figure 4 reproduced from Artess, et al., (2014) shows that the likelihood of obtaining a graduate job varies by subject discipline and fluctuates slightly over time. For example, Humanities postgraduates appear far less likely to achieve a graduate job within six months of graduating than Mathematics and Information Technology postgraduates.

There are very real challenges in classifying types of graduate employment. It could be argued that a job which is classified as professional/managerial is a graduate job. Another approach is to ask the

graduates whether they needed a degree to obtain and fulfil the job role. Ball (2015) identifies that slightly fewer jobs would be classified as graduate level by graduates themselves than if a classification system is used.

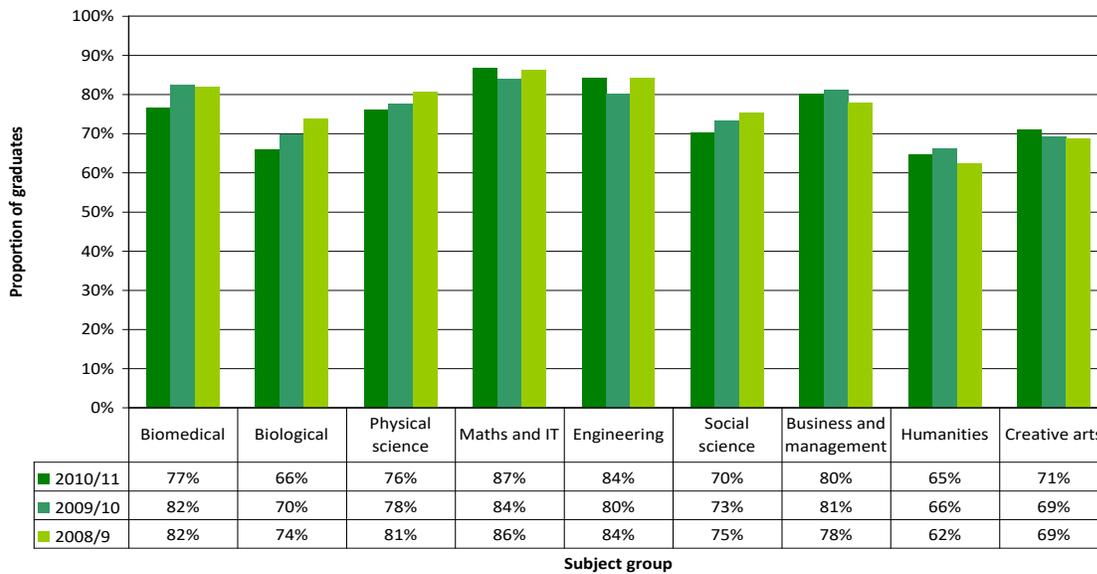


Figure 4: Proportion of young (aged 21–24 years) taught Masters graduates obtaining professional and managerial level employment at six months following graduation in 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11. Source: Artess, et al., 2014:20.

A close examination of the patterns of PGT employment following graduation therefore paints an ambiguous picture. PGT students are clearly highly employable, but on the other hand PGT degrees do not provide any guarantees. For most people in most subjects the position of a PGT degree does not offer an automatic passport to the good life. Rather PGT is best seen as a critical career opportunity, a moment when students have the opportunity to build their social and human capital and to leverage this for career advancement. However, the process of leveraging opportunities is a complex and requires a skilled approach with which PGT programmes need to engage more overtly.

Implications for higher education providers

In the UK there is good data on PGT student progression for the six months after graduation. This is a valuable resource which is not available everywhere. Nonetheless, it is important for all HEPs to consider their usage of data to understand the career destinations of their PGT students. We would suggest that HEPs attend to the following stages.

- *Reviewing* data sources to ascertain what is known about PGT graduates from the institution overall and programmes in particular.

- *Extending* the coverage of destinations data using both qualitative and quantitative methods to extend the coverage and depth of what is known about postgraduate career trajectories.
- *Analysing* data to consider what it reveals about the whole student cohort and key sub-populations within it particularly those related to subject disciplines and equality characteristics.
- *Using* the findings of the analysis as part of the programme development and quality assurance processes.
- *Publishing* data and analyses to inform the career development of prospective and current PGT students.

HEPs also have an important decision to make about their orientation towards former students. Career building is not something that happens overnight on the point of graduation. One option is to consider what career services and support should be offered past the point of graduation to help students to firmly transition to the labour market and maximise the value of their PGT study. Such a consideration clearly raises questions about the business model upon which such ongoing support could be based. However, it is also worth noting that alumni also represent a major resource for current students and potentially form a pool of employers and professionals who can support the career development of current students.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have argued that career development lies at the heart of PGT programmes. It is essential that HEPs orientate towards the concept of career development if they are to ensure that their programmes recruit, satisfy their students, and produce graduates who are capable of moving on and realising their potential. The PGT student journey is best conceptualised as a series of transitions to, within and beyond the programme which are connected by the thread of the students' career building.

This chapter has drawn on the experience of PGT study in the UK to inform this discussion about institutional approaches to career development within PGT. However, as we have frequently noted this area is under-researched and there is currently very little research on PGT career development and indeed on the PGT student experience as a whole. It is important that institutions, policy makers and other funders recognise this evidential gap and seek to fill it.

Ultimately we believe that the opportunity to study at a postgraduate level should be a personally transformative experience. Career is the mechanism through which individuals make meaning of their life experiences and the place where they integrate learning, work, and their wider life aspirations and interests. PGT students are aware of the centrality of career to their decision to study at PGT level, it is important that HEPs acknowledge this more strongly and develop their programmes accordingly.

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