

Life beyond the PhD: pathways, persistence and possibilities (a workshop for doctoral students and recent doctoral graduates)

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As in many countries, doctoral graduates in Australia and New Zealand face an increasingly competitive and confusing employment environment. Traditionally, doctoral education was seen as providing a pathway to tenured academic work that involved both teaching and research. However, increasingly, the academic workforce is made up of people on casual, fixed-term contracts, or in teaching-only positions, who have limited job security, employment benefits, and/or prospects for advancement. Pathways to secure academic work are often lengthy and circuitous. Finding such work is especially challenging for those with family commitments, who are unable to move, or whose area of expertise is not 'in demand'. However, doctoral education can be seen as much more than 'academic internship' since students learn a wide variety of skills that can be applied to a range of employment contexts. They also develop a way of thinking that is sorely needed in a complex world marked by environmental, social and economic uncertainty. How can doctoral students prepare for and pre-empt post-study employment challenges? And how can new graduates in less-than-ideal positions keep their spirits up and their options open?

In this interactive workshop intended for doctoral students and recent doctoral graduates, we map our own, very different, post-doctoral journeys to academic employment in international education related fields. We chart the highs and lows we have experienced, noting factors that have helped (and made it hard for) us to survive and thrive so far. We also discuss alternative post-doctoral pathways, drawing on our own and others' research. We then invite workshop participants to reflect on their own academic journeys and possible employment trajectories, including the skills and attributes they have gained from their doctoral studies (and employment experiences) so far; their preferred post-doctoral pathways; the challenges they are likely to face (or are already facing) en route; and how these might be addressed in both the short and long term.