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A delicate balance: optimising individual aspirations and institutional missions in higher education

Celia Whitchurch, William Locke and Giulio Marini

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Contents

Abstract 1

Introduction 2

Analysis 4

General findings 6

Roles 7

Career trajectories 10

A typology of approaches to roles and careers 14

Mainstream academics 19

Portfolio academics 23

Niche academics 27

Conceptual framing of the three approaches 31

Between individuals and institutional structures 32

A delicate balance 37

'Double edged swords' 42

Conclusion 44

References 46

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Abstract

This working paper offers an analysis of the interviews undertaken as the first stage of CGHE Project 3.2, with senior managers and academic staff, in eight universities. It explores the approaches taken by both groups in addressing institutional and individual aspirations, the relationships between individuals and their institutions, and ways in which both are likely to be realised in practice via local managers such as heads of department and programme or project leaders. Three approaches to roles and careers are identified, described as *Mainstream, Portfolio* and *Niche*, demonstrating how these may be adopted by individuals at different times and in different circumstances. An overview is then taken of the delicate balance that exists between institutional policy, its local interpretation and day-to-day practice, as well as ways in which bottom up initiatives may in turn influence policy making.

Introduction

Working Paper 45 builds on Working Paper 43, entitled *The future higher education workforce in locally and globally engaged higher education institutions: a review of literature on the topic of 'the academic workforce'.* Significant findings have now emerged from the first stage of the project, in which 69 interviews with academic and professional staff, including members of senior management teams, have been completed in eight case study universities across the UK. The project is mapping the key influences, milestones and challenges of an increasingly diverse body of academic and associated staff. This work will be reinforced by surveys to be conducted later in 2018/19 among all staff in a subset of the eight case study universities, and a return visit to the original interviewees in 2019/20, so as to obtain a longitudinal view. This paper also adds to and updates the initial literature review.

Institutions, and in turn individuals, are increasingly obliged to interact with more market-oriented conditions, accountability mechanisms, and an expanding student population. They do this in an increasingly differentiated UK higher education system (Fillipakou, Tapper and Salter 2011). While HESA data and institutional documentation provide an opportunity to look at broad brush trends and formal responses of institutions to the changing composition of the workforce, the qualitative interviews undertaken for the project have made it possible to explore the perceptions and understandings of individuals, and the particular ways in which they navigate local policies and structures, and approach an academic career. The interim findings are set in the context of institutional types (pre-1992, post-1992 and post-2004 universities), and against the disciplinary backgrounds and levels of seniority of individuals. Some of the findings are not necessarily what might be expected in relation to these categories, suggesting that new frames may be required. Finally, the paper reviews ways in which staff relate to their institutions and negotiate their careers, as expectations on universities expand over time and under changing conditions.

Despite a continually expanding literature on the diversification of the academic workforce at the macro level, and on the responses of both individuals and institutions to changing environments at the micro level (for instance Kezar and Maxey 2016; Leisyte and Wilkesmann 2016; Scott, Gallagher and Parry 2016; Balbachevsky 2017; Brew et al 2017; Crosier 2017; Machado-Taylor et al 2017; Teichler 2017; Frolich et al 2018; Rosewell and Ashwin 2018; Holcombe and Kezar 2018; Webber 2018; Kwiek 2019), there has been less exploration of day-to-day interactions between individuals and institutions. As Degn (2018) suggests, it would appear that sense-making for individual academics increasingly focuses on locale within an institution, rather than the institution as a whole. In this study the inclusion of the voices of a range of staff, from senior and middle managers to academics at different stages of their careers, enabled a better understanding to be achieved of the increasingly complex relationship between institutions and their staff, the delicate balance that this represents, and the

innovative practices that can lead to accommodations of mutual benefit. It therefore adds a dimension that has been less prominent in the literature.

The project was conducted across a range of institutions chosen according to mission, history and geographic spread across the four countries of the UK. They can be categorised as follows:

Type of university	Pre-1992 Russell Group (research intensive institutions)	Pre-1992 Non-Russell Group	Post-1992 (former polytechnics)	Post-2004 (former colleges of higher education)	Total
Number in each category	3	2	2	1	8

Table 1: Institutional case studies

The profile of those interviewed across the project was as follows:

Category of staff	1 Senior managers eg pro-vice-chancellors, directors of human resources	2 Middle managers eg heads of school and depart-ment	3 Teaching and research staff	4 Teaching-only staff	5 Research-only staff	6 Learning support staff	7 Professional staff	Total
Number in each category	16	9	28	2	5	5	4	69

Table 2: Interviewees in the study

The analysis and interim findings are based on the project research questions as follows:

1. In what ways are academic roles and identities diversifying?
2. What are the implications for individuals and institutions, locally and globally?

3. What tensions and/or synergies arise from this diversification, for instance, between individual aspirations and institutional missions, structures and processes?
4. How are such tensions being managed and resolved in optimal ways for individuals and institutions?

Although Research Question 1 refers to roles and identities, significant issues also emerged from the research about the impact of diversification on careers, which will be further investigated in the second (survey) and third (repeat interviews) stages of the study.

This paper therefore explores the approaches of individuals involved in different types of academic activity to their roles and careers; ways in which they interact with their institutions and colleagues; and the implications for the academic profession, institutional managers, and individuals themselves. It goes on to review the iteration between bottom-up and top-down aspirations, and ways in which these might be harnessed constructively to achieve optimal relationships and outcomes for both institutions and their staff.

Analysis

The data gathered from the institutional interviews was analysed using Creswell's "data analysis spiral" (Creswell, 1998: 143), whereby data is revisited via processes of reading, describing, classifying, interpreting and representing, with continuous loops back between these activities. The data was then mapped against possible variables, such as different types of institution, academic discipline, and the career stage of the individual. This enabled "semantic" (explicit, overt) and "latent" (underlying, implicit) themes to be identified (Braun and Clark 2013). Consideration was also given to the degree of agency that individuals were able to adopt in relation to their roles and careers, the possibility of multiple roles and identities, and how individuals negotiate and manage these.

As an initial step in the analysis, the research questions were used to develop *descriptive codes* for factual details, for instance trends in the data sets, documentary evidence from the case institutions, and the biographical details of respondents; *interpretive codes* for possible latent meanings, for instance tension between individual aspirations and organisational reward and career development processes; and *pattern codes* for links or themes across respondent accounts, including where these tell different stories (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 57).

As a starting point, a factual profile of interviewees was drawn up, both from a pre-circulated pro forma and from the accounts of individuals, and *descriptive codes* developed. These included:

- age
- gender
- nationality
- ethnicity
- qualifications
- discipline
- current post/role
- type of contract
- key relationships
- career trajectory (in and out of higher education).

These details gave a sense of where people had come from, where they were positioned, what their key relationships were and where they saw themselves going. Following a summary of factual details, significant aspects of the accounts were noted, for instance, dissonance in understandings about processes for promotion, or unexpected views about career prospects. Thus the initial categorisation and interpretation became part of the research process of data collection, management, reading, describing, classifying, interpreting and representing, with loops back as the material was re-visited (Creswell, 1994).

The initial analysis of the emergent data reviewed respondents according to their positioning in relation to institutional processes and structures, their positioning vis-a-vis teaching, research and other associated academic activity, their approaches to a career in higher education, their relationships with colleagues internal and external to their institution, and their involvement in expanding areas of work such as student support or community engagement. *Interpretive codes* included:

- Disciplinary activity
- Balance of teaching and research
- Associated activity eg in practice settings
- Types of knowledge
- Management activity
- Ideas of being an academic
- Relationships in which respondents were involved.

Thus at a factual level information was gathered about career histories, trajectories and transitions; and at an interpretive level around the relationship between individuals and institutional structures.

General findings

In general terms, a number of clear messages emerged from the data. The diversification of the workforce, partly arising from an influx of academic staff with professional and practitioner backgrounds, and the fact that significant numbers of staff have worked in other sectors and may move in and out of higher education, may be eroding the sense of a collective profession or even disciplinary community. Younger generations of staff may be inclined to see academia more in terms of a job that is not dissimilar from other professional roles requiring judgement and discretion, in which life experience and networks may be as significant as knowledge itself. Thus networking, whether to raise an individual's profile with those who might have an influence on their future, or more generally to open opportunities, was seen as an important element in progressing a career, as in the following comment: "I mean getting a good and strong network… Talking to people, getting to show your work..., I think is the best way to open new doors in different places" (research fellow, social science, pre-1992 Russell Group university). Such attitudes may contribute to a decreasing sense of belonging to a singular profession, as well as an increasing awareness of universities as organisations as opposed to a sheltering umbrella for academic endeavour, with associated structural and procedural requirements. There was also evidence of the evolution of mechanisms to respond to, and at times circumnavigate, these requirements, and that this affected those in mid-career, as well as those early in their career. However less attention has been paid to mid-career academics who can feel 'lost' in the system, are likely to experience challenges, and may have significant choices to make about, for instance, their careers and work-life balance. As a result, higher education is no longer necessarily seen as a secure option, one person going so far as to say that: "I think it's very cut throat and very competitive in university life, and actually industry looks like an easier option" (professor, applied science, pre-1992 university).

A higher profile was also given to both engagement and impact as strong indicators for career advancement, reflecting the findings of Ooms et al (2018). Thus: "external engagement is very important now... everyone must be doing some external engagement, otherwise they don't get promoted" (deputy vice-chancellor, pre-1992 university). Although individuals in post-1992 universities seemed to have embraced this, there was a sense in pre-1992 universities that this could preclude exploration and discovery within research, in that impact has to be defined in advance, and that the time spent on impact statements and completion of research databases was taking time away from the research itself. Moreover, the increasing range and significance of

activities such as enterprise, internationalisation, knowledge exchange and practice increasingly overlap with teaching and research, which are no longer watertight categories.

The narratives further revealed how individuals and institutions navigated tensions around, for instance, market imperatives and ideals of service, policy requirements and creative endeavour, and the competing demands of teaching, research and related activities. Whilst more market-oriented approaches in both pre- and post-1992 universities were apparent, particularly among senior managers who had previous experience of other sectors, these tended to be couched in terms of a shift in the employment equation from an emphasis on individual performance to the relationship between this and institutional requirements. Such approaches could come into play, for instance, in challenging departmental requests for new or promoted posts, and requiring a justification for these in relation to teaching and/or research strategy. Thus several institutions said that they were undertaking workforce planning, that is not simply replacing posts when they fell vacant, but taking an overview of these in relation to, for instance, institutional shape, the balance of disciplines, and levels of recruitment. From the individual's point of view, this could make it more difficult to plan a career in a single institution, and in that sense could be seen as stimulating mobility among the academic profession.

Roles

An increasing range of disciplines, particularly in relation to practitioner subjects such as health and social care, has contributed to changes in the composition of the workforce and, in turn, understandings of being an academic. Significant numbers of staff have worked in other sectors and enter higher education in their thirties or forties. Others have strong links outside academia, in industry, professional bodies and NGOs, as in the following case: "I think a lot of [applied scientists] see themselves as academics who crossed the boundary into practice..., so I see myself as an academic, but..., if it's not applied, if it's not relevant for [the applied science] and it's just a high impact factor [journal] paper, I'm not interested..., although, that said, with the REF, there's more emphasis on impact case studies, which, in our field, means that being more practice orientated helps. So yes, I see myself as an academic, but only sort of 50% academic…" (research fellow, science, pre-1992 university).

New roles have also emerged, such as supporting student employability and careers, or running online programmes, which require a different approach to addressing student needs. It can also lead to frustration on the part of staff managing associated processes such as monitoring online forums: "I never really had the opportunity to be a normal academic..., I can't remember when I've ever been like that, even before I worked at xxx, I worked in outreach, I was an outreach, community outreach teaching fellow... the distance learning thing puts you out on a limb... the wider university

actually has no idea what I'm doing" (lecturer, social science, pre-1992 university). Nor do such people necessarily fit neatly into a work allocation model. Therefore, as this individual went on to say, "a one size fits all academic is sort of falling apart" (lecturer, social science, pre-1992 university), and individual roles are increasingly fluid, across different types of activity and over time. In addition there are increasing numbers of staff, often with higher degrees and academic credentials, who are employed on professional contracts and perform teaching and learning and research support roles, for instance helping with applications for funding and contributing to activity aimed at student recruitment and retention.

Furthermore, student expectations of a university education are greater, partly as a result of higher tuition fees, teaching evaluation, employability agendas and widening participation initiatives, and many need significantly more help and support than when their teachers were undergraduates or postgraduates. Thus: "it's not like the old days when you could not be around and just concentrate on your work, most of the money comes from students, and so I think being an academic is a less flexible and more tough profession than it used to be, whilst still being a very privileged one" (deputy vice-chancellor, pre-1992 university). This is especially the case in those institutions that cater for students from a non-traditional background: "we might need to spend more time to repackage something..., because... In order to let the students understand those concepts or models, we need to spend extra time to think about different ways to present it… " (lecturer, social science, post-2004 university). These developments in turn impact on the breadth and spread of activity conducted by academic staff, particularly the time devoted to learning support and pastoral care.

A common issue was a lack of clarity around job descriptions, particularly assumptions in relation to the proportions of time assumed to be devoted to teaching, research and other activity such as knowledge exchange or community engagement: "...my job is... supposed to be, as I understand it..., one third research, one third teaching, one third admin..., so that's what I have been told, but again, you know, one hears different things" (reader, humanities, pre-1992 university). Interestingly another person in the same school quoted 40% teaching, 40% research, 20% other activity. Pastoral care of students was something that was frequently mentioned as not being accounted for. There were also concerns over poor performance, or what one person called "wilful incompetence", by peers and ways in which this was dealt with, sometimes leading to what another person described as the "stealing" of academic time when workloads were transferred from poor to good teachers: "a colleague on one of my projects came out with 'academic theft', which is where people who don't do things well have effectively stolen time from others of their colleagues, who would then either clear up the mess, or take over the role because no-one else at that level was competent to do it" (professor, humanities, pre-1992 Russell Group university). Equity issues can thereby arise as well as reducing the time for research: "The thing that nurtures us is

our research and I think that if you lose that or it's not enough, you're not getting that succour that you need to keep on going, to make your job enjoyable..." (reader, humanities, pre-1992 university).

In practice, roles and workloads were often based on understandings between middle managers and individuals, which were subject to interpretation. Some academic managers deliberately tried to play to individual strengths in managing these: "... there are colleagues who will receive very severe criticism from others for not pulling their weight on some core activities and I've always felt... it's a very varied job and you will have some colleagues who are really brilliant at the public facing stuff, others who are really good at the teaching, others who are really good at research and you shouldn't expect everyone to be equally good at everything. What you don't want is a world in which only one of those gets rewarded and the other two are seen as ancillary, but if you could have a system where we do take all of them seriously and everybody's pulling their weight in some way, then we should be fairly flexible about who does what and play to people's strengths and not worry that someone's got fewer hours teaching or a few more hours research" (professor, humanities, pre-1992 university). Issues of trust and confidence in departmental or team leadership come into play here, highlighting the criticality of these roles in achieving quality outcomes, individually and collectively. Recognition for endeavour, even if this could not be rewarded immediately, was a strong theme, even from an academic with a part-time post who purported not to be interested in the career ladder *per se,* and took what they referred to as the "Maginot line" approach to structures, that is circumnavigated them: "I think I'd quite like to get one more promotion and that's because, you know, the sense of recognition..." (senior lecturer, applied science, pre-1992 university).

The following comment demonstrates how the influence of a line manager can be disproportionate, positively and negatively, especially for early career staff: "I think now, in terms of my current role... having... a PI who makes me think about my career is really useful and I don't think that's the same for everyone, so..., I find it frustrating that a lot of your success can be sort of linked in to somebody else and that somebody else mightn't really care that much about you... it just seems very subjective... who you're working for and how much support they give you..." (research fellow, social science, pre-1992 Russell Group university). Thus in the following case, there were tensions between a line manager and the central university administration, in that a project leader resisted an individual's undertaking teaching in the department, despite this being university policy, saying that the research council funders did not permit this: "...this is a bone of contention between my line manager, who doesn't want me to do any [teaching], because she thinks I should be 100% research because of [research council policy], and the university central, who are saying that it's up to them to decide and that the contract for all post-docs is that..., however you're funded, you do 60 hours [teaching]" (research fellow, science, pre-1992 university). The individual was

therefore left in a difficult position because they wanted the teaching experience and were doing it anyway, but it was the line manager rather than the central administration who was resisting this. Nevertheless, even where they are positive, a dependency on local relationships could be a double-edged sword in that they could be time limited: “when you have change that usually means changes in personnel, all the relationships that you’ve built with certain teams disappear, the experience and the faith on both sides can be... fractured...” (reader, humanities, post-1992 university).

However, it was also important to actively distinguish oneself in relation to colleagues in order to achieve recognition and favour. Sometimes this meant taking the initiative and leading by example: “I've found the only way that people will take you seriously is if you do something, say, for example, I made a change in my teaching, the way I'm doing a particular type of teaching, or indeed, the way I supervise my PhDs..., and then suddenly people start noticing” (reader, humanities, pre-1992 university). Taken even further, individual profiles, often promoted via online media, were seen as vital, particularly by younger staff, in promoting their cause. Thus: “I had a friend who wrote two books and didn’t get her promotion to senior lecturer because [she] didn’t have enough REF articles in that particular period of time, whatever, and I feel like this kind of attitude is slowly starting to fall apart, really slowly, partly because of the Teaching Excellence Framework [TEF] and things like that... so people, *almost their profile is sometimes more important than, say, their CVs*... I know people who’ve kind of been more involved in, say, government or things like that, seem to be becoming more and more employable...” (lecturer, social science, pre-1992 university) (authors’ emphasis). Associated with this general approach is the fact that “...people put a lot of weight on titles, rather than what’s actually been done...” (research fellow, social science, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

Career trajectories

At the same time, it was evident that there has been significant change in the last ten years or so in the difficulty of obtaining a lectureship, in that candidates are expected to have not only a PhD but a prestigious postdoctoral appointment and publications, including a monograph. Thus: “we are getting students who have got their PhDs, been research fellows, built up research profiles, have been co-investigator on some really important Horizon 2020 research grant, and they’re the ones that are applying for junior positions, even at this university” (professor, teaching and learning, post-1992 university); and “Now you need a PhD in the bag and then you’re up against people who have already got a distinguished postdoctoral fellowship under their belt as well, they’ve got book contracts... all of those things…” (reader, humanities, pre-1992 university). However, and notwithstanding the high bar that new entrants to academia are expected to reach, in practice the route to a permanent job was not infrequently through acting up, for instance to cover for maternity leave or study leave; or through a contact who thinks the individual would be a suitable candidate, ie some kind of ‘lucky

break', even though the individual would subsequently be formally interviewed and selected. In this respect it appears that informal opportunities and relationships may be as significant in career development as formal structures and processes (Locke, Whitchurch, Smith and Mazenod 2016; Whitchurch and Gordon 2017).

Those without a research record tended to find it particularly difficult: "There's a very negative environment about full-time permanent lectureships, you basically get told, especially if you're like me and you've been doing teaching contracts for a while,… That you're unemployable and it's really quite negative..." (lecturer, social science, pre-1992 university). These kind of hurdles appear, in turn, to have led to an increasingly instrumental approach as early as the doctoral phase: "... if [doctoral students] want to go out into industry and start making big bucks... they need to make sure that their PhD is going to lend itself to that and that they're going to develop the kind of skills that are sought by industry… If they want to be an academic then... they need to be using that time on the PhD wisely to build up their experiences and get an understanding of how they can become an academic" (professor, teaching and learning, post-1992 university). Furthermore, other options were commonly on the agenda: "I was surprised… to find out that quite a lot of people [undertaking PhDs] did not aim to become a lecturing academic and that they had other options as well…" (reader, humanities, pre-1992 university). This more targeted approach to a career may reflect the fact that the element of choice in academia, particularly around what to teach and research, may be becoming more restricted by funding and curriculum requirements, including those of the TEF, for instance the need to include employability skills elements in teaching. Even where this is accommodated, it may lead to strain and frustration in the longer term. Doctorates funded around a pre-chosen topic, as opposed to free choice pursuing individual interests, may influence this from the start of a career, and is a tension that can be seen running through the narratives.

At the same time, there is a cohort of staff in institutions that have achieved university status in the last 25 years, often from practitioner subjects, who do not have doctorates or research records, which can create tension as such institutions compete nationally and internationally for resources in relation to students or research funding. This has put pressure on the academic profession and has led to fragmentation and indeed dissonance in understandings of roles and purposes, for instance: "I think there is real dissonance in some people's perception of why they are here… We get a lot of very mid-career type people who are experts but they might be academically naive... A lot of health courses, they're in their infancy in relation to income generation, research, evidence base and all that kind of stuff" (senior lecturer, health, post-1992 university). Others mentioned the need for life skills in managing the increasing spread and complexity of academic roles and multiple responsibilities, as well as disciplinary focus.

It was also evident that management responsibilities are increasingly sought earlier on in careers than hitherto as part of a portfolio, and used as a way of adding to promotion chances. This has led to issues for both younger generations and for contemporary mid-career academics:
"... I got my first academic job in '92, I was about the first person I knew to actually get a proper job from my cohort, because the Thatcher freeze had been on and there'd been five or six years in which nobody was being appointed to permanent positions in departments and that has meant... there's a complete gap in the profession balance of about a decade, so I became Head of Department in my mid-forties, before I was a professor... it's become the way you become a professor now and it's because there aren't any professors who are fit to do the job or want to do the job around in the cohort above... I think we've had to do jobs in a slightly different sequence and had to do the jobs more than once, often because the distribution of how those jobs should be done has moved over time. So one function is that I, very early on, started doing jobs like chairing exam boards at quite a high level of seniority" (professor, humanities, pre-1992 university). This implies something of a paradox in that although it may be taking longer for people to achieve permanent posts, career progression thereafter may be quicker, with some evidence of, for the reasons outlined in the above quotation, people being appointed to a chair at younger ages.

Academic careers themselves would appear to be less positional, that is no longer based on clear pathways, norms and expectations of milestones at specific points linked to age or activity. Thus: "...there's a lot more uncertainty around an academic career than there used to be, because people used to come into it and that was it" (professor, applied science, post-1992 university). At the same time responsibilities have become extended, and teaching and research are simply part of a portfolio for many people: "There are so many boxes to tick now as an academic. You used to be able to come in, do your teaching, do your research and leave. Now you're responsible for the pastoral support of students… For marketing the courses, for getting involved with recruitment, for getting involved with admissions, you have targets for teaching, targets for research excellence, targets for other things…" (professor, teaching and learning, post-1992 university).

Furthermore, although considerable attention has been paid to early career staff (Locke, Freeman and Rose 2017; McAlpine, Amundsen and Turner 2014; Marini 2018) there are also significant issues for those in mid-career who can become 'lost' in the system. This was a theme that recurred, but was succinctly expressed as follows: "I think it tends sometimes to get rhetoricised in a version that says, there's an older generation of academics that don't know what rewards are now like, you had it easy, you've had secure pensions, you could afford to buy a house... and yet actually, I think the pressures now on people in mid to late career are, again, complex and more difficult than they were many years ago and haven't necessarily been addressed as

effectively as some [in] the very clear focus that we've now put on making sure people don't get over-burdened with teaching too quickly... at times when you may well have more commitments in your life in terms of family, elderly parents and so on. I know many colleagues who struggle with work life balance in a very real way in sort of their late forties, early fifties and beyond. I think also [it's] not quite clear where your career goes... I do think that's a big unaddressed issue in the profession more generally" (professor, humanities, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

These emerging themes reflected a general trend in approaches to roles and careers noted by Whitchurch (2018) of greater openness and less exclusivity in relation to ideas of being an academic (Table 1):

Classic accounts of being an academic	**Contemporary approaches to being an academic**
Discipline as key identifier	Search for distinguishing activities in addition to discipline
Professional autonomy	Partner and client orientation (co-practitioners, professional bodies, business and community)
Universally recognised career path involving teaching, research and knowledge exchange	Multiple/mixed career paths, including some that are novel and/or unique to the individual, and time outside higher education
Institutional/disciplinary patronage and mentors within the profession providing guidance and steerage	Extended networks inside and outside academia, providing bottom up support, information exchange and intelligence about career possibilities
Disciplinary and professional capital	Knowledge and network capital

Table 1: Classic accounts of, and contemporary approaches to, being an academic (Whitchurch 2018)

In general terms, contemporary academic staff, particularly those in early and mid-career, appear to be less accepting of established structures (in Bourdieu's terms, the academic *field*), and are likely to develop their own *habitus* through their interaction with the structures and power relations of the field (Bourdieu 1993). Furthermore, a general democratisation and flattening of social structures, in particular via the influence of social media, has challenged the currency of Bourdieu's theories by highlighting the emphasis placed on engagement activity as opposed to aspiring to elite values and a sense of exclusivity (Coulangeon and Duval 2015). This, in turn, reflects contemporary attitudes to professionalism which are less deferential, with

greater openness to external influences where new forms of capital may accrue. These forms of capital may, however, be less certain and more subject to change, with a looser connection to established disciplines and institutions. Therefore, credibility in an academic setting is increasingly likely to depend on individuals' ability to establish their reputation on the basis of the perceived value-added of a unique set of experiences and skills. As institutional requirements have become more stringent, it could be said that individuals have become more constrained in what Bourdieu terms "position taking" in relation to institutional sites of power, influence and knowledge, and also in their perception of what opportunities might be available to them in other fields, including those external to the university (Whitchurch 2018).

A typology of approaches to roles and careers

As a second step in the analysis, an overview was taken of overarching themes and from these pattern codes were developed, framing three types of approaches to roles and careers. From this emerged a typology of *Mainstream* (adhering to formal structures and timelines, focusing on activities deemed to be most valuable), *Portfolio* (a cumulative gathering of academic and associated experience, internal and external), and *Niche* (addressing personal values, interests and strengths), approaches to academic roles and careers.

Pattern codes relating to Mainstream approaches

- Awareness of structures (eg in understandings about roles, responsibilities, job descriptions)
- A linear approach to the career ladder
- Awareness of career timescales and milestones
- Learning from one's own and others' experience
- Ability to modulate processes and systems.

Pattern codes relating to Portfolio approaches

- Communication across internal and external boundaries with colleagues, peers, academic and professional colleagues
- Translation/interpretation of working across disciplinary and institutional boundaries
- Ease of movement across boundaries
- Partnership and networking
- Negotiation skills.

Pattern codes relating to Niche approaches

- Focus on a specific area of activity
- Strong values, an ethical base
- Service (eg to institution, academic colleagues, students, external clients)

- Trusteeship (eg of programme standards, sources of help for students)
- Knowledge exchange for collective/community purposes
- Team working across mix of functions/seniority.

This enabled the analysis to be taken to a conceptual level around the disciplinary, organisational, external/community and internal/motivational spaces occupied by academic and associated staff, leading to a theorisation of emergent spaces, and the variables affecting changing practices, such as type of institution, type of contract, discipline, line manager, and opportunities for short term career experience such as maternity cover.

On the one hand, it was clear that respondents across the typologies of *Mainstream, Portfolio* and *Niche* approaches did not necessarily anticipate automatic promotion through their institutional career structure, subject to meeting certain criteria. They therefore expected to take responsibility for their roles and careers, drawing on but not relying upon, or necessarily expecting, support and development opportunities from their institutions. They were therefore active agents in their own role and career development. As the following respondents indicated:
"I've made my job work for me" (senior lecturer, social science, pre-1992 university).
"you have to keep changing, you have to keep moving, otherwise you're finished" (pro-vice-chancellor, pre-1992 Russell Group university).
"In academia, there's not such a big salary, but there is job security… as long as you're not passive and you don't just... sit back and just let it happen and as long as you're a fighter and you work hard, then you do have the potential for a nice, long, happy career in this game..." (lecturer, science, pre-1992 university).

On the other hand, individuals could also be distinguished by the fact that while generally being proactive, they might also take different approaches to their roles and careers. These approaches were likely to influence the individual's interaction with four spatial domains: the *Disciplinary domain*, representing academic knowledge; the *Organisational domain*, representing structures for advancement; the *External/community domain,* representing a spectrum of other activities with which an individual might be involved, such as professional practice or community engagement; and the *Internal/motivational domain*, representing personal commitments and values, for instance to the pastoral care of students. The resulting model demonstrates the complexities and the spatial dimensions of contemporary academic identities within the three domains, shown in Table 2.

Typology of approaches to roles and careers *Domains*	*Mainstream* *Orientation*	*Portfolio* *Orientation*	*Niche* *Orientation*
Disciplinary	Teaching and research synergy International networks, conferences Reputational activity/impact Vertical networks	Teaching and/or research Practice locales Interdisciplinary/ boundary crossing Innovation	Teaching or research Teaching and learning Areas of intrinsic interest Pedagogic research
Organisational	Involvement in research assessment Teaching evaluation Funding sources Management activity Vertical networks	Horizontal, peer group networks (cross institutional)	Horizontal, peer group networks (local) Some activity may be unfunded Local colleagues/team
External/community	Funding sources (national/regional) Measured involvement in support of career goals	Business/professional/ community networks (extended/virtual) Professional bodies NGOs Seeking free space	Support networks Community links eg widening participation Outreach
Internal/motivational	Responsive in observing/optimising structures (rewards, constraints, possibilities and potentials) Cost benefit analysis Satisficing if necessary to optimise career progress and minimise stress	Proactive in creating new locales of action Spirit of exploration and/or search for security (see Whitchurch 2018) Hedging bets Exit plan if needed	Sense of vocation/service/ personal satisfaction and of where strengths lie Internally value driven Students/team Pastoral care Work-life balance Satisficing if necessary to optimise work-life balance and minimise stress

Table 2: Typology of approaches to roles and careers

Table 2 represents a heuristic device for the purposes of illustration in that the typologies show dominant tendencies or dispositions. It became clear that while some individuals demonstrated characteristics of a single domain, others demonstrated a mobility between two or more. The individuals interviewed have therefore been placed in the category with which they appeared to have the strongest affiliation. As the capacity of academic staff expands and diversifies to cope with ongoing demands and

future developments, career trajectories are continuously re-defined and updated. In reality, people may take different approaches at different stages of their career or in different institutions, or move between spaces for specific purposes and according to circumstances. Thus, some of those in the *Portfolio* or *Niche* categories may become *Mainstream* later in their careers if circumstances change, although a number of these indicated that they did not think this was likely to happen. The typology, therefore, should be seen as illustrating a disposition towards one approach rather than the others, and as a basis for comparison. What was clear was the fluid nature of these approaches. Thus, while formal structures were acknowledged and utilised, staff were also constructing individual approaches to suit local and even personal circumstances, which were being tested *in situ*. The situation was, therefore, both dynamic and complex. The model therefore provides a way of bringing into view underlying dynamics that may not be visible within the formal frameworks of careers, disciplines or types of contract.

As shown in Table 3 below, and with the usual caveats about sample sizes, of the 49 staff interviewed with significant academic components to their careers, whether or not they were on academic or professional contracts, 14 individuals (28%) displayed characteristics that positioned them primarily as having a *Mainstream* approach, 19 (39%) as having a *Portfolio* approach, and 16 (33%) as having a *Niche* approach. Thus, those with a predominantly *Mainstream* approach, adopting what might be seen as normative standards and assumptions about career progression in higher education, achieving certain milestones on certain timescales according to quality and volume of teaching and research output, are in the minority. This might be seen as surprising, and contrary to what might be expected, given the emphasis by institutions on devising pathways for different categories of staff. Although the small numbers, and the fact that there were five pre-1992 case study universities and three post-1992 universities in the sample, mean that firm conclusions cannot be drawn, it may be significant that 11 of the 14 categorised as *Mainstream* were in the five pre-1992 universities, in that they may be more likely to flourish in traditionally-oriented institutional structures. Conversely, it may be that it is more difficult for *Portfolio* and *Niche* academics to flourish in pre-1992 universities, but further work would be required to test this. At the same time it is significant that the majority of staff in the sample are not characterised as *Mainstream*, which illustrates shifts in the way that individuals view academic roles and careers, interact with the structures in which they find themselves, and prepare for their futures in differing degrees. Nor were the categorisations directly related to level of seniority, ie they were spread across the range, although there were no professors categorised as *Niche*, which is not surprising as they would have had to meet certain criteria and/or had a portfolio of activity to progress. However, it may be that as more people are appointed to chairs on the basis of teaching and other non-research oriented achievements, this could change.

Case study university	*Mainstream*	*Portfolio*	*Niche*
Pre-1992 Russell	1 senior lecturer, social science	1 professor, applied science 1 professor, science 1 educational developer	1 senior lecturer, applied science 1 research fellow, social science
Post-2004		1 reader, social science 1 senior lecturer, humanities	1 lecturer, social science 1 reader, social science 1 lecturer, applied science 1 lecturer, science
Post-1992	1 lecturer, science	1 senior lecturer, health	1 lecturer, health 1 lecturer, humanities 1 lecturer, science 1 lecturer, social science
Pre-1992	1 lecturer, student support 1 reader, humanities 1 lecturer, humanities	1 senior lecturer, applied science	1 lecturer, science 1 research fellow, applied science
Pre-1992 Russell	1 reader, applied science 1 professor, humanities	1 educational developer 1 teaching fellow, science	1 lecturer, social science 1 senior lecturer, humanities
Post-1992	1 reader, humanities 1 professor, applied science	1 professor, teaching and learning 1 senior lecturer, health 1 lecturer, student support	1 teaching fellow, applied science
Pre-1992 Russell	1 lecturer, health 1 research fellow, social science 1 reader, humanities	2 research fellows, social science 1 senior lecturer, applied science	1 senior lecturer, teaching and learning
Pre-1992	2 lecturers, science	1 reader, applied science 1 lecturer, applied science 1 professor, social science 1 lecturer, teaching and learning	
Totals	14	19	16

Table 3: Role and career typology of interviewees

Note: those on professional contracts undertaking academic activity have been shown at the academic equivalent level. The characteristics of the three categories of approaches to roles and careers, as well as some of the implications for individuals and institutions, are developed in more detail in the following section.

Mainstream academics

Mainstream academics have a strong awareness of structures, processes and procedures, as well as career timescales, expectations of roles, the likely impact of activity and influential players in the institution who might support them. They are also likely to take a holistic view of the relationship between teaching and research, of a synergy between the two, and the desirability of achieving an optimal balance between these in career terms: “a lot of our teaching is genuinely research driven, in the sense that it’s the book you're working on, you’re talking about it with your students and they give you ideas that help shape what you write, so it’s always seemed to be a very artificial divide and that’s even before you address the question, whether that makes you a better teacher..., but even if that wasn’t true, I think it makes better research, which is often neglected in that nexus...” (professor, humanities, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

Nevertheless, this holistic approach often leads to the need for pragmatic decisions about balance and focus of effort, and these individuals are also likely to undertake a cost benefit analysis of their activities, focusing on those that are likely to be of most benefit in relation to their next role or promotion, as illustrated by the following interviewee: “I’ve just been given a lot more admin responsibility... so I tried to ask to drop some of those roles to take more time to do the research, but instead they said oh no, you need to do that too, do those roles even better to demonstrate your eligibility for promotion… I’m going to be more selective in what I take on, so this past year I kind of went to every meeting and took full responsibility for everything. I think I’m going to be more selective this year in order to narrow down the time spent on that and go back to the research…” (lecturer, science, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

Such a cost benefit analysis is likely to include taking cognisance of the impact of (particularly) research in shaping choice and emphasis of activity: “...knowing how important funding is in terms of your promotion application success… I have made use of opportunities that are out there that probably I would not have applied for had I been doing my research just driven by my interest… [impact] has changed the way I’m now going to construct a particular project… not the kind of books that I would have written years ago… I made a conscious decision that I wanted… to reach… not just historians… [but] lots of different people” (reader, humanities, pre-1992 Russell Group university). Another *Mainstream* respondent took this cost benefit analysis to the extreme of suggesting that a focus on either teaching or research would be likely to reap the most rewards both in terms of satisfaction and financial security, thus:
“I think that in terms of long-term job security, being a pure researcher is probably the best way to go, because if you have a sustained source of income, you know, in terms of research grants, a steady cash flow, you will have a very long and happy career in academia. If you take on both responsibilities, teaching and research, your time is split and so your ability to be able to maintain that steady flow of income, it’s much harder

to do because you have that much less time. Then, also with the teaching-only, if you're very effective at teaching, maybe, and the way in which the higher education system is moving that we're, you know, it's becoming a lot more focused on student experience, student satisfaction, because of the income that students generate and the fact that we're now becoming more of a service provider than an education facility..., I guess there probably is a lot of career security associated with teaching-only as well" (lecturer, science, pre-1992 university).

It was also evident that in their approach to progression mechanisms, *Mainstream* academics tended to assume a traditional service orientation, with rewards linked to quality of performance and, in that sense, might be seen as conservative. The following individual was therefore discomforted by a perceived shift to a more competitive, market based approach: "... thinking through what's my subject, how do you best deliver it, what's good pedagogy, felt really worthwhile and important work, which I was moderately well equipped to do because I've always loved teaching and research equally..., what I do as a public servant delivering education, but also research and the subject as well... I was at a meeting at one point, when... two or three people were beginning to articulate this slight sense that people in the professoriate had, they don't know quite what to do or how to move their careers and the senior leadership turned round and said, well, they should apply for jobs somewhere else and that will show us that, if they're any good, they'll get an offer and then they can negotiate. The three or four of us who'd spent our careers feeling we'd sort of earned something by being loyal... had to think it through, but basically have felt that actually it had been rather useful for xxx that we've accumulated historical memory of how the institution works and have committed ourselves to it long term, that was a very unsettling conversation to have... where people do have this perception that... the best way to advance your career is to get an offer somewhere else and then come and play hardball" (professor, humanities, pre-1992 Russell Group university). In particular, a sense that loyalty and service were being eroded as markers of esteem was particularly unsettling, which may be why others settled for *Niche* roles in which security and contentment are valued equally with, if not above, advancement.

The shifting environment could therefore create restrictions for those categorised as *Mainstream*, with a sense that those in this category are increasingly likely to feel constrained, either because traditional norms and values are being eroded, or because new ones are not yet recognised. For different reasons, the following pen portrait demonstrates frustration with institutional progression structures and processes, in that seemingly little status and recognition is given to innovative work on online education, with no senior voices supporting this development. It also demonstrates that mid-, as well as early, career academics can feel blocked in both their day-to-day endeavours and in their future careers:

Pen portrait 1
I personally supervised fifteen MSc students' dissertations and provided 30 lectures, as well as running the distance education course, as well as redesigning the curriculum. I'm the sort of educator that I put a lot of effort into my education, such that I was barely able to spend one day a week on research, couldn't get the momentum going, but also suffered by being a single researcher... Getting appointed to professor, I think, is going to be incredibly challenging, because the criteria is almost impossible to meet, even though the amount of revenue I've brought in, the status that I've brought in, that in a lesser university I would be a professor already, the responsibilities I have are professorial, but the promotion criteria, it's like I'm supposed to win an international teaching award to be able to get to professorship... [my role] [i]t's being an innovator and seen as an innovator, which is also a strength and a weakness, in that sometimes being a more steady approach can be safer, but basically since joining xxx and in fact..., I've never felt secure in my job. We've had, in the nine years of being here, two restructures and I'm aware that I'm not producing high impact research and I'm aware of how this organisation works, so as a result, I find myself working incredibly hard on something else, but [am] still left feeling insecure at the end of the day... I'm worried career-wise because I have a status, I think, in online education..., but there are not too many jobs in being an online..., I'm not interested in the technology, I'm interested in teaching and learning online, so I do worry about where the exit plan is... I think I've brought in a lot of money for [institution], but still spend most nights tossing and turning, worrying about job security, frustrated that I haven't made it to a chair yet and can't see how I can in [institution]... grants for educational research is the toughest stuff that we're doing. It's never clear to me who will fund us…, so it's a little bit like being in a parallel universe... I think where we're really struggling..., is that there's no... single voice in senior management who's overseeing… a champion for what we're trying to do... a teaching university I think are better placed to support those who teach... there are times, especially because I've got a five year old, that if I could get a nice position that I'm in now, at a lovely little university close to the sea, we'd be very happy" (reader, science, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

Again *Niche* tendencies are evident, as well as the sense that it might be easier to become *Mainstream* in a less prestigious institution. Issues around a lack of fit between institutional processes and online education were echoed by another *Mainstream* member of staff at another institution responsible for a distance learning programme: "there are a lot of things that happen with distance learning that..., I feel like don't happen for campus based learning, things like links break, a student will immediately email you, they're very on it, they check things, it's not working, they email you and you have to really fix it straight away because they only have a short period of time that they can access it before they move on to the next topic... during that week they may only allot, you know, four hours on one day to do it and if the link isn't

working in those four hours, you've disadvantaged them, so..., you have to be quite responsive…" (lecturer, social science, pre-1992 university). Thus career pathways for what might be termed 'virtual' academics would appear to be significantly underdeveloped, and particularly evident as both these individuals had *Mainstream* approaches to their careers.

However, others were able to push the boundaries in meeting system requirements for progression, in the following case gaining recognition for new approaches to data collection in the humanities in the same institution: "I was at the cutting edge... and my digital [work] also fed back into my teaching quite a lot. So, my career progression, although I've got a research record which I'm proud of and which I've defended actually, equivalent to several monographs, nonetheless, is a non-traditional element and my career has owed something to taking on these other roles on the basis of those experiences that have given me an institutional role, which I'm sure helped underpin my chair when I got it..., so... I suppose the two things that strike me about it is, one, that doing the 'wrong' kind of research, given the kind of advice people tend to report being given with reference to REF, has not done me any harm and actually I've been able to build a very different portfolio of research without that being an obstacle, and which people have understood or been wanting to accept as genuine, and I've had to explain it, but I've been able to do so... I don't have a sense of [the academic career] as being a completely broken structure, although I think some other people do..." (professor, humanities, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

Thus, despite careful choices being made to optimise progression opportunities, the strains of achieving the steps required for a linear career could also be detected. Extended research interests, and commitment to disciplinary or professional associations, were seen as highly motivating and valued in coping with increasing organisational pressures and requirements, while retaining a focus on activity that was likely to reinforce the case for progression. Therefore much would seem to depend on individual attitudes about what might be possible in relation to traditional structures associated with linear career paths with an associated timeline. It was also clear that vertical networks, ie those that connected the individual with people of influence in the institutional and disciplinary hierarchy (Putnam 2000; Angervall et al 2018), with links to mentors and senior supporters who can confer advantage, could be a critical factor, thus: "it's a matter of finding out who are the specific people who you think actually can be beneficial to you and cultivating relationships with those people..., rather than always just seeing them as, you know, these are people who are just a burden on us, telling us to do X, Y and Z..." (professor, science, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

Portfolio academics

Compared with *Mainstream* academics, *Portfolio* academics appeared to demonstrate greater self-determination in actively constructing their roles, rather than necessarily seeking to fit into a pre-determined career mould. They were also more likely to hedge their bets by working with institutional norms, values and targets where possible and appropriate, but also by seeking to develop professional capital internally and externally. This was commonly in order to enhance academic activity, develop opportunities, keep options open, and/or give themselves a safety net and possible exit plan if necessary. They tended to form extended lateral networks (Angervall *et al* 2018; Putnam 2000), based on reciprocal social capital which provided mutual support and self-help. Nevertheless, some of these networks could prove significant in making a contribution to impact agendas, such as links to government agencies, business and industry, and the community.

The following pen portraits from two different pre-1992 universities illustrate two types of portfolio academic, one with a part-time appointment and ongoing community commitments outside higher education, the other someone who had built a career in higher education via part-time roles in different types of university, around family commitments and part-time study, after roles in financial services. Both had also undertaken part-time doctorates along the way. These illustrate in different ways the piecemeal fashion in which careers can develop by adding to a portfolio in ways that are not necessarily planned or anticipated from the start, using contacts and networks in different professional and disciplinary areas.

Pen Portrait 2

Well, there's a thing called a career and for some people it defines a sort of logical series of steps. In my case, it describes a sort of zigzagging way through the world. I did an undergraduate degree in science in London. I then worked, as you do, for the probation service. I lived in a collective house, so we set up a building co-operative after I got the City and Guilds in carpentry and joinery, so I worked as a carpenter for... several years. Then I met my wife and went to live [abroad]... and she brought me back to England, she wanted to do postgraduate studies and we ended up in xxxx, where I worked again as a carpenter, but just self-employed.

Then..., through her contact with [the University of xxx], I heard about things that were going on... and got involved in [applied science] education in local schools and making wildlife gardens and suchlike and then, through sort of her contacts, I got onto a project on [applied science] education... there... Through that, I did a masters in science and technology sort of policy... Then, well, my wife got a fellowship in [abroad], we went and lived in [abroad] for a year and then she got the job here... and I looked around and I saw this [applied science institute].... and it looked interesting and I walked in the door and who should be sitting there but my old... lecturer from when I

was an undergraduate... Then, a long story short..., somebody left a research project, I took over that project and then sort of bumped along, always in a part time role and that was sort of partly decided on the back of my wife having a full time job, we weren't quite sure whether our relationship would cope... with us both working full time...

Then, through several bits of research, sort of part posts, I put up a [applied science] education module on the master's programme and then the university put out a fees waiver to members of staff who wanted to do PhDs, so I signed up for a PhD and seven or more years later, after I'd become primary carer to [elderly relative] in the meantime, I ended up with a PhD. Some years later, a sympathetic head of school sort of made my job into... a part post but actually like a permanent post..., I'm up to a 0.5 now, but I've also done several, quite a lot of research projects in that time... And then through that process, I've come into a space where I've combined... a whole bunch of evening classes, I've done a welding course and ceramics and jewellery, I did a BTEC down at [specialist arts institution]... and so that's why I'd describe it as... a career through life, and then I've sort of come to a space where I've put up an undergraduate module..., so I'm trying to bring these ideas of creativity into that space... I teach woodland crafts..., so that's a nice thing to, you know, given all this employability, so it's demonstrating team skills, etc.... I'd describe myself as an educator... I see it as a process of facilitation and being a sort of creative producer in some ways..." (senior lecturer, applied science, pre-1992 university).

Pen portrait 3
I took a degree in [creative arts] and had an intention to teach... for a while, but that didn't work out due to moving location. I became self-employed for a couple of years and then I moved into a completely different field and..., I went into [financial services] and I moved up..., from being a temporary assistant, through to a person who was [more] senior... and then I became a... manager. Then, I paused to have two children and after that, came back into higher education... as a staff member, so I had a sort of five year period of childcare break... and it was quite fortunate in some ways, because I was also given the opportunity for some redundancy or a new post when the... merger took place, so I thought, well, I'll take the redundancy for now and have a think about what I want to do. So..., I took a really small part-time post at [post-2004 university] and this was as an administrator for a research unit... and it was just four hours a week, but it fitted very well with really young children. They increased my hours to six, a gigantic six hours a week and then I also took on, after a year or two, two more six hour temporary contracts, which ended up with me doing eighteen hours in three different parts of the university and so I did ten years in [post-2004 university] and during that time, having done these smaller posts..., I ended up with a post [in e-learning] and it was around the time when online learning was beginning to grow a little bit and so..., I'd been working for six of my hours in an IT services department and I applied for this small post... and when I was successful in that, I started working with

staff members, advising them on how they could introduce more technology into the way that they taught. At the same time, we started to look at having an e-learning strategy in that university, so I became involved in that. Alongside this, I had done another qualification as a staff member but as a part-time student and that was... in IT management..., so I was working different contracts to be able to balance with home life. Then... I'd applied for some temporary teaching, some sessional teaching, which was in the business school and at the same time, applied for a masters degree at [pre-1992 university]..., which was in educational research… they're a department that I'm still in contact with a little bit because, you know, some really interesting relationships were sort of started there and I've written with people who sort of connect back with some of the tutors that I had there. So, I completed that..., I ended up with a couple of modules of my own during that time and I also carried on doing some other work... and I ran an externally funded project, so I managed that and that was related to teaching and research repositories... Then, I decided to apply for a post over here at [pre-1992 university]... and whilst the post was a sort of... learning technologist type post, with a responsibility for one other employee, when I came to interview, they offered me a PhD at the same time and that was a deciding factor for me to come..." (lecturer, teaching and learning, pre-1992 university).

As might be expected, a significant number of *Portfolio* academics came from applied, practice- or business-orientated disciplines, with natural links outside the higher education sector which they used to enhance their teaching: "I think teaching without the professional experience in this field is, you are doing an injustice to the students, because I think you need to keep up-to-date and current, particularly with media because the technology is changing… Understanding the media landscape and how work is commissioned and the way that the commercial environment works, I think you have to be in it to understand it... I don't think I could give the students as high a value if I wasn't working in the field alongside the teaching... sometimes you have to make a choice if you're having two careers, you can't always do both to the full extent that you would like… But maybe that's not such a bad thing because the two can bumble along quite nicely together and complement each other in some ways as well…" (senior lecturer, humanities, post-2004 university).

Some of these individuals, including the interviewee above, worked part-time in higher education and part-time elsewhere, therefore managing parallel careers, each of which brought synergy to the other, but could also be seen as a safety net. Others kept open the possibility of a future career in another sector, including the private sector, which was a clear motivating factor for the following individual, both as a possible exit strategy if needed, as well as a more lucrative option: "[academic] research doesn't pay as much as industry.... I can definitely see myself going out of academia… I quite like the idea that I could go there eventually, I mean I'd need more project work and more experience if I did do it, but it's always nice to have that card in your hand, as

opposed to once you've played it you haven't got it any more… in academia you can always keep hold of a private card, especially as you get a lot more experience that card becomes particularly valuable..., you can go elsewhere, you can stay, you've got options…" (research fellow, social science, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

Thus some individuals took the initiative in using their academic work as a base for building a portfolio that could possibly provide a bridge to another type of career if necessary: "... outreach is something that I've always really enjoyed doing, so when I first started, the deputy head of department... saw that I was happy to be involved in this and so essentially, within a couple of months, handed it over to me and I was surprised by how little that we did... and there was money behind it, so I did essentially give myself probably more work because of that, so I wanted us to have things like summer schools and we didn't have any work experience opportunities and things like that, so I have created more things in that sense" (teaching fellow, science, pre-1992 Russell Group university). In this case, because of the individual's interest and active agency, middle managers in the department were willing to make discretionary space and time available to them to extend their portfolio. Nevertheless, there were indications that this person, while adopting a *Portfolio* approach for the time being, had aspirations to move up the career ladder, and were becoming aware that they needed to think about the steps they might take to do this: "I would definitely be looking for a senior teaching fellow role and it would be one that actually has time for research... I do want to be successful in my career, so I think possibly having a more kind of actual think about where I want to go and be more strategic about the roles I'm taking on would be a good decision..." (teaching fellow, science, pre-1992 Russell Group university). A growing awareness of career structures and possibilities, and that decisions needed to be made about how best to allocate their time, suggest that they could become *Mainstream* in the future, although they were also aware of the difficulty of developing vertical networks with those who might influence a career: "I think it's not that easy, I think I'm just lucky or happen to have found out how to sort of be in the same room as these people, rather than there being... an obvious forum to speak to these people" (teaching fellow, science, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

Others felt that they did not fit precisely into a single discipline or activity, and therefore used their lateral contacts to build a support network to share and develop practice: "there is a growing number of people like me, but we don't have quite a reference group... I have several services portfolios and I'm sitting beside people who have single portfolios, but nonetheless, the reason I'm mentioning those groups is those groups..., our community of practice help to share in terms of developments that are happening in their services that I can think about and bring back" (educational developer, pre-1992 Russell Group university). However, extended activity, along with the impact that resulting networks could offer, is now seen in some disciplines and institutions as an important component of applications for progression, suggesting that

the *Portfolio* approach may increasingly become the norm: “The professorial application is much more than just having a list of four star journal articles, there’s a lot more to it in terms of individual profile and as I say externality… we look to support the economic prosperity of this region... In my heart I am a business academic, business practitioner turned academic, with the emphasis on business… I think if you’ve never experienced the cut and thrust of a private practice in business, I think it’s a chink in a CV…” (reader, business, post- 2004 university).

***Niche* academics**

Niche academics are likely to be driven by considerations of service to students, colleagues and/or their professional communities, often with an aim of achieving a sense of security and work-life balance. Their motivations may also stem from a sense that it may not be possible to undertake both teaching and research to the highest standards, with a preference therefore to focus on their strengths. Positive aspects of teaching-only and research-only roles were thereby recognised by those who wished to undertake these types of roles. They are likely to have a sense of vocation, particularly to students. As one said, “I get to help the students in terms of developing themselves... I see my graduates as impact” (teaching fellow, engineering, post-1992 university). There is also a sense in which *Niche* academics might be seen as representing earlier, ‘ideal’ conceptions of academic life, based on a vocation and dedication to a discipline, with an understanding that progression will, by default, automatically flow from this. Thus: “I think academia is a way of life, as opposed to a job, it’s a life choice. It certainly worked out that way for me, and personal life is geared towards that as well really...” Nevertheless, in contemporary environments this had led to a stark choice for this individual: “The main sacrifice… I’ve made, unconsciously… is that I haven’t been able to start a family, and now that’s passed me by…” (lecturer, social science, post-1992 university).

Similarly, past conceptions of the academic as the ‘gentleman (or woman) scholar’, not consciously making moves to develop a career, are reflected in some of the narratives: “I just keep dabbling at research... I’m protecting myself by doing a little bit of everything... I love how I can do a little bit of research without a lot of pressure, how I can do teaching well, how I can still engage with the community and bring that into my teaching... I’ve been here long enough and I feel very privileged and have been very lucky, but I kind of just do my own thing” (senior lecturer, social science, post-1992 university). Compared with *Portfolio* academics, this person is “protecting” themselves by spreading their activity, but within the comfort of known boundaries, and without actively seeking new opportunities or taking risks. Others simply enjoyed what they were doing and had no sense of wanting to move on: “I could be a research fellow for ten years, I’d probably be happy enough, I enjoy doing research and it’s nice” (research fellow, social science, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

At times ‘satisficing’ approaches were evident, ie taking the view that things were good enough for the time being, therefore acceptable, even if the ideal and optimal scenario might not be in view or even available. In this sense, such narratives reflect Bhabha’s (1994) concept of “splitting” whereby people go along with formal policy for the time being, but also develop their own interests and ambitions in whatever way they can, including for instance the use of workload models. This could be with the aim of preserving family life, maintaining a sense of security, and/or focusing on specific interests, for instance: “I am… doing something that I don’t dislike… I’ve got kids, I need to be home, it’s convenient, this university is five miles away from where I live, I can be a big fish in a small pond here, the money is good for what I have to do, I don’t have any management responsibilities... you dig a trench for yourself, so people know who you are, so in the way people know me here, they know what I do, my strengths and weaknesses…” (reader, social science, post-2004 university). The following respondent also included a strong commitment to activity in the third world in their motivation to stay put geographically and in career terms: “Family is too important to me to commute..., so unless I was desperate, I wouldn’t commute... More to the point, I just see myself having a good research project in a good research team and doing good... science and not just being... a lot about impact..., bringing master’s students over from less developed countries..., capacity building, which we do a lot of here in our department and I’d want to be doing that, wherever I was based..., so just doing good science and at a career progression which probably wasn’t amazingly quick...” (research fellow, applied science, pre-1992 university).

Another individual saw a possible trajectory as moving back and forth between high earning and high comfort roles over time, assuming that these were unlikely to be combined in one post: “... of course, it’s nice to have more money..., but for the money I'm getting here now, it’s fine, I mean, I don’t have children..., I don’t have family commitments, so I can live pretty well and travel and do things with the money I earn. Of course, I find money important, but then I think also I value that I’m happy with the job and I think that’s important, because..., you can earn a lot of money and then be miserable and you know, it doesn’t compensate..., or maybe... I can work for, you know, a couple of years in a very profitable job and kind of save a lot and then move back again to maybe a less profitable one, with better conditions or, I don’t know, I mean, that idea has crossed my mind too, like, let’s do a bit of sacrifice for a couple of years...” (research fellow, social science, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

Niche academics also tend to become involved in non-quantifiable activity such as pastoral care, a role that often fell outside workload calculations, and they could be vulnerable in the sense of unconsciously opting out of credit bearing activity. Despite the fact that pastoral care could be a vital element in the student experience, it tended to be invisible: “I suppose pastoral care does fall under teaching, but to be honest, it feels like a very different thing from teaching and I think that it is increasingly... that

academics... are finding themselves in a pastoral role and it's something that I think some people relish more than other people and it's something that... isn't completely clear cut what your pastoral role is and to what extent, what you need to do to fulfil it and so on, but I think it's a very important aspect of our everyday lives when we're dealing with students" (professor, science, pre-1992 Russell Group university). *Niche* academics can therefore be useful to the institution in doing this 'unpaid' and often unacknowledged work, and in this respect may be more likely to be seen as "academic artisans" (Brew *et al* 2018).

Interestingly, there were also indications that commitments to, for instance, external community work undertaken on a semi-voluntary basis, as in the case of the following pen portrait, had the potential to become absorbed into institutional strategy, almost by default, and to contribute to impact. This is an example of policy being informed by practice, via a bottom up initiative. The pen portrait also clearly illustrates how individual expectations and motivations form part of the implicit psychological contract between institution and employees:

Pen portrait 4
... since I've had this role and the temporary roles leading up to it, I have continued to engage with community groups in different ways, so for example, outside of work, I do some voluntary work in the field that I research in and that I used to work in, that's clearly outside of work. Inside of work, I try to keep relationships with organisations in the community that are relevant to my research, and then there's a grey area of organisations that I'm part of, that I'd want to be part of even if I didn't have the academic job, so I don't feel like I'm kind of involved as a representative of my institution or something and I don't feel like I'm involved simply because of my research interests, I'm involved because I believe in them as an activist, I'm committed and so on. Then, on the other hand, I have increasingly tried to incorporate most of that work into my paid work time, because I just felt like I could do more and more things that are related to my research, will benefit my institution in terms of impact and in terms of me being likely to get research funding... it's quite blurry what counts as research or research related or community engagement... and I think it's been good because it means that I'm not doing a huge amount of work that is related to work but isn't work and I kind of, it just makes things a bit more achievable..., so it's one reason I really wanted to stay here, but also they really care about teaching, I really do feel, not always in the ways I'd maybe want them to, but you know, there are good things... I actually don't know where my career will go and I feel quite fuzzy about that... Some days I think, I'd love to do this for ten years, more, for the rest of my working life, it's an amazing job, it feels like such a privilege, it's also, I know for some people it feels badly paid if they've maybe been in banking or business, [but] for me, coming from a community based occupation, the pay is very good and that's not a kind of primary motivator for me. I just feel in a very privileged position, to work doing something I

love, I love all the elements of my job and very interesting work and doing research that I think does something useful and good in the world and getting paid well for it, I can't believe it, I sometimes just pinch myself... So, in some ways, I really want to be here in ten years' time, for me, that's about being here, staying in the same institution, to try and build things and try and improve things and partly because I'm not very ambitious, I'm not very interested in promotions, I'm not very interested in moving around for kind of careerist reasons. I'd move for other reasons, I'd move..., if they attacked... autonomy, if they started making us do more things in a more structured way or if they watched us more or, you know, there's things that would make me leave; and then things that would make me more likely to stay would be things like having a more diverse working environment and paying more attention to issues of equality... Sometimes I just think it's a sick working culture, it's making people ill and it's not okay, so sometimes I want to go and work in a health food shop or in a garden and I don't care and they can pay me [the] minimum wage..., I can live on [the] minimum wage, I've done it before, so sometimes I just think, sod it, I'm leaving. So, my ten year plan isn't, like, you know, get the next grant and go to the next level and be promoted, I see it like a two path thing, where, carry on and do good stuff and get better as a researcher and keep contributing here to the teaching and to my colleagues, or do it as far as I can, but I'm not going to stay if it's going to make me ill, I'm not interested, or if I can't do what I believe in... there are parts of the impact agenda that are problematic, but it does give me an opportunity to be deeply engaged in the communities I want to be engaged in and that's really good (lecturer, social science, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

However, a potential problem for *Niche* academics, particularly those on a teaching track, is that they can feel exploited or even blocked: "... the career path to a chair is extremely difficult. This is something which has impacted on me particularly and within a university, if you haven't got a chair..., you've hit a glass ceiling..., there's a very small number of people who have progressed to the chair in education, on the education route... It's not very well defined but it's also, it's very difficult to..., if you're completely overloaded with routine, mundane tasks, you don't have time to build a research profile" (senior lecturer, science, pre-1992 university). This also suggests that some individuals may become *Niche* by default, because they cannot find a way forward in their careers, perhaps because of a lack of awareness of the appropriate choices to make and steps to take early on. Similarly, there were some indications that early career staff may begin by having a *Niche* approach, almost by default, with the possibility of becoming *Mainstream* or *Portfolio* if, and when, they have a permanent post, depending on how secure they feel and what their aspirations are. From the institution's point of view, however, too many *Niche* academics, particularly among older cohorts, can create a log jam of staff who are not meeting research criteria, including professors: "...there are lots of academics who we should get rid of, because they're not very good... It's difficult, because some of the professors have children,

they're at university, which they have to pay money for now, they have mortgages and they want to stay and just have a quiet life and you know, their research increasingly needs to be shown to have an impact" (director of human resources, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

Conceptual framing of the three approaches

Those with a *Mainstream* approach might be said to have located themselves to a greater or lesser extent within pre-determined structures such as reward, incentive and promotion systems. In Giddens' terms (Giddens 1990; 1991), although their activity might be principally informed by the "rules and resources" of institutional structures, they also expected to interact with these structures and even have an influence on them at local level. Thus, those in *Mainstream* careers, who see themselves as advancing in linear fashion within defined periods of time, are, because of workload pressures, likely to use the structures in which they find themselves strategically, undertaking a cost benefit analysis of activities that are likely to have the most impact, or give them a distinctive profile compared with their peer group. They are thereby likely to position themselves appropriately within the hierarchies and power structures of what Bourdieu (1993) terms "cultural reproduction" within the academic field, for instance in the form of patronage from senior staff, clear-cut career paths, and strong disciplinary bases.

Those with a *Portfolio* approach use their understanding of the "rules and resources" of more than one type of space, including outside higher education, in pursuing their careers, often interpreting institutional systems in ways that support a more flexible approach. They tend to draw on external experience and contacts, are open to gaining expertise outside, as well as within, the sector, and have a more open-ended approach to their careers. They are therefore distinguished by entering and engaging with other professional fields, and thus remove themselves to different degrees from the cultural reproduction of the academic field. Depending on their relationship with a new field, for instance whether this is on a salaried, self-employed or voluntary basis, they may in turn begin to interact with and be influenced by new structures and cultures, and to develop a *habitus* within them, including position-taking. In time, they may thereby influence the academic field and its power relations.

Those with a *Niche* approach are more focused on the "rules and resources" associated with a specific area of activity, such as teaching, pastoral care or engagement. Although they are likely to have internal and external networks, they tend to see their futures within the sector and to create their *habitus* within a segment of the academic field, staying within a space that is comfortable to them and feels secure. They are likely to be motivated by internal values including a dedication to either research or teaching, service to students and/or the local community, and considerations such as work-life balance, thereby distancing themselves from markers

of impact or influence, and from being involved in the cultural reproduction of the field.However, the three approaches are not mutually exclusive. Each individual is likely to be driven by different motivations in different measures at different times in their career and according to local circumstances.

Between individuals and institutional structures

Part of the complexity of higher education institutions as organisations is the fact that staff involved in academic activity, whether or not they are on academic contracts, tend to have strong disciplinary and professional practice allegiances. In larger institutions management is likely to be devolved and to take place not only at the senior management team level, but also at the level of faculties, schools and departments. Roles such as head of department and dean may rotate between individuals who revert after their term of office to their peer group of colleagues. Relatively junior members of staff in age and level of seniority may find themselves in management roles, particularly at the team and school level, although they would not necessarily see themselves as ‘managers’. There is therefore often no clear distinction or even demarcation between ‘managers’ and ‘managed’, despite perceptions of power in relation to those with ‘management’ titles. Those managers interviewed were only too conscious that their roles involved considerable responsibility for the futures of colleagues, and that a consensual approach was most likely to achieve optimal outcomes for the majority.

However, the size and shape of institutions was also likely to have an influence on perceptions of how they were managed. It was evident that isolation could occur in both small and large institutions, those that were on a single campus, and those that were geographically dispersed, as in the following multi-site institution: “I think one of the other big issues... we’re the only [science] people based on this campus, so the research building is at xxx... and our faculty is based at yyy, so if you think about events that happen... they're never here, so we’re always travelling..., so you're never going to bump into somebody unless it’s organised, so that kind of continuity is lost” (teaching fellow, science, pre-1992 Russell Group university). Although discussions with senior management team members often indicated good intentions, for instance in keeping communication channels clear and open, in practice this might be difficult to achieve from the point of view of the individual: “There’s this central administrative body of the university [that] tries to make things better… we’re going to offer these courses and so forth to help people develop, for example leadership skills or whatever, but I find that they take up so much time most people can’t take advantage of them with all their other duties... So I feel like there seems to be a disconnect between staff, the academic staff and the professional staff in that regard, where I know they’re trying very hard, but we don’t seem to be communicating with each other on those kinds of issues” (lecturer, science, pre-1992 university).

Although there were not hard-and-fast distinctions between pre-and post-1992 universities in the sample, and each institution had its own shape, culture and structure, there was a general sense of greater pragmatism among staff in the post-1992 and post-2004 universities. This included a greater awareness of the positioning of individuals in relation to formal requirements and structures, and sector norms and targets, perhaps as a result of the greater prevalence of practitioner-based roles. There also tended to be less extended or international networks, with a focus on those needed to do the job, for instance, professional practice links and communities of practice.

The role of the human resources director and their department, not unexpectedly, was a critical one that sometimes demonstrated a divergence of perceptions between the directors interviewed and academic staff, notwithstanding efforts on the part of directors to portray a user friendly, fair and equitable operation. The directors of human resources themselves were often only too aware of this, thus: “my real mandate… is to reduce the amount of central control and compliance on the university and to allow more academic freedom… I’m on the academic side to try and build commitment... I know that’s a big [culture] clash in most universities...” (director of human resources, pre-1992 Russell Group university). Where this worked it was likely to have a positive effect on morale: “The vice-chancellor will do a number of all staff talks, where every member of staff is invited and he will outline the challenges that we are currently facing and the university’s plans, and also make it very clear what our responsibilities as members of staff are to facing these challenges... people stay here because they like working here. People are given the freedom to be creative and quite autonomous, but with... clear strategic direction from the top” (lecturer, student support, post-1992 university).

Some institutions had firmer, more publicised structures than others that were more flexible and subject to modulation at local level. There was some indication that this was more likely to be the case in post-1992 universities, with a tradition of corporate management, reinforced by manageable sub-units, whereby “the size of the school is such that you can keep a grip on it” (professor, applied science, post-1992 university). However, there was also evidence that over-scripted procedures can lead to dissonance between policy and practice, as in the following example where what was said at information-giving seminars about promotion and progression differed from formal policy statements: “they’re like insider seminars... they’re open to everyone, but they give you the perspective of... ‘when we get to this stack of applications, this is what we really expect’, and it’s really quite different to the paperwork that gets sent out. There’s definitely potential conflicts between the way in which the promotion system is seen to work on paper and then how it seems to pan out within the process itself...” (reader, humanities, post-1992 university).

Furthermore, where standard structures, policies and processes are designed to cater for what is assumed to be a homogeneous majority of staff, an increasingly fluid situation means that exceptions may also represent at least a substantial minority, if not a majority, for whom special consideration and treatment is needed in relation to, for instance, promotion, career progression and professional development. These include people in educational development roles, on professional contracts undertaking academic activity, teaching-only roles trying to develop a research profile, research-only roles trying to obtain experience in teaching, and a range of other bespoke roles. As a result anomalies can arise in relation to individual roles and career paths, for instance: “what was interesting is a lot of academics did apply for my job that I have now and they were viewing it as a stepping stone to their own research career, so they were going to attempt to do exactly that, which is try and run a research group, whilst being a teaching fellow, and that isn’t what the department was looking for...” (teaching fellow, science, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

This was often exacerbated by a lack of clarity around job descriptions and assumptions around proportions of teaching, research and other activity: “... the writing up of papers for publication and doing active research, that isn’t in my job description, even though I have been asked to do it, so it’s hard to carve out the time to do it when it’s not actually part of my workload, as it were” (educational developer, pre-1992 Russell Group university). At the same time, and in practice, an element of fluidity and ambiguity may suit both institutions and individuals, for instance around promotion criteria, the value accorded to teaching and innovation, and the balance of teaching and research, as this enables modulation of proportions of activity over time as an individual’s career progresses: “We will have some professors who do very little teaching, we probably have some academics who do very little teaching as well, so I don’t think we’re impervious to the argument, we just don’t deal with it so crisply and overtly as having teaching-only or research-only contracts” (director of human resources, post-1992 university).

The following pen portrait of someone who was appointed as a programme leader in the humanities, but on a professional contract at senior lecturer level, illustrates this well, and typifies a number of similar issues faced by individuals (and their line managers) who are unable to make structures and processes work effectively for them:

Pen portrait 5
I think I probably am on the radar generally as somebody that the institution is not quite sure what to do with me sort of contractually..., so I think individuals are all very willing and supportive but the structures... the question nobody can seem to answer is what threshold of research I need to be able to show to move onto an academic contract, because when I first started asking, the dean was saying, oh, you know, it’s

not really about trying to prove yourself on the research side, you need to show your education, your leadership and that you're doing some research and..., you'll basically have a different profile..., but nobody's been able to say... what the threshold is to sort of qualify to move over and the latest I've heard is, oh well, we'd need world leading researchers on our academic contract... so at the moment, to be honest, I feel stuck in a bit of a catch 22, that I can't do the research because there's just not the time, but I can't move over without that... I'm getting the messages that the things that I do and that I'm being asked to do are then not being necessarily recognised or rewarded as valuable, even though it says in the strategy..., there's that mismatch..., we're all really proud of the culture in our department and the way we engage with each other and the students, and so I think that's a positive way, we don't fit into some of the more hidebound sort of structures of some departments… as soon as REF comes back onto the radar, people need to be committing to things, their mind is on..., especially people who've got work to do..., need to be making sure they're in the position they need to be in for REF, so personally, if I wanted to be returned, I'd have to have some leave to get the book done in time to make the contract deadline...

Now, the deputy... could do it, it's not impossible, but my value to xxx is as the person who runs the xxx programme, so it's whether the sort of research benefits, which the university would get, the research benefit of my book, whether that's enough to then sort of counteract the inconvenience of xxx dealing with standing arrangements. Also, I'm not technically allowed the leave on my contract, so they'd have to be making a pretty big exception, so that's the starkest thing really, is that the thing that I need, that I think I'm being told I need to do to progress, I'm just not in a position to do... I don't think there's a clear pathway and I don't think it's facilitated by the structures that exist at the moment, so ideally, I'd like to be on the kind of contract where I have got time to develop a more balanced profile, so at the moment, I've got this asymmetric profile with, I'm doing actually lots of stuff that's probably higher than senior lecturer on the leadership and the education side but, as I say, the research is not considered to be commensurate with the SL profile... I don't want to become the leading researcher in my field, that's not what drives me, but I do want personally to have made that progress... so whether it's a programme director role or vice-dean role or something like that, I think that would be what I see myself doing in the next five or ten years... Everybody who finds out about my contract is surprised, everyone expects me to be on an academic contract, people see me as an academic, I think, so it's something that people want to sort of help sort out, but we never get any further forwards because the institution doesn't know, I think, on a fundamental level, what to do with me... I do trust the people involved to try and make things work, it's just I don't know if the structures are there to really help them figure it out... (programme leader (senior lecturer equivalent), humanities, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

One of the effects of increased policy requirements on institutions by government and external bodies may be that structures have become more hierarchical, with longer lines of communication, and institutions may therefore wish to consider ways in which this could be ameliorated, if only at the faculty or school level, in order to play to individual motivations and strengths: “it’s that general understanding that you’ve got to be a team, but you’ve got to accept that each member of the team is very different and is required to do different things… as opposed to… a management sort of thing” (director of human resources, post-1992 university). This seemed to work best at local level, as in the following case, with a sense of collective responsibility among peers, even if this could lead to more work: “...it’s not very hierarchical in this school, which I really think is wonderful, that suits me; the university feels very hierarchical, very top down, I don’t feel much identification with the university [but] I do feel that identification with my school and I'm here because of my school and my colleagues... The tension is that..., although the non-hierarchical nature of the school is a really good thing, there’s a sense of collective responsibility, which I think is really good, but what that means is that it’s very hard not to overwork or not to pull your weight with everything, because I feel that I don’t want to just make more work and stress for everyone else” (lecturer, social science, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

Acknowledging a wider constituency of academic and associated staff, including those working in a ‘Third Space’ between academic and professional spheres of activity (Whitchurch 2013; Veles *et al* 2018), and working with a greater range of contributions, is also likely to be accompanied by a playing to local synergies, as in the case of the following person working in an academic practice department: “I personally feel very proud of the fact that we’ve had two senior IT directors take a postgraduate certificate [in teaching and learning]… library staff, careers [staff]... which helps a dialogue across the services and support staff and the many other professional staff that fall across that... We would go so far [as]… to call it a widening participation effort... amongst staff... It’s quite clear to us... that there are some very clear benefits in the way that people then build further partnerships or work together on committees, you see it in different forms all the time… To help that flow of conversation, to see into each other’s worlds...” (lecturer, teaching and learning, pre-1992 university).

The relationship between higher education institutions and their staff, and the distinctive nature of individual academic identities as having an element of independence from the institution, is encapsulated in the following comment: “I think..., for an academic staff to be very successful, there’s an element where they’re almost self-employed and their identity is what sells things out there. So, it’s very difficult at times to switch from that, almost self-employed entrepreneur, back into saying you’re part of an organisation... I don’t think, I don’t know about a lot of other organisations but I think that’s unique... so it’s harder to build a university identity amongst all of your staff, particularly your academic staff, because what you’re asking them to do very

often, your success is often based on their identity as an expert in their field, so they're multiple identities" (educational developer, pre-1992 Russell Group university). Appreciating this tension between individual roles and identities, and what is required to make a contribution to the collective institution, would appear to be a pre-requisite for those leading higher education institutions, thereby putting "much more emphasis on distributed leadership and interpersonal networks, the relationship of organizational goals to organizational mission statements, collaboration and cooperation, and [using] negotiation and persuasion... to empower staff" (Deem and Eggins 2017).

A delicate balance

A delicate balance therefore exists between policies and practices aimed at the greatest good of the greatest number and the sensitive optimisation of local resources, including staff, and it is this that is often difficult to achieve as the system and institutions become larger. It may be significant that in the smaller post-2004 university in the sample, which had a cohesive history and low turnover from its days as a college, the majority of those interviewed were categorised as *Niche,* in that they were settled and reasonably content. By comparison, a large, multi-campus institution can find it more difficult to align policy and practice: "I think xxx still struggles as a particular institution because of this geographical dispersion and the different traditions that have come in, and not all of those have been showing signs of completely disappearing... and it's a slightly Baroque structure, with governance that doesn't always work particularly effectively... I think it still struggles with how information flows work, in ways that make the life of mid-career academics peculiarly difficult..." (professor, humanities, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

This delicate balance also involves managing constraints and freedoms, creating tensions for both institutional managers (balancing market considerations and stimulating creativity) and academic staff more generally (balancing their own interests and motivations with pragmatic considerations of organisational structures and processes). The balance between teaching and research is perhaps the most critical, particularly for *Mainstream* academics: "I guess [early career academics] need to find some way of dividing their time, probably the biggest thing. I guess if they really want to do well and they're really passionate about research, they're probably realistically going to have to let the teaching be quite mediocre, and not... try and be a perfectionist on that. It depends what track they want to take, I suppose. I think most people join because they want to do research. Equally, they don't want to look an idiot when they're teaching in front of hundreds of people... so [there is] a balance to be had" (reader, science, post-1992 university). There was also an ongoing sense of individuals trying to achieve both security and flexibility. This leaves managers at all levels trying to optimise what academic staff can offer individually and collectively, in ways that are productive both for them and the institution. Efforts to do this often occur through professional development programmes, although the narratives suggest that

extreme care is needed to tailor them so that individual benefits accrue, rather than a sense of compliance with requirements, for instance to attend certain development programmes, and to have this on the record.

Recognition of problems associated with a mechanistic attitude, to workload models in particular, was indeed recognised by two senior managers in two different institutions: “What we have inadvertently designed is what I call a blue collar solution for a white collar workforce… We have now given it a sort of pseudo-scientific basis and what happens is that people start doing the counting, ‘I’m sorry manager but I can’t take on any more because my load says I’m full’, whereas actually... good people just do the work… they have the… inbuilt chip, they would probably go the extra mile regardless because that’s just how they are…” (director of human resources, post-1992 university); and “[workload models] are for people who put wheels on cars, 35 hours, two hour lunch break, 10 minute coffee break… That’s exactly the opposite of what you would want a professional to do… So I find all this completely stupid. However many universities are wedded to workload models” (professor, social science, pre-1992 university).

Nevertheless, there was elsewhere recognition of the value of such models, provided that they were sensitive to individual circumstances: “One of the things we were working on just towards the end of my time [as an academic manager] in the faculty was, could we come up with a model which would enable people just to shift the balance, without it being seen as any kind of judgement on their capacity to do different aspects of the career... I think people got more scared of taking on leadership roles, despite the fact that the rewards might look more instantly obvious now than they used to be... they were... scared because that means that they might not be REFable... The flexibility you need as Head of Department to get a department to keep going is not always there among colleagues and certainly finding someone at short notice to take on a big administrative role in a department is now, I think, much more difficult, particularly if that person is already committed to a REF strategy that they’ve signed off with a department..., and says, woah, you know, you can’t now tell me to be head of exams...” (professor, humanities, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

Conversely, as illustrated by one individual who ran an online, distance learning programme that was not amenable to a standard workload model, being outside such a model altogether could mean that they felt overloaded: “I'm not part of any work allocation management whatsoever, my job is literally to do the [distance learning programme] and whatever that requires, that time is indefinite, which is actually quite scary and I did ask to be on [the workload model] and they found it too difficult to do..., because it’s set up with a standard model of, you deliver two lectures a week, you deliver three seminars a week and I don’t do that, I monitor online forums, I record lectures in advance, so I’m delivering those lectures on the day, they’re all done in

advance, massively front-loaded, so rather than deal with that, which they found too difficult, they just sort of said, we won't include you in the work allocation model, we just won't give you extra departmental responsibilities, which hasn't really worked out too well" (lecturer, social science, pre-1992 university). In this case, being excluded from a workload model could lead to feelings of inequity in terms of workload. Balancing equity with flexibility could also therefore be a challenge, particularly for local managers responsible for making sensitive adjustments.

Perceptions of what was variously described as "management", "administration" and "bureaucracy" can be unpacked in different ways. Relationships with academic managers and professional staff are often good at the individual and day-to-day level but may be less well regarded, and indeed the subject of tension, when seen as a collective and in the abstract. Thus the following individual found their local professional colleagues in a school more helpful than their academic managers: "Our administration in [subject] is fantastic, I think they are great, they are people I would be stuck in a lift with much more happily than some of my academic colleagues, they are a wonderful support network, we work well together... they're as committed as I am and... I think sometimes with academic colleagues who are not as committed, you feel more of an affinity with administrators who have a strong commitment..." (reader, humanities, pre-1992 university). Again this represents a balance to be had for local managers in interpreting institutional policy in a way that is palatable to academic colleagues.

Terminology was also important, with 'human resources', 'management' and even 'administration' being increasingly contested in a higher education environment. As one director of human resources put it: "I am very wary about 'management'... because... it has become... quite a divisive word... it needs to be the relationships that people have with each other, the relationships that people have with their line managers, so within the institution, that tends to be kind of the key" (director of human resources, post-1992 university). At the same time a distinction might be made between between what might be termed technical problems requiring technical solutions, often to do with IT processes and the difficulties of dealing with a mass system, often referred to as "bureaucracy", and the application of, for instance, workload models and staff development strategies that should be designed so that they are flexible enough to be tailored to individual needs. Thus, on the one hand structures can provide an equitable system and a sense of security. On the other hand, if their purposes are not fully understood, or are seen as non-facilitative or damaging, they can be regarded as irritating formalities that have to be complied with. This represents a fine line and it may be that more attention should be paid to presentation and explanation of institutional processes and requirements.

Negative perceptions could also be exacerbated by the nature and tone of communications, even with local managers, as in the following instance: “what was a little bit grating was over the summer, getting an email cold [from the head of department] saying, because of your other roles [widening participation, equity], you’re now going to be deputy admissions tutor, so I’m just like, is there going to be a discussion about this, so…, it was sort of sugar coated with the fact that it would be good for my career progression” (teaching fellow, science, pre-1992 Russell Group university). Although time pressures may well have caused this form of communication, a lack of dialogue, and the fact that it was not part of an ongoing discussion about career development, resulted in a negative reaction and potential resentment, which could perhaps have been avoided. Similarly at the collective level, a neglect of process in implementing strategy can leave a communication gap between senior management teams and ground level, which jeopardises new developments: “there’s a lot of talk about aims, but not how to get there, and I think that’s a real problem and I think there are people that could make, you know, could help on the stepping stones, but they're not brought in... I think that’s, unfortunately, a university-wide problem, in that there’s..., a lot of discussions higher up, there are obviously grass roots discussions, but there’s not enough effort to bridge the gap and find out what’s effective... [as an example] there’s stuff like lecture capture, they just said, across the board this is now obligatory and people were like, no... this is my content, you can’t record it and stuff..., so I think there are ways to approach it and that possibly wasn’t the best one. So telling people why lecture capture is important, how it’s used, show them data as to why it’s beneficial for students and accessibility and stuff, but I think... it was kind of a missed opportunity...” (teaching fellow, science, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

In day-to-day terms it is often a question of getting buy in and changing practice on the ground so that it influences policy bottom up: “One thing that does happen often over time is just you reach a critical mass and it tips it over to the point that you’ve got generally the change that you need... you have to plan it with an understanding that it’s about changing people’s behaviours, getting people to buy in, getting people to appreciate that there’s a reason for doing this and to find a way of addressing their interests or making it easier for them... so you try to encourage a bottom up approach but you need to have senior people reinforcing it... Sometimes, to be honest, what is really happening is things have become custom and practice...” (educational developer, pre-1992 Russell Group university). This illustrates the view that “The landscape of practice is... not congruent with the reified structures of institutional divisions and boundaries” (Wenger 2010: 131). Effectively this is likely to mean allowing policy to be sensitive to practice, and adjusting relationships across institutional structures to facilitate this.

Furthermore, from an individual point of view, the following example indicated that it was possible, by self-informing, with a little effort, to engage positively with structures which may on the face of it seem intractable: “They [professional association]... engage in a serious way, to try and change things, without just moaning in the way that you... do when you face the government or whatever, and I think you learn quite a lot from that, both playing the game but also trying to stick to your principles..., that’s very useful when you come back into an institution. It also means you might know where to go and look in an institution to find the key stuff out [for instance about open access]... you know it must be somewhere, whereas many colleagues, I think, are not even aware what they don’t know... so there have been a number of occasions I was able to come back to xxx and dig, to find out something that I knew was being decided somewhere and was apparently crucial, but I had no idea from within the institution it was even under consideration (professor, humanities, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

As shown above, optimising the balance between maintaining structural requirements, achieving relatively secure prospects for individuals, and promoting creativity is likely to require a top-down, bottom-up iteration. Thus, “The process of engaging drives engagement… The act of doing it, the act of interacting, communicating, conversation has an impact on how engaged people feel” (director of human resources, post-1992 university). A number of senior managers expressed an understanding of this and an ability, in sociological terms, to ‘take the part of the other’ by appreciating the motivations of academic colleagues: “‘I'm interested in my research more than my employer’ is my understanding of academics, so you can try and control that and then they may just leave, or you can try and work with it, to try and build more commitment and my view is, I'm on the academic side to try and build commitment... we need... to step back to say, how can we get the best out of the academics and how can the professional services people understand how to develop that, rather than tell them what to do” (director of human resources, pre-1992 Russell Group university). The relationship between human resources departments and middle managers such as heads of department, in particular, was a critical one in enabling processes to be flexed as necessary in relation to individual needs. Dialogue at this level appeared to be the most productive, and some managers took their responsibility to provide support to staff seriously, reflecting the idea of vertical social capital which can give access to, for instance, contacts and opportunities, even funding, that would not otherwise be available: “I think the responsibility of being a professor is... about... being in a supportive role within the department...” (professor, teaching and learning, post-1992 university).

There was also evidence from academic staff that well-trained and qualified professional staff can help to remove the burden of administration: “I was very much of the opinion we should be bringing in high quality administrative staff, so that the

academic staff don't end up doing it because... the administrative burdens are growing and growing, the level of detail you had to put into things and the load on academics was growing with that, so it's better to bring people in (senior lecturer, science, pre-1992 university). This was corroborated by senior colleagues: "If you don't have good administrative support, then what tends to happen is that you have expensive academics spending their time, not only doing things they shouldn't be doing, but actually getting really frustrated because they're spending time doing things which others should be doing" (director of human resources, post-1992 university); and "you've got a third class of people… who are fundamentally engaged in bridging the university and the outside world and these people are the kinds of people who negotiate arrangements with government funding agencies, who negotiate with companies, who arrange a lot of the programmes that we do with small businesses and things like that… It's professional managers..., they might come from businesses, lobbyists,… who have a particular professional skill because we need it… I think some of the academics adjust to this wonderfully because they say here's someone to help me… and others feel threatened by it because they're saying these people are impinging on my turf… (professor, social science, pre-1992 university). These positive views of professional staff show them as a critical link providing advice as to the appropriateness of local practice, and the likelihood of successful implementation or adaptation of institutional policy, thereby promoting synergy between the two.

In practice, this was likely to depend on having professional staff on hand at the right time and place, and their gaining the confidence of academic colleagues, often on an individual, one-to-one basis. This is another example of perceptions being driven by individual relationships rather than a collective view of 'managers' or 'management' in the abstract, articulated as follows: "[supporting students] is a developing role and it's a developing identity,… I think we have to... keep moving in that direction and... create closer integration between academics and..., academic skills support staff" (teaching fellow, applied science, post-1992 university). Others felt that having a hand in administrative tasks enabled them to ensure quality and influence processes: "I know quite a few of my colleagues don't like the administration side of things, but at the same time, because..., I didn't do my undergraduate degree until I was 25, so I've had a non-traditional route into this, I understand that rather than just sitting around complaining about administration, if you do it, it at least gets done well and makes everybody's life easier..." (lecturer, humanities, pre-1992 university).

'Double edged swords'

However, it was apparent that the tensions outlined above can give rise to a number of paradoxes or 'double edged swords' in that, for instance, there was often a sense of being lucky to work in higher education and yet of living on a 'knife edge', as with the following individual who confessed to mixed feelings about obtaining a research grant: "I'll be so happy if I get it and I'll be worried and stressed; and if I don't get it, I'll be

disappointed and relieved, so it's interesting" (lecturer, social science, pre-1992 Russell Group university). Others were doing things in their own time such as a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and pedagogic research to make themselves more employable, with a potential tension between willingly taking on extra roles for the purposes of a CV, and feeling overworked. Furthermore, ideals of academic autonomy may seem less attractive if there is no support from a line manager and mentor, and if people feel isolated with a sense that they are 'on their own'. In turn, well-meaning mentors and line managers may themselves be out of date in their advice to younger staff.

Similarly, years of insecurity can be reinterpreted as valuable experience once a permanent job is secured, with a sense of tables being turned: "...the existence of temporary contracts is extremely, in some ways... stressful for young people, but in other ways, I think it's fantastic that people end up moving between different institutions, getting experience in different labs, getting to know people... So, even though it's a painful time for many people, I think it's good that PhD students come out and have that period where they're moving around and working in different institutions, gaining different types of experience and expanding their research networks" (professor, science, pre-1992 Russell Group university). Nevertheless achieving this requires persistence and a certain amount of confidence, and some decide to settle for other types of role in an academic environment, such as the following individual: "I love teaching and I really miss teaching and that is something, doing research and teaching and even the administrative side that comes with lectureships... that I could see myself enjoying for the next 40 years..., so in that way, it's very much my preferred option, but the reality of employment makes it my non-preferred option, because as much as I would love to do that, I want a job that pays me well and I get leave and I can buy a house and get a mortgage and I know that the academic career path isn't stable enough to do that..." (educational developer, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

It was also pointed out that academic managers themselves were subject to inherent tensions between sympathy for academic endeavour and the requirements of institutional management: "to be a professor you have... to be… incredibly focused… incredibly self-motivated, possibly quite brutal in relation to achievement… When you're in management roles that is almost by definition challenged by the role and the philosophy inherent in being a professor, so if you get a professor who is a good manager, that is rare... I think there is a credibility inherent in people's behaviours that is almost outwith their title" (senior lecturer, health, post-1992 university). Such dilemmas, and the fact that compromises may be required, was eloquently expressed by one professor looking back over their career: "And how do you train people for that [institutional leadership]? I don't think it's easy to do, if they're also going to be good at their disciplines... it was always a good feature of higher education institutions and... the thing that's most lost the confidence of colleagues in senior management, is their

perception that..., universities are not being run by academics... I think half of it is nonsense and nothing makes me crosser... than the kind of rather half-baked, knee jerked, ‘it’s the managers’ reaction, when in fact, without... some of the strategic decisions that have been taken, we’d all be out of a job tomorrow... that’s not just me going native, because there's lots of things I’m really cross with what goes on higher up, but also I’m under no illusions about the importance of some of the decisions they’re taking and for me the right ones... in terms of preserving employment of colleagues...” (professor, humanities, pre-1992 Russell Group university).

Conclusion

The study suggests that there has been a significant shift from linear career ladders to a variety of possible career trajectories, some of them unique to the individual, and that non-traditional, nonlinear careers may be becoming the norm. The shape of an individual career may also depend on particular initiatives and contacts, and the way in which individuals are able to harness networks, be they vertical or horizontal. Within career structures, roles themselves appear to be increasingly open to interpretation and development, sometimes in other locales and outside formal hours and job descriptions. Less certainty of long-term career futures at early and mid-career stages seems to have led to a tendency for individuals to focus on the immediate team, research group or departmental community, with less sense of the higher education system beyond the home institution or region. Similarly, immediate, short term horizons and timescales seemed to dominate as the longer term became more uncertain. A diversification of the workforce and growth of disciplines to include professional and practitioner subjects may also mean that the sub-discipline is more significant as a marker of identity, with less sense of belonging to a collective ‘community of scholars’.

The narratives of interviewees also suggest that an overarching challenge for institutional leaders is to seek to close the potential gap between what are often avowedly good intentions at the policy level, and what happens in practice in day-to-day interactions at faculty, school and departmental level. Recognition of tensions that arise, common dilemmas and concerns, was one factor mentioned in different guises that could provide reassurance, if not immediate practical help, particularly to younger staff, and help to maintain motivation. This was most likely to be provided by line managers, whether at departmental or team level, who are also in the best position to understand tipping points that may occur in relation to, for instance, flexible approaches to workload models and career development.

As a conceptual framing for the study, respondents in academic and associated activity were categorised as taking *Mainstream* (adhering to formal structures and timelines, focusing on activities deemed to be most valuable), *Portfolio* (a cumulative gathering of academic and associated experience, internal and external), and *Niche*

(addressing personal values, interests and strengths), approaches to academic roles and careers. Within this framework, issues were identified about the extent to which individuals may seek to take a holistic approach to a role or career, particularly those formally appointed to undertake both teaching and research, or to focus on strengths rather than seeking to rectify gaps or even weaknesses in their profile. This was a key tension that arose repeatedly in the narratives, and may have contributed to a shift away from *Mainstream* to *Portfolio* and *Niche* approaches. It may also be that those with a *Niche* approach, for instance, may focus on local or regional agendas in institutions which themselves have a strong regional affiliation and niche portfolio, often in less metropolitan areas; whereas those with a *Portfolio* approach are more likely to be located in institutions serving a broader range of national and international agendas, often in cities, with wider networks. However, a larger study would be required to confirm such a pattern. It would appear to be more difficult to adopt a *Mainstream* approach to a career than in the past, despite the best efforts of institutions to introduce a variety of career pathways, and partly because of mixed messages, both in practice and in formal policy, about the sustainability of teaching and other possible non-research routes. Similarly the increasingly significant role of management experience in progressing a career is not necessarily laid down in formal documentation, and awareness of this may be patchy, or arise only when a role needs filling and professional advancement is held out as an incentive. It would also appear that increased mobility and diversification may have changed the nature of the individual academic's relationship with their disciplines and institutions as framing boundaries for activity, in that both can be used as platforms for broader portfolios, credibility, and recognition.

Significantly however, despite acknowledged stresses, the attractions of an academic career appear to remain strong. Late entrants in particular tended to have greater appreciation of the benefits of academia: "... being an academic… There are certain points in your timetable you have to be in different places, but the rest of your day, you're free to manage it how you wish… I could go [back] into industry and I could probably earn a lot more money, but you balance that with the quality of your life... I came in more mature to start with and I think that helps" (professor, teaching and learning, post-1992 university); and from a late entrant from government service: "[What] I enjoy about this profession is the fact that I have so much control over my time and my workload, so you know, if I want to take a day off, I can take a day off, I don't need to tell anybody, I can just work at home, work at the office, but at the same time, if things don't get done, then people will come after me... I still can't believe I get paid for reading and writing, it doesn't seem like a proper job, to be perfectly honest..." (lecturer, humanities, pre-1992 university). An element of flexibility and even ambiguity in institutional policy, at all levels, may be implicit acknowledgement of this, and therefore be accepted by both policymakers and staff.

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