

Stream: Pedagogic Research

Submission title:

(Re)Imagining Academic Identities Within Shifting Policy Landscapes

Presenters:

Martha Caddell and Anne Tierney

This session is framed as a conversation between two distinct pieces of research, linked by their shared focus on exploring academic identities in the context of flux in the higher education policy landscape.

Changes in policy, funding and regulation are impacting on university priorities and on the workloads, focus and pedagogic practices of academics and other university staff (e.g. Burke et al 2014, Mayhew 2017, Riddell et al 2016). Debate has focused on the defining and monitoring of research and teaching 'excellence' and the value for money offered in an increasingly marketised, massified and stratified higher education arena (Ball 2003, Gourlay & Stevenson 2017, Brown 2011). Alongside this, the recent populist turn has led both to the emergence of a vocal anti-intellectualism and a galvanised and, indeed, increasingly (re)politicised voice for academic communities (Roberts & Becker 2017). Such change – real and rhetorical – poses challenges to the environments in which academics work and how they understand their professional identities and expertise.

Tierney's work explores the opportunities for brokering between teaching-focused and research-focused academics. She critically explores the de facto development of two separate communities of practice, the policy drivers that underpin this, and the agency and choice of academics in relation to their career pathways. This then opens space to investigate what happens at the boundaries of these roles, the nature and extent of channels for interaction and exchange between staff in different roles and the tensions arising from this divide.

Similarly, Caddell's research explores boundaries of academic roles, investigating how staff coming in to the profession and those more established in their careers understand their work and identities. The work explores how staff articulate and understand their pathways into and through academic life and 'backwards maps' these narratives to explore interplay with shifting policy frameworks and agendas.

The session will open up the conversation between the two pieces of work, exploring the conceptual and policy interests that underpin them and the narratives emerging from the studies. Participants will be invited to engage in the discussion, to explore how individual academic careers are shaped and framed by wider sectoral shifts.