**(Post) Academic Careers: PhD graduates and Employability in- and outside Academia**

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**Life Beyond a PhD: Working with PhD students as co-researchers to re-imagine their employability skills**

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UK universities are under increasing accountability pressures to ensure that their students are ready for employment. Cast within the mantra of ‘value for money’, this discourse is mainly framed within a utilitarian modernist view of human capital as the cumulative aggregation of discrete skills. Such a discourse, however, suffers of at least two limitations. First, it presupposes a common agreement on what skills are needed now and in the future (Bridges, 1993). Such a managerialist and reductivist discourse (Craswell, 2007) erases the complexity of addressing the interplay between skills, attitudes, competencies but also motivation and personal development. Second, not much attention has been devoted to the employability needs of PhD students.

Despite much rhetoric and useful tools, such as the Researcher Development Framework (Vitae, 2011), employability is usually left to post-viva and confined to the boundaries of the student-supervisor relationship. Because the traditional academic career is only one option, and increasingly less straightforward and more competitive (Disney et al, 2013), this presentation illustrates and reflects on the process and outcomes of the two PhD students led initiatives FEASST@8 and SUCCEED@8. Part of the Enhancing Learning and Teaching Fund and strategic aims of the University of Northampton’s employability agenda, both initiatives drew from student voice principles to develop support activities for PhD students working as co-researchers on the projects acquired and applied researcher, teaching, and digital skills. The presentation concludes with a set of recommendations on how to embed and build a culture enabling PhD students to gain valuable employability skills.

Bridges, D. (1993) Transferable skills: A philosophical perspective, *Studies in Higher Education*, 18:1, 43-51

Craswell, G. (2007) Deconstructing the skills training debate in doctoral education, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 26:4, 377-391

Disney, T. et al (2013) Doctoral researcher skill development: Learning through doing. *Planet*, 27, 2, 14-20

VITAE (2011) Researcher Development Framework. London: VITAE