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Simon Paye

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Convergence and Divergence of Career Paths in the Labour Market: the Case of British Academia

Simon Paye, Centre de Sociologie des Organisations, Sciences Po, et Centre Maurice Halbwachs

The (changing) idea of a university

The famous manifesto by John Henry Newman in 1852 not only renewed the terms of the debate on the social role of universities but also remained a long-standing reference, still in use today. Indeed, what is largely conceived as the fundamental dual role of a university – developing knowledge for its own sake and diffusing it throughout society – has persistently been at stake. In the United Kingdom, since the 1950s, and concomitantly with the massification of higher education, this debate has taken an upswing with the charge against the "elitist" mission of British universities of educating people in accordance with liberal ideals and not endorsing the mission of training professionals for the labour market. Since about the 1990s, most universities have incorporated this new prerogative. Throughout the 20th century, increasing emphasis on research has translated into a substantial growth of research activity in British universities.

The focus of the debate has further shifted as universities have progressively adopted the characteristics of other formal organisations (Musselin, 2006; Krücken & Meier, 2007), intensified their ties with the economic sector in accordance with the so-called "third mission" and developed new businesses in the campus. Hence, from the quasi-monastic scholarship and apprenticeship of medieval universities like Oxbridge that prevailed since the 13th century; to Newman's ideals; to the adoption of the "job placement" prerogative; to the model of the "multiversity" (Kerr, 1972) pursuing an increasing variety of missions, the idea of a university has considerably evolved.

The teaching-research nexus disentangled?

Right at the centre of these debates lays the intricate issue of the *teaching-research nexus*. The differentiation of research and teaching takes a paramount importance in the debates and the relationship between these two activities is subject to fierce arguments. On the one hand, following Humboldt's vision, advocates of the teaching-research nexus stress out the symbiotic relationship of these activities. Opponents to that vision, epitomised by Newman but also Condorcet, argue that teaching and research are, by essence, too different to be performed by the same individuals or by the same institutions (Gingras, 2003).

These confronting views take a new importance in England as the academic professions are undergoing a trend of job specialisation. A recent study reports that the division of labour between these two activities has increased: there are 25% of "teaching only academics" and 22% of "research only academics" (Locke & Bennion, 2009, p. 5).

This tendency is subject to contrasting opinions. On the one hand, some scholars have pointed to a threat of "deprofessionalisation" or even "proletarianisation"of the academic profession (Fulton & Holland, 2001; Halsey, 1992). On the other, the development of academic career management by universities is seen as a gain in professionalism in academic activities: increase of "teaching excellence", "good research" and "academic leadership". This view is particularly supported by publications intended for an audience of higher education practitioners[1]. In-between these two rather polar stances there is a wide array of intermediate interpretations, that combine in different ways declinist and optimistic elements attributable to these two stances.

Given such antagonism in the way the literature covers the issue, the "fate" of the teaching-research nexus in an era of occupational specialisation is a crucial empirical question. It is also unclear how its possible disintegration relates to the internal dynamics of the academic professions.

How to study occupational specialisation between teaching and research?

Since the pioneering works of Halsey & Trow (1971) and Williams *et al*. (1974), this phenomenon has mostly been studied through synchronic labour market analyses based on

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1 See for example the reviews "Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education" published by the Association of University Administrators or the "Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management".

large-scale surveys on academic careers[2] or on secondary analysis of official statistics[3]. The limit of these methods lays in their approach in terms of stocks, that undermine their capacity to reconstitute careers as longitudinal processes.

The drawbacks of any "stock approach" are threefold. Firstly, it doesn't account accurately for the point(s) in the career in which the state of the teaching-research balance changes. Taking the example of a teaching-only staff, assuming that she holds a PhD and therefore has practised research, it is impossible to know when she abandoned the practice. Therefore, using the stock approach, one can only know whether a change has happened between the PhD award and the situation in the date of the survey filling. Whether this change results from one or various state transitions and when such transitions happened remain unsolved questions. Thus, by overlooking the temporal dimension of careers, the risk incurred by a "stock approach" is to reify general categories such as "teaching career" or "research career", whereas it is highly questionable that people follow exclusive paths all the way through their career. This remark leads to the second drawback: the possibility to interpret phenomena of *segmentation*[4]. Increased division of labour between teaching and research doesn't mechanically introduce segmentation in the labour market. Such interpretation dangerously amalgamates *task differentiation* and *patterns of mobility*.

Thirdly, approaches focusing on stocks don't provide any information on the mechanisms that produce increased division of labour. There is limited knowledge on how and why certain individuals end up in teaching posts, others in research posts and others on more traditional posts, performing both.

These drawbacks can be seen as a consequence of the fact that labour markets are still too often studied independently from careers, and *vice versa*[5]. The approach proposed here is intended to bridge this gap by analysing labour market and careers together. It consists in

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2 See for example Brennan, Locke & Naidoo (2007).

3 See for example Sastry (2005).

4 Segmentation is a polysemic term. It is used in sociology of labour markets referring to the boundary between primary and secondary (Piore, 1975), internal and external (Doeringer & Piore, 1971) and sometimes occupational job markets, as well as gendered, class-based or race-based labour markets (Reich *et al*, 1973). In the sociology of occupations, segments refer to ensembles of individuals in competition to each other, represented by different institutions statuses and carrying organised identities (Bucher & Strauss, 1992, pp. 68-69).

5 Just as studies on academic labour markets haven't contributed much to scholarly knowledge of academic careers, the rare studies that analysed academic careers as longitudinal processes have not informed much about the functioning of academic labour markets. Illustration of mutual contribution can nevertheless be found when leaving the empirical terrain of academia, for example in transitional labour market theories (Gautié & Gazier, 2004), or in lifecourse perspectives of labour markets (Blossfeld & Mayer, 1988).

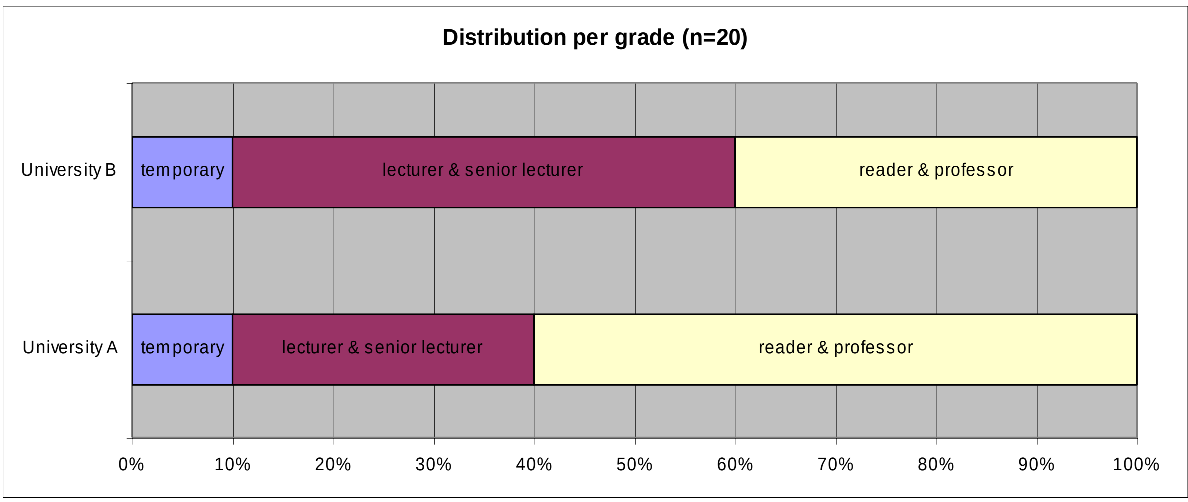
unveiling the patterns of the labour market by looking through the lens of careers. In other words, this "flow" approach consists in throwing new light on the functioning of the labour market by apprehending it as a space of professional circulation.

The method: longitudinal qualitative research

It is suggested here to seize labour market mechanisms through the analysis of individual retrospective accounts of their own career[6]. It is therefore a method drawing on longitudinal qualitative research, inspired by interactionist approaches to careers and life histories (Becker, 1963; Stebbins, 1971). The style of the interviews for this research has been in some points similar to what French sociologists call "*entretien biographique*" (Demazière & Dubar, 1997) and to the approach of the sociology of careers pleaded by Hermanowicz (2007)[7].

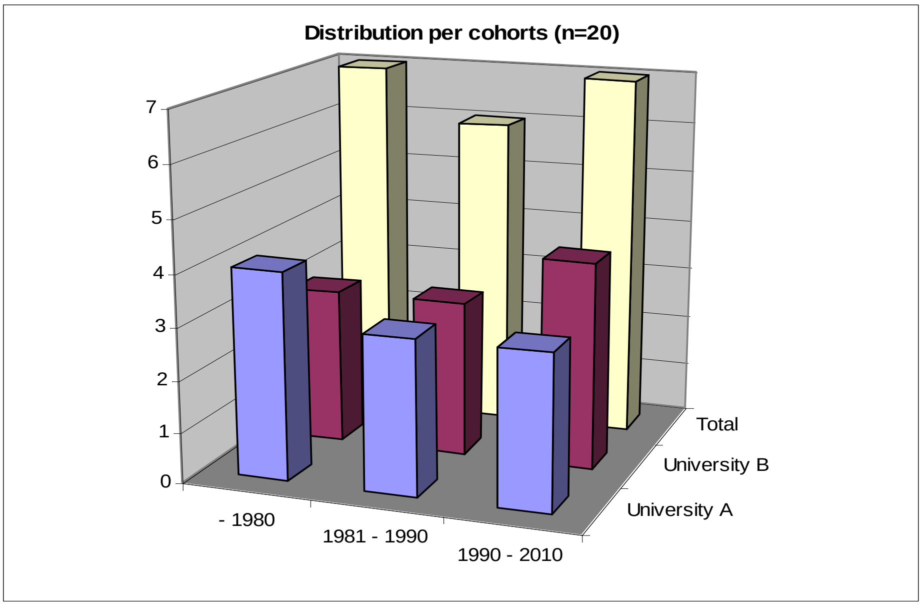
The overarching research question for which these interviews were designed was: "What shapes the professional profile of academics in the course of their career and how?" I asked them as initial directive to relate their career and to cover as much as possible professional and non-professional events. I didn't impose questions and only interfered when the interviewee was taking the conversation towards an uninteresting route. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours and 20 minutes and most of them lasted well over an hour.

The data was gathered during interviews with 20 academics of different grades, among which there were 8 political scientists, 2 philosophers, 5 sociologists, 4 historians and 1 psychologist. The graph below shows the distribution per grade of the interviewees:



In University A, senior academics are slightly over-represented, whereas academics on temporary contracts are less represented in both institutions as they have been less responsive to my request and also harder to localise.

When ranged by date of Bachelor (or equivalent diploma) award and classified in three periods, interviewees are evenly distributed across the two universities:



The analysis of these qualitative interviews is intended to unveil both subjective and objective aspects of people's career that, in turn, inform how the labour market works[8]. It is therefore an attempt to study academic careers otherwise than using an approach based on "predictors" as

[8] Interviewing academics on their own lives can be seen as an intricate task, for the boundaries between the "indigenous" and the "scientist" roles can substantially blur during and beyond the interaction. For a reflection on the methodological problems of such a research configuration, see Paye (2011, forthcoming).

is usually the case[9]. Therefore, the guiding principle is to examine careers and labour markets not in terms of *determination* but in terms of *differentiation*.

Research question

Most interviewees insisted on the fact that their career was "atypical". Particularly striking was the fact that no one identified its own career as "typical". This statement involves a comparison: one considers its own trajectory as unusual in relation to a more or less tacit norm. But if the majority claims to have an atypical career, does it mean that there is no norm at all? Or is the norm just an unachievable ideal that people hold in their mind as a theoretical reference and to which they compare their own trajectory? Alternatively, could there be various norms, so that the persons who could possibly fall into someone's norm don't qualify their career as normal because they have in mind another reference? These questions are intricate ones and will not be addressed here in detail. But they shed light on how people position themselves within a given social group. Does this emphasis on singularity reflect a high level of heterogeneity in the "career space" of their professional group?

The analysis of the career paths shows that there is indeed a great variety of professional trajectories (as well as social, political, domestic, conjugal, health and psychological trajectories). Of the 20 persons interviewed, there is no case of significant coincidence between two career paths. One important element of differentiation is the orientation of the professional career in terms of core activities of academic work, namely research, teaching, and, to keep it simple here, the so-called "third-leg" stream of tasks, which includes administration duties, management, meetings, service to the profession, etc.

Leaving out right away the idea of building a typology of careers from a small sample of interviews, one can nevertheless identify roughly four main orientations that the mix of work of a given individual may take permanently or temporarily: a research orientation, a teaching orientation, a managerial orientation, or no orientation at all, which means keeping in balance the core academic tasks, which is sometimes referred to as the idea of a "generic" academic career. Using this rough categorisation for the modest purpose of describing the current professional profile of the 20 interviewees shows that they are dispersed as follows: 3

[9] Especially in American sociology: see for example Scott Long (1978), Kulis & Miller-Loessi (1992), and more recently Xie (1998) and Perna (2001), but also in British sociology or higher education studies, for example Over (1985).

"research-oriented", 6 "teaching-oriented", 3 "management-oriented" and 8 "generic". This noticeable variety necessarily underlies a process of differentiation in people's career.

To understand why careers are not isomorphic, I propose to explore the following research question: How can people deviate from both the canonical model of the "generic" profile and the increasingly promoted "research-oriented" profile? This question can be re-framed more generally using the form of the well-known research question in interactionist sociology: How does one become teacher, researcher, manager?

The answer to this question would be fallacious if consideration would only be given to differentiation. In the flow of individuals through the academic labour market, there are particular moments in which profiles have to stick to certain requirements. The most significant one seems to be the pivotal "passage" from a temporary situation in academia to a permanent position[10]. Let's see first what happens before it occurs.

Convergence towards a professional norm: the teaching-research balance

In British academia, this key event in the career happens generally – though not exclusively – during the process of securing a position of permanent lecturer. Even though all lecturer positions do not strictly refer to the same competences, and the same mix of activities, they do most of the time carry the same set of basic requirements. These latter act as coercive criteria that reduce the possibility space of careers, in the same fashion as a bottleneck. Put in practical terms, this means holding a PhD, having a certain number of scientific publications, demonstrating teaching experience, etc., a process of accumulation of proofs that can be depicted as an academisation of the professional profile. Most, if not all, academics have at one point in their life had to conform to a strong professional norm, despite the fact that they were coming from various horizons, carrying different life histories and professional experiences.

The great diversity of starting points in our interviewees sample shows that even though academisation leads to a common outcome, it takes different routes towards it. For example, 6 out of the 20 interviewees have had another professional career before becoming academics. Of the 14 others, not all of them have followed a study programme with a strong social

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[10] In terms of internal labour markets, this movement takes place in the "entry port" (Doeringer & Piore, 1971), the boundary between secondary and primary labour markets. In interactionist sociology, it can be depicted as a "status passage" (Glaser & Strauss, 1971).

science component and a clear orientation towards research and scholarship. But however distant are the social and cognitive origins of the trajectories, all of them have gone through a kind of "funnel" as they have tailored their profile to a prevalent norm. In the discourse of the actors, this "funnelling" is expressed in terms of "ticking the boxes" or "jump through the hoop". As the interviewees have got closer to the possibility to enter into the primary labour market, their endeavours to conform to the norm have increased. This clearly appears in the account of a politics teacher in an ex-Polytechnic. During his undergraduate studies, he is not very engaged in getting good academic results:

> *"I haven't been attending any lectures to be honest, I was always doing demonstrations, or going down to London, attending meetings, speaking at meetings… I was very surprised to pass my first year at university considering that I was partly present. But in those days you could do it."*

Later on, when having to choose between two offers for his PhD studies, he considers the opportunity to teach as a positive criterion:

> *"So I went for the money and not the status… Manchester University has much better status; I could have gone there. I chose Nottingham, because there was more money on the table and there was guaranteed teaching experience."*

And only a couple of years after, he volunteered to offer unpaid teaching work in order to complement his academic profile:

> *"I happened to go and knock on people's door and ask for teaching. And they didn't pay me for it; it was just to make my CV look better."*

Such a process of profile adaptation in the early professional career illuminates the convergence of the trajectories in the social space constituted by academic jobs. But without subsequent divergence, there wouldn't be such a variety of professional profiles as observed in our sample, in the large-scale surveys or in public statistical data on academic staff cited above. The next part of the paper is geared to illuminate some of the main mechanisms that produce this divergence, or, in other words, career differentiation.

Career differentiation

The observation that individuals are dispersed unequally within a single labour market is a common fact in the sociological literature and in heterodox economics. This dispersion, however, could be interpreted in many ways, according to whether the "entrance" into the profession involves coercive criteria or not. Manifestly, the entrance into labour markets like poetry or catering is wider than the "entry port" (to use Doeringer & Piore's expression) of those constituted by the medical or law professions. Therefore, the dispersion in the professional space can be interpreted in the first case as a natural continuation of *initial individual differences*, or instead as the outcome of a divergence of career paths through the appearance of *constructed individual differences*, which is more likely to occur in law and medicine.

This part is geared to suggest that observed dispersion in the professional space in British academia is more likely to be an outcome of a divergence of career paths rather than a natural consequence of *initial differences*. As said above, the great majority of professional academics have gone through a narrow "funnel" that has had an effect of homogenisation of their profile. In the subsequent course of the career, individual profiles increasingly diverge from the "generic" model, thereby exhibiting *constructed differences*. These features are consistent with a process of career differentiation which needs to be explained.

1 – Models of career routes[11]

A first way to explain career differentiation is to consider the structuring effect of existing models of career routes. These can be apprehended both as *cognitive references* of professional trajectories that impinge on people's representations and as embodied *rules of mobility*, often formulated at the university level, which organise career advancement. Both cognitive and regulative facets of career routes play a substantial role in the differentiation of careers[12].

The rules of career advancement within a given university are often erected on the idea that there can be a bifurcation between teaching and research. In England, the standard academic career ladder (i.e. the most common) is structured in three main levels of seniority: the grades of lecturer, senior lecturer (which roughly corresponds to principal lecturer in ex-Polytechnics) and professor. Regarding the grade of reader, most interviewees have offered a view consistent with the idea that "the status of 'reader' is the equivalent of senior lecturer in terms of remuneration but has more of a research focus and hence higher status" (Brennan, Locke & Naidoo, 2007, p.164). Several universities have implemented local reforms in the management of academic careers, recasting more or less radically their career ladder on a

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[11] To simplify the argument, we will only concentrate on what is called the "teaching route" and the "research route", thereby leaving out other models of career route, including what is generally referred as to the "management route". For further information on this latter, see for example Warner (1999) or Henkel (2000, pp. 235-249).

[12] Introducing this distinction between embodied and cognitive forms is intended to clarify the mechanisms at stake, but it is relevant to point out that interviewees tend to mix those forms in their accounts.

two-track model[13]. This has been recently the case in university B. Even though most academics are not aware of the recent reform led by the human resource department, there is a tacit agreement among them that career advancement can follow two different logics:

> *"There is a teaching promotion route. But not many people take that. (...) For most of us, you're promoted on your research, not on your teaching." (reader in history)*

In university A, no recent reform has been implemented but the issue is under debate:

> *"I've written internal memos to my senior management colleagues exactly on this issue. Because, the question is: is it that one has to make a choice as an individual between going for the reader route or going for the principal lecturer route? And what skills and competencies and priorities does that mean? Or does it potentially rule out; are they mutually exclusive? And I certainly failed, that could be. But I was assured by the head of school here that they aren't mutually exclusive." (senior lecturer in politics)*

However, the two career routes are already nested in the current career system: the two intermediary grades between lecturer and professor, ("reader" and "principal lecturer") are connoted in terms of teaching/research orientation. Individuals' career strategies are therefore formulated in those terms:

> *"the idea is that if one is going down the full scale research route, one will apply for a readership. And because I have never even published a book I would not really be able to apply for a readership. What I'm saying is I have started so late that I have not built up a sufficient record of publications. So my view was that: 'If I do want to advance, it would be more down this route [meaning: the principal lecturer route]'." (principal lecturer in history, university A)*

Whether they are implicit or explicit, local rules of mobility are crucial elements of a more or less subtle channelling of careers. Career routes are at least equally influential when they operate as cognitive references. Asking academics to relate crucial choices related to career orientation allows examining their representations of the possible alternatives, which frequently involve an exclusive choice between a research and a teaching stream, like in this example:

> *"So I had two options. Either to go into a kind of research-led career, you know, a contract-research, work as a research associate or eventually get my own grants and so on; or go for a lecturership. (...) I don't do well with that kind of insecurity. You know, of having to apply, year after year, after year for money. I don't have the personality for it. I don't like risk. So I wanted a lecturership." (assistant professor in sociology, university B)*

Here, the research route is perceived as insecure and risky as compared to a more stable teaching career. This view is not shared by everyone. Some academics on research positions

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[13] See for example Strike (2005) on this issue.

claim to prefer their condition as they are freed from the “burden” of teaching and can therefore devote more time on research and publications. For a vast majority of interviewees, abandoning research activities is perceived as a failure. Reciprocally, the idea of a “successful career” most of the time involves a reference to research activities and publications. Whatever the normativity attached to them, models of career routes widely circulate in academic spheres and provide cognitive frames for the formulation of individuals’ career strategies[14]. Their influence cannot be neglected: they indeed reveal to be as important as the formal rules of job mobility.

2 – Loose coupling between appraisal, time management and career orientation

The fact that people tend to think about career decisions using mutually-exclusive categories is not sufficient to explain how their trajectory effectively differentiates itself from others. The main mechanism of career differentiation is rather to be found in a range of practical actions regulating promotions and work allocation at both department and university levels[15]. It involves two main organisational regulative actions: appraisal and time allocation.

Appraisal

In the two universities studied, there was a formal appraisal process, which was not directly coupled with the promotion process. As put by a former head of department of politics:

> *“Appraisal had never really been important to University B. It’s always been a relatively formalistic process. (...) [People here] could not see any demonstrable benefit that came from it, and I think they were probably right. It wasn’t leading to any change in anything; it was just a kind of box-ticking exercise.”*

Most interviewees agreed on such a view and appraisal was almost unanimously perceived as of little relevance on career progression. Another evaluation process, not labelled as appraisal and not performed at the individual level, has nevertheless a pivotal role on individual careers: the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)[16]. Originally, the RAE was intended to set

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[14] It is no surprise that the most emblematic discourses on career strategy, the guides for academic careers, also tend to frame career choices in those terms. See for example the two most famous British guides for academic careers, both emanating from university B (Grant, 2006; Blaxter *et al*, 1998).

[15] Even though they can be considered as the core mechanism, they would hardly operate without the cognitive references and the rules of mobility above discussed.

[16] The RAE is led by the Higher Education Funding Councils of the four constituent countries of the UK. It is a cycle of evaluation of the research activity of university departments. The outcome of the RAE is taken as the main criterion for public funding for research.

the basis for research funding allocation, based on the assessment of research at the department level. But it also turned out to operate implicitly as an individual evaluation. When preparing the RAE submission, heads of departments, sometimes sharing responsibility with a RAE committee, make a selection of the academic staff from which the publication record is to be submitted. This selection has the effect of labelling *de facto* academics whose research is valued and those whose research is less valued[17]. In both cases, the RAE acts as a signal. For the former, it signals that they stay on a competitive track and can potentially be used for career advancement, as is the case with this senior lecturer in politics at University B:

> *"I'm kind of a banker for the RAE.*
>
> *– What do you mean by 'banker'?*
>
> *– (...) You're seen as an asset in RAE terms. And if you're an asset in RAE terms, it's easier to get employed and you get well thought of in your department."*

For the latter, a non-submission often suggests an idea of failure, and can translate into a sanction, as it happened with this lecturer in politics at University B:

> *"When it came to filling out the RAE requirements, I was obviously in difficulty. I was not able to provide the number of items that was expected. So that was a formal indication that I was not meeting the basic requirements. (...) And in later rounds, the department decided that I wouldn't be submitted.*
>
> *…/...*
>
> *recently [in 2006], because my research had come to a hold – almost to a hold – the department made me an offer of becoming purely teaching as opposed to research. So they have a special status whereby, with no loss of salary, you could accept an expanded teaching responsibility without being expected to perform in terms of research (you weren't going to be submitted on the RAE, etc.) (...) for quite a long time, I sort of went on with a normal status trying to revive my research activity but in practice not being very successful in doing so. So that eventually led to this offer."*

The examination of the whole set of interviews indicates that the RAE has more influence than the formal yearly appraisal in terms of career orientation. Yet, "offers" of career reorientation such as the example cited above are relatively rare. To understand how people's careers diverge, it is needed to enquire on how division of teaching and research labour is held within departments.

[17] Hence the emergence and subsequent wide use of the expressions "research-active" and "research-passive" among academic staff and university administrators.

Work time allocation

The distribution of teaching load and administrative duties is taken very seriously by most interviewees. Indeed, the way academic work is divided within academic departments directly relates to the time allocated to each individual for core academic tasks. Again, decisions on this issue are taken by the head of department, who is sometimes seconded by purposely appointed academics[18]. What is mostly at stake – and this resonates with the idea of a "successful career" exposed above – is what is called "research time". As put by a principal lecturer in history:

> *"We all want to research [laughs]. So there is no problem with that. The problem is getting the time to do it."*

Whether it relates to a willingness to stick to a "successful career", to the greatest autonomy characterising research work or to individual preferences, time given for research is more valued. Therefore, teaching load, administrative duties and research leaves concentrate an important amount of individual concern. It can pave the way to genuine struggle around the issue of time, for example when power relations prevail over perceived merit. As a response to these problems, a number of universities in the UK have implemented systems of workload models[19]. This is the case of the two universities studied in this research[20]. In both contexts, their implementation was justified by a principle of transparency: by affecting to each member of staff an individual workload model, it was hoped that unfairness and inequalities would reduce. Yet, the interviews indicate that power relations have not totally disappeared:

> *"where the problems occur in my experience, is that some people are better at lobbying for themselves.*
>
> *.../...*
>
> *Some people are very good at protecting their own time."*
>
> *(associate professor in sociology, University B)*

"Protecting one's own time" implies providing convincing arguments to the time-keepers. Hence the diversity of strategies used by individuals to negotiate. At this point, the outcomes of the annual appraisal and the RAE submission are used by staff as arguments providing competitive advantage and by the time-keepers as implicit criteria of differentiation.

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18 In one of the two universities studied, they are called "teaching and learning coordinators".

19 Workload models are time allocation schedules. They generally take the form of spreadsheets filled in by each academic staff indicating the amount of time to be devoted to a range of activities. For example, the workload model of a senior lecturer in politics in university A indicates: 70% teaching; 8% support activities; 16% scholarship and professional development; 2% post-graduate research supervision; 4% general management and administration.

20 To be perfectly accurate, one of these universities is currently implementing it and in the other, some departments have developed their own local system.

"Protecting one's own time" can be achieved through other strategies. An important one is the practice of "buy-out"[21]. To take a simple instance:

> *"There was a buy-out attached to the ESRC grant (...) and I wasn't given the buy-out that I'd got through the grant, which made doing the research very difficult. (...) I was quite cross that I didn't get the time, I was quite angry about that. (...) I'm actually on research leave now. And I had two terms of a crude research leave. And I managed to trade in the buy-out that I never got for another term of leave." (associate professor in sociology, University B)*

She was denied the possibility to outsource teaching hours but has been able to negotiate, as a counterpart, an extra term of leave. This example shows that time devoted to teaching is far from being strictly determined in advance and is subject to modifications at the discretion of management.

Thus, division of work and time allocation constitute a key principle of career differentiation. Even though they are not clearly coupled with appraisal, they implicitly rely on it.

Career transitions

Allowance of research time is therefore contingent on negotiations, which in turn depend on the outcome of appraisal, on the RAE submission, or on other "arguments", such as the control of research grants as a transferable asset. Extra research time can also be obtained through the practice of buy-out. In all these cases, negotiation power mostly depends on research production[22]. If one's research production is judged as unsatisfactory, it is likely that at the end of the loop, one ends up with limited time to conduct research. On the contrary, if one's research is regarded as successful, one is more likely to be granted a high amount of research time. In other words, it can reasonably be expected that, *all things being equal*, produced research volume affects the production of research volume, according to a *cumulative logic*[23].

The accounts of interviewees on their career – especially those who have dropped research activity – offer a large number of examples. A rather extreme case is that of this young

[21] The expression of "buy-out" is the one commonly used in British academia. It refers to a specific form of outsourcing, in which a permanent academic staff controlling transferable assets (for example a research grant) convinces its department to take on this money to recruit a temporary lecturer who delivers the teaching originally attributed to him. If the operation concludes, he ends up with substantial gains in research time.

[22] Except perhaps for annual appraisal, where research is supposed to be assessed to the same extent than teaching and administrative responsibilities.

[23] This resonates with Robert Merton's characterisation of the Matthew effect: "the rich get richer at a rate that makes the poor become relatively poorer" (1968, p.7). Another way to qualify this phenomenon is to talk in terms of vicious and virtuous circles, but it entails attaching normative content to career orientations.

teacher in politics at University B. He declares to be unable to pursue research, because of his high teaching load of 22 hours per week:

> *"So I work between 70 and 85 hours a week. (...) That of course closes out the space of research for obvious reasons."*

Less extreme but equally relevant is the case of this principal lecturer in politics at University A, who is involved in faculty administration and labour union activism:

> *"Most of my energy, most of my time these days is in my director of studies role and my vice-chair of the UCU role. I do a small amount of teaching, and my research is dormant, I'm afraid."*

This principle of cumulative advantage can also be embodied in local rules. Such is the case with a measure implemented a few years ago in University A to induce publication endeavours: the faculty of social sciences has a policy of giving 30 days of research time to each member of staff considered as "research-active".

Career differences are not only amplified by cumulative logics, but also by phenomena of *irreversibility*[24]. Small events in one point of the career can reveal to be of considerable significance in its subsequent development. For example, accepting a research-only job in the beginning of the academic career can entail unforeseen consequences, such as in the case of this research-only academic politics in University A:

> *"I didn't realise the implication at that time that I kind of placed myself into a research path (...) Now that I think about it I didn't realise that I was saying to the world without knowing it that I had decided to be a researcher rather than track myself into a teaching career, which is more stable"*

She finds it difficult to be recruited on a lecturer position, because recruiters consider her as a researcher. The contrary can happen too:

> *"What I had found was that I signed up for teaching." (Emeritus fellow, former senior lecturer in philosophy, University B)*

Just as for the lecturer in politics at University B who was "offered" a teaching-only position after his non-submission to the RAE, this philosopher would have had to spend an enormous amount of energy to reach back a level of research activity comparable to that of his fellows.

Any transition people experience in their occupational career involves a "cost". The variability of these costs can be significant, depending on the nature of the transition. Considering different cases can help seize this variability. Career accounts of the interviewees

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[24] Irreversibility is the term used here, although the concept of "path-dependency" could have been chosen. The latter has the slight inconvenient, however, to suggest that careers follow a unique path, something that will precisely be questioned in the next section. The recent French book *Bifurcations* offers stimulating insights on the heuristics of these two concepts (2010).

seem consistent with the idea that a transition towards a higher teaching component is "cheaper" than a transition from a teaching-oriented profile to a more research-oriented one. It appears for example that the progressive placement of individuals on teaching positions often followed a logic of abandonment of research activity. No single case of return to research activity after a desertion has been observed in our sample, which seems consistent with the idea that leaving research is a fairly irreversible move.

The "forging" of one's academic profile thus involves different sources of irreversibility attached to specific events throughout the career. These events can be decisions to accept a job offer, outcomes of teaching load negotiations, or even continuous or punctual micro interactions between colleagues bestowing specific meanings and diffusing them around[25].

A striking feature common to almost all the career accounts is the paucity of multiple reorientations between the access to a permanent job and the interview date[26]. Change between different professional orientations occurs seldom more than once over the course of employment. This suggests that as people get more involved in one core academic task, their possibility to reach back former positions decreases. In other words, when placement in one of the channels occurs, the subsequent course of employment is modified. This narrowing of the possibility space involves irreversibility, so that getting back to a former position involves significant endeavours or is seen as too "costly" to be envisaged[27].

To conclude, **appraisal** practices have little direct influence on the differentiation of careers. But their outcome performs a segregative function in negotiations during the subsequent stage of **work time allocation**. This allocation, in turn, has dramatic effects on the subsequent trajectory, amplifying **career reorientations** through cumulative and irreversible logics. It is worth noting that models of career routes and main mechanisms of career differentiation have been analysed separately for the sole sake of clarity. Empirically, it is their articulation that ensures the function of differentiation.

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[25] An example is the practice of informal labelling in conversations. One who is labelled as "researcher", whatever one's working contract says, will most likely be regarded as a researcher, hence as someone who will not be considered for a lecturing job, whether one wishes it or not.

[26] Only one of them has effectively gone through transitions between teaching, research and administrative orientations, even though the sequence of the positions he occupied do not well reflect them.

[27] These features correspond to Grossetti's definition of "bifurcation" (2010), and to a lesser extend to that of "turning point" as introduced by Hughes and further formalised by Abbott (1997).

So far we have only analysed collective sources of disparity in the labour market. But differences in individual career paths do not only result from organisational and professional mechanisms.

3 – Multiple commitments and intertwined interests

Many research endeavours have striven to explore the entanglement of work and other spheres of life, such as health, family, hobbies, politics or housing. The concept of commitment, as theorised by Becker (1960) and subsequently by Stebbins (1970), offers an analytical heuristics to understand how investments in different spheres of life interact, and how people integrate them into a "consistent line of activity" (Becker, 1960, p.32). Being committed, for example to one's family, means acting consistently with past actions performed in the various "portfolios" of life. For example, commitment can account for the reasons why most people don't suddenly change their career orientation, leave their organisation or their occupation (*ibid*, p.33):

> *"– Do you think about leaving the institution or the job?*
> *– Not really, because of family reason. My ex-wife and my younger son live locally. (...) I have to stay locally so that I could have regular weekly contact with my son." (Principal lecturer in politics, University A)*

Commitment can also explain why people are bound to decrease their involvement in research work following childbirth. This is a common feature in the careers of the interviewees. Parenthood constitutes a new source of commitment that can affect commitment in academic activities. The arrival of the child can be related to what Becker calls a "side bet". Side bets occur when someone "has staked something of value to him, something originally unrelated to his present line of action, on being consistent in his present behavior." (*ibid*, p.35). For example, a principal lecturer in politics at University A now at the doorstep of retirement recalls how he progressively disengaged from research. He invokes the birth of his child, the refurbishing of his house, his time-consuming divorce and his progressive involvement in union activism. All these involvements have acted against sustaining a sufficient research activity so as to keep up on a "generic" academic route, and have entailed a drift towards a more teaching-oriented professional profile.

Another source of individual differences in career strategies can stem from one's sense of what a "successful career" is. Interview material shows that there is a wide variety of criteria. In fact, almost each individual formulates a unique description. For example, for a professor in criminology at university A, success means becoming a professor and "buying out" as much teaching as possible to concentrate on research. For one of her colleagues, a principal lecturer in sociology, a successful career implies a healthy equilibrium between private and professional lives. For two other colleagues in political sciences, the overarching criterion is being politically-involved in teaching and scholarship. Other conceptions of career success can rely on teaching excellence, or good administrative service to the department. Career success can also be defined negatively:

> *"I'm not working with promotion in mind. Because often most promotions also come with a large amount of administrative work that I don't particularly enjoy. I would rather not be promoted than have a large component in my working life that I don't like." (associate professor in sociology, University B)*

Hence, personal definitions of professional success also explain inter-individual differences, particularly because they underlie strategic career decisions. It would be misleading however to argue that the idea of career success comes first, followed by career strategy and finally a resulting set of commitments. Interviewees have good reasons to formulate their idea of career success in accordance with the number and the colour of the balls they are juggling with. It is therefore likely that career success be thought in relation to one's repertoire of commitments. Both have been depicted here as sources of individual differences. Not accounting for these would have overweighted the coercive effect of organisational mechanisms and the weight of professional norms.

This part constitutes a first attempt to analytically disaggregate the main causes of divergence in career paths. The three main sources of career differentiation offer a first explanation of why, after being tailored to a rather homogeneous professional standard of recruitment, individual profiles increasingly diverge from the "generic" model of an academic career. This indicates that the dispersion of individuals in the academic labour market is mainly the outcome of a divergence of career paths.

Conclusion

The considerable stakes attached to the splitting of the teaching-research nexus raised the question of whether increased job specialisation was to be attributed to a genuine labour market balkanisation or to a process of career differentiation. The treatment of this question has been done with a life course perspective focusing on flows of individuals rather than on stocks of occupied job positions. The longitudinal qualitative method used allowed concluding that observed variety of professional profiles results from career differentiation.

We identified a tendency to convergence operating before the access to the first permanent position, and a subsequent diverging trend. This divergence is a puzzling phenomenon. There is no clear or systematic social allocation principle for teaching-oriented or research-oriented posts. Nevertheless, the career accounts of the interviewees have provided with sufficient empirical material to suggest a variety of sources of individual differences:

- models of career routes, acting as both cognitive models and embodied rules of mobility;
- mechanisms operating through appraisal, work time allocation and career reorientation; and
- phenomena of commitment at a more individual level.

In other words, it can be said: "one is not born a teacher (or a researcher), but becomes one". The perhaps excessive existentialist tone of this statement has the great advantage of stressing the fact that teaching-only and research-only jobs are not there by essence, but are filled by people who have diverged from the norm imposed by the requirements of the entry jobs in the profession. This suggests potential areas for further research.

First, this paper lays a first set of arguments to make the broad prediction that job specialisation is more likely to occur after the passage to permanentship. Therefore, the heterogeneity of the labour market is to be put in relation to career stages.
Second, there is an urge to move from the narrator to the statistical unit. A quantitative approach is needed to test the depth of the phenomena identified from the biographical interviews. The 20 interviewees of this study are part of a larger sample from which a dataset containing the career histories of 140 individuals has been built. Quantification will be used to validate or contradict the phenomenon of career convergence – divergence and to accurately characterise, through the use of sequence analysis, the variety of trajectories followed by academics. The quantitative analysis also shall allow exploring more determinants of individual trajectories by gender, age, education, etc. Indeed, historical, gender-based, institutional and disciplinary variations have not been addressed here. For example, comparing different generations can help assess the depth of the idea of transformation of

academic careers, particularly the question of whether there is a trend towards differentiation or normalisation of careers. Differences between the two universities and across disciplines will also be the object of greater attention in the next stages of research. However, independently from disciplinary, individual or organisational variations, the convergence and divergence of career paths is expected to be the most relevant account of diversity.

Finally, this double movement of convergence – divergence is not exclusive to the academic career and could potentially be observed in a range of occupational groups characterised by closed labour markets (Paradeise, 1988). Those labour markets which are “protected” by a professional coalition (occupational labour market), an administrative unit (internal labour market), or by more peculiar configurations (such as the French “corps d'Etat”) are particularly expected to exhibit the same feature, even if perhaps in a less “pure” form than in British academia. Studying the process of organisational and individual forging of professional profiles in a variety of labour markets would therefore allow clarifying whether observed division of labour is interpretable to segmentation or to career differentiation.

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Abstract:

The proliferation of “research-only” and “teaching-only” posts in British universities can be interpreted as a signal that academics evolve in a segmented labour market. This view, however, is debatable. This paper proposes to go beyond static approaches of the labour market and to adopt a “career perspective” that emphasises on flow instead of stocks. The analysis of work histories gathered during in-depth interviews suggests that the labour market is *not strictly* segmented in terms of teaching and research, but that division of academic labour results from a process of individual differentiation. First, a convergence of early career paths leads to the crucial stage of securing a first permanent position. Subsequently, professional profiles tend to diverge through a sequence of career transitions. What is therefore put forward is an explanation of heterogeneity of the academic professions in terms of career differentiation.