'NEWER RESEARCHERS IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION: CREATING NEW IDENTITIES, COMMUNITIES & KNOWLEDGE & SHAPING POLICY IN A CLIMATE OF AUSTERITY'

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Introduction

- Report on recent study of mainly European based newer researchers in sub-field of HE, to see how these researchers connect to & with HE research/policy, contribute to knowledge and the academic community of HE researchers

- Draw on literature about changing environment for HE research, newcomers to academic work, changes to academic profession & public service professionals as policy actors/subjects

- Discuss findings – equal split between policy actors & policy subjects (also 'future influencers') & why so little involvement with HE research community

Higher education as a field of study

- Fast growing in Europe & elsewhere (Tight 2012, McFarlane & Grant 2012) evidenced by doctorates, HE journal submissions, papers at European HE conferences

- Driven by massification, Bologna, focus on students & teaching (e.g European Commission 2013), globalisation

- Research into HE, academic development, disciplinary pedagogic research (Clegg 2012); also institutional research & work by non-HE scholars (Collini 2012, Docherty 2011)

- Large base of newer HE researchers but thin infrastructure – most research groups tiny, HE little taught at ug or pgt level in Europe, few big research groups with high funding in Europe (Deem 2013)

- Many HE researchers no background in social sciences, HE research little contribution to or creative use of social theory

- Not one contested field (Bourdieu 1986, 1988, 1993b) but several.

Policy Focus on newer HE researchers

- Interested in newer researchers' engagement with HE policies:
  - The ways in which they felt they were influenced *by* policy;
  - The ways in which they felt *they* influenced or might influence policy
- Newer researchers in HE fields theoretically well positioned to be knowledgeable about HE policy, including EU polices
- Research generally increasingly being expected to contribute to policy (European Commission 2009;2011) with newer researchers alerted to significance of impact of their research on wider community (EUA 2005; Group of Eight 2013; RCUK 2013)

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Study methods

- Snowball sampling – email lists, learned societies, personal contacts etc
- Asked to self-define as newer HE researcher
- 42 semi structured interviews, f2f, Skype or phone, in spring 2012
- Most respondents studying or working in European Higher Education Area
- Asked about backgrounds, research, career plans, interactions with & notions of policy
- Checked each other's thematic analysis after coding

Examining Policy Engagement

- To conceptualise policy engagement we drew on work that discusses whether policies are seen as 'fixed texts' or located in the practices of those who enact them (Ball 1994; Ozga 2000; Vidovich 2007).

- We used a framework from Ball et al. (2011) developed in relation to school teachers which examines whether people have passive or active relationships to policy

- We examined the factors that appear to play a part in shaping respondents' relationships to policy including gender, nationality, mode of study, type & stage of doctorate, any previous work experience in HE & whether already had significant policy-related experience prior to doctorate

Framework from Ball et al (2011b)

Policy actors	Policy work
Narrators – selecting aspects of policy	Interpretation, selection and enforcement of meanings, mainly done by headteachers and the SLT
Entrepreneurs – policy advocates	Advocacy, creativity and integration
Outsiders (outside of the institution)	Entrepreneurship, partnership and monitoring
Transactors – policy seen to be done	Accounting, reporting, monitoring
Enthusiasts – embody policy	Investment, creativity, satisfaction and career
Translators – recruit to possibilities of policy	Production of texts, artifacts and events
Critics	Union representatives: monitoring of management, maintaining counter-discourses
Receivers – rely on interpretations of interpretations	Mainly junior teachers and teaching assistants: coping, defending and dependency

Gender	Female		Male		
	31 (74%)		11 (26%)		
National Location	Australasia	Canada	Mainland Europe	South America	UK and Ireland
	4 (10%)	2 (5%)	13 (31%)	2 (5%)	21 (50%)
Mode of Study	Full-time		Part-Time		
	19 (45%)		23 (55%)		
Doctoral Route	Traditional PhD		Professional Programme (including modules on policy)		
	30 (71%)		12 (29%)		
Doctoral Stage	Pre-PhD	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year or more	Post-PhD
	1 (2%)	3 (7%)	9 (21%)	16 (38%)	13 (31%)
Background before Doctorate	Established HE Career (Academic or admin)	Established Other Career	Student Politics	Masters Degree	Unstable HE role eg pt teacher
	24 (57%)	3 (7%)	3 (7%)	9 (21%)	3 (7%)

Outcomes 1

Policy actors	Number (percentage) of participants adopting this role
Narrators	1 (2%)
Entrepreneurs	6 (14%)
Outsiders	0
Transactors	0
Enthusiasts	1 (2%)
Translators	18 (43%)
Critics	2 (5%)
Receivers	31 (74%)
Future Influencer – New Category	20 (48%)
Vague	11 (26%)
Detailed	9 (21%)

Responses on policy interaction

- **Policy entrepreneur**
- I have been on the rector's think tank as a student here [university where he is doing the PhD). I definitely want to continue shaping policy as I have done since my Helsinki university student rep days (Pavi, Finland, midway current Phd but seconded from an NGO)
- **Active/critic**
- I am involved in policy work now – I have done work for the European Universities Association UA and am part of the Eurodocs Mobility Working Group - and I plan to continue this (Eleni, UK, Greek, just submitted PhD)

Passive policy responses

- **Passive/receiver:** I'm not really interested in doing or influencing policy work (it's too much responsibility), only minimally by publishing in non-academic journals. I am quite wary of researchers giving policy advice as there is often not enough information to do this and we don't know government priorities. I don't want to be a policy maker (Irina, 2nd year of PhD, UK)

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- **Future influencer:** I hope to influence policy about international students and intercultural competence at the end of my research though I know the thesis will end up on a library shelf. I think intercultural competence should be part of school students training and that of HE students too - mobility for the latter is very important (Andrej, 3rd year research student, Czech republic)

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- **Receiver/ maybe future influencer:** I would like to influence policy in HE having spent so much time and money doing a PhD on student support, but I feel my knowledge is untapped in my present role and there are few others in my own institution doing any research on HE. I feel that influencing policy would be easier in a more senior job (Grainne, half way through PhD, is in a professional services role at a different university, Ireland)

Outcomes 2

- A possible relationship between PhD stage and whether participants had passive or active roles in relation to policy (came to fore in ft year3/4 or pt equivalent;

- Those with established senior roles in HE or elsewhere more likely to have active roles in relation to policy;

- Those studying part-time and those studying professional doctorates more likely to have more active roles in relation to policy

Working in conditions of austerity

- My teaching fellow post is permanent and I know my School values me but as a lot of other academics at [my university] have been made redundant, I don't feel secure … cuts have made [my university] value teaching more but research is still more worthwhile [to the university] and there is more money in it (Maria, UK, teaching fellow, about to do PhD on HE, already has science PhD)

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- there is no policy on career paths, little research funding, and no permanent jobs. Researchers have had first a 10%, then a 15% cut – with a full-time researcher earning only 1200 Euros/month; we have a lack of rights. Since 2010 tenure has ceased; the system has collapsed as prior rules have been overturned (Rufa, Spain, postdoc)

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Stoicism in the face of austerity

- Finland has moved from a civil servant notion of academic work & many long term contracts to many more short-term contracts with only a few possibilities of tenure. I may get a tenured position or not. Academe is becoming more competitive … It is very different to 10 years ago, no one can just fix on just one thing, you have to do research, publish, administration, multiple projects, third mission etc

- (Caarina, Finland, postdoc researcher)

- My future career might be in HE or another kind of organization but things are changing fast so I don't know really. I know are a lot of temporary jobs in HE at the moment and that it is difficult for postdocs to get permanent posts. But something will turn up (Andrej, Czech Republic & New Zealand, PhD student)

Whence academic identity?

- Despite self definition as newer HE researchers, our respondents seldom had any significant connection to or with an established cadre of HE researchers

- Rather their identity seemed to rest on their PhD topic or a pre-existing employment position in HE, often not connected to doing research in HE

- Contrary to what other studies have suggested (Henkel 2000, Trowler & Becher 2001, Trowler et al 2012), for new HE researchers there were few signs of a communitarian or community of practice link or membership of a theoretical/epistemological academic tribe

Implications and reflections

1. Newer HE researchers in Europe could be offered training about how to conceptualise and interact with policies; useful for HE staff as well as doctoral students

2. Our findings illustrate that becoming a newer researcher into higher education builds on existing identities, political activity, employment, networks etc & new networks slow to develop

3. HE is still a very new academic sub-field – it has yet to establish a better infrastructure and means of support for new researchers

4. Despite self defining as HE researchers, most do not see themselves as part of a wider community of researchers (role for learned societies here?)

5. There is little sense of all this new knowledge ever being able to contribute to EU or other transnational policies on HE – though a number of respondents had more modest plans to contribute at institutional level

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