



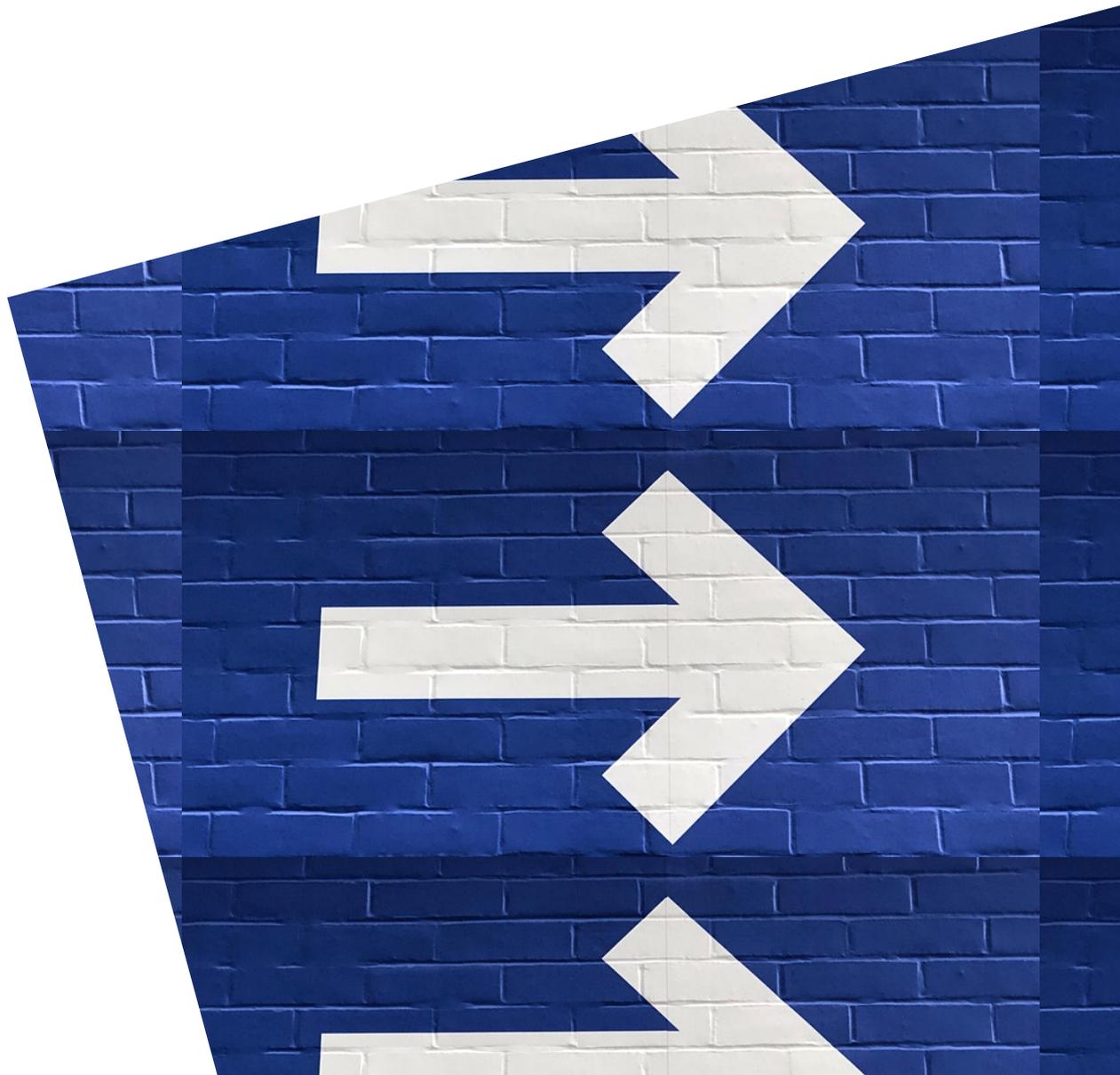
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Comparative Network on Refugee Externalisation Policies  
Report

# Post-PhD Careers in Academia and Beyond

Online Seminar

17 August 2021



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## Introduction

This seminar was held online on 17 August, 12pm – 2pm. A recording of this event is available here: [\[LINK\]](#)

Navigating the job market after completing a PhD is challenging but the impacts of COVID-19, recent changes to government policy, and systemic casualisation of academia have further increased employment uncertainty for early career academics. This panel was aimed at helping early career academics to leverage their unique skillset for future employment and brought together a panel of experts to discuss a variety of post-PhD career pathways in academia and beyond.

This online seminar was co-hosted by the Comparative Network on Refugee Externalisation Policies (CONREP) and the Melbourne Social Equity Institute.

CONREP is a Jean Monnet Erasmus+ network grant which brings together seven universities from

across Australia and the European Union to research the causes and consequences of refugee externalisation policies. This panel was part of a wider CONREP seminar series to help PhD students and early career academics further develop their professional and research skills.

The Melbourne Social Equity Institute is a research institute at the University of Melbourne bringing together researchers to address disadvantage across areas of health, education, housing, culture, work, and transport. In addition to research support, the Melbourne Social Equity Institute offers a variety of development programs for young researchers, including the Interdisciplinary PhD Program in Migration, Refugees and Statelessness, as well as the Doctoral Academy.



# Seminar Report

## Panellist Presentations

After an acknowledgement of country, panel chair **Kelly Soderstrom** welcomed the panellists and attendees and noted that the seminar was a joint initiative between CONREP and the Melbourne Social Equity Institute.

Soderstrom then invited the first panellist, **Warren Frehse**, to open discussion. As a career strategist, Frehse shared points on how post-graduate students could familiarise themselves with recent trends in the employment market and how they could position themselves for relevant roles in academia and industry.

Frehse pointed to recent reports published by various institutes, one of which showed that only 30 per cent of PhD graduates continued into a career in academia. Another survey created by CSIRO showed the number of PhD graduates had doubled over the last two decades. It found half of these graduates wished to enter the public or business sector with the other half wanting to stay in academia. Notably, this survey found an alignment between Australia's growth industries and the industries that employed the majority of PhD graduates. The McKinsey Report showed that employers increasingly wanted to hire people with digital skills, high cognitive skills, high social and emotional skills, adaptability, and resilience. Frehse saw these skills as greatly overlapping with the skillset developed by PhD students.

Frehse noted that explaining the importance of a PhD qualification to industry employers can be a challenge for new PhD graduates. He recommended PhD graduates learnt how to identify and articulate their skills; align these skills to the industry; use targeted statements; develop self-marketing and networking skills; use evidence-based research examples as part of your proposition; and build their own understanding of employment opportunities.

Frehse highlighted information and guides that the university library offered post-graduate students to navigate future career paths, which can be found here:

<https://unimelb.libguides.com/c.php?g=402862&p=2741309>

**Kate Taylor** from the university's research strategy group then described the increased non-linearity of career paths and offered her experience as an example. Her first job as a PhD graduate was as an assistant-manager at a Liquorland franchise which, although not what she had expected, taught her business practices that put her in good stead for future employment. Kate described finding her career path by trying different things—learning along the way and following opportunities to positions she found interesting or rewarding. Taylor's advice to PhD students included: to learn the difference between personal and professional resilience; to find professional mentors; to be generous with others and avoid being judgemental; to focus on the positive things that can be taken from different employment opportunities (including the tools and courses that the university offered); and to let go of perfectionism. Taylor reminded PhD students that staying connected to research was important and there were many careers that allowed employees to remain connected to research opportunities.

Pro-Vice Chancellor of research capability, **Prof Julie McLeod** then spoke about careers in academia. She began by noting that there were now fewer opportunities in academia, before describing the requirements of a career in this area. In Prof McLeod's view, an academic career required PhD students to consider their own histories and values: how the student came to the field, what the current circumstances were like in academia here and other parts of the world; which communities (local, professional, cultural) the student could embed themselves into; and how a career in academia fitted with the student's envisioned life—including how an academic career would 'work for you and how you work for it'. Prof McLeod said the pressures of academic life could have large impacts upon one's ability to 'do the job' and that successful

academics must be pragmatic about what they can and cannot do. Further to this, Prof McLeod advised PhD students to be driven by their passions as ultimately, it was only this passion that could sustain a career. Prof McLeod stressed the importance for early career academics to build and maintain collegiality with colleagues at all levels. She recommended keeping a CV as a 'living document': accruing and categorising any experiences, positions, or qualifications. This document could then serve as a source to draw from when putting together a CV for a specific position. She reminded PhD students that a CV was a 'backward-looking story', but it should also give the impression of progress and a continuing journey. It was important for the student to have different employment and experience 'narratives' to fit different prospective employment positions.

Prof McLeod suggested PhD students create five-year plans that outlined where the student wanted to be and how the student was going to achieve this. She agreed with Taylor by saying career progression sometimes meant moving horizontally rather than vertically. McLeod further suggested to PhD students to break down five-year goals into one-year goals to help the student keep track of progress. In this regard, it was also important for PhD students to relate their academic performance to their relative opportunity to, such as noting interruptions to study, and the forms the interruptions have taken. She reminded students that they should not appear apologetic about these interruptions and present them factually. In closing, Prof McLeod shared some of the university's early career research grants and schemes and encouraged students to look further afield for additional opportunities.

**Dr Louise Olliff**, senior policy advisor for the Refugee Council of Australia, began her presentation by asking attendees to indicate if they had previous professional experience before commencing studies and made the point that it was important for PhD students to expose themselves to multiple roles and opportunities. Dr Olliff described her own a non-linear career path into academia through policy research and

writing for NFPs and NGOs. Her intention had been for PhD research to strengthen her activist and advocacy work. This led to a mutually beneficial relationship wherein she continued to work for the refugee council as she studied and this, in turn, informed her PhD research. To keep her research relevant to the sector in which she worked, Dr Olliff fused her academic and community networks. This, she said, helped to translate specialist knowledge into new opportunities, as well as create changes in non-academic areas important to her. She also suggested PhD students be open to opportunities that are currently around them, such as guest lecturing, tutoring, and coordinating subjects. Through her experiences, Dr Olliff learned to be adaptable to changing circumstances across different sectors and found it was 'ok to cobble together a CV'—in fact, bringing together different areas of expertise can be an attractive asset to employers.

**Madeleine Gleeson**, a lawyer and senior research associate at the University of New South Wales also shared her experiences of melding interests and experiences in different work sectors to progress her own career. She echoed the panel's consistent message that there was no single way to reach a dream job. Gleeson expanded on this message by adding that the ability to find that dream job depended on chance, opportunity, and one's own curiosity. Gleeson told the audience not to be dismayed by employment statistics because people were always moving across institutions and industries. She reminded students that new institutions were always opening and new industries always developing—many of which were unforeseeable years ago. This led her to believe that because we cannot know what opportunities the future will bring, we must therefore be prepared and adaptable to these opportunities as they arise. Gleeson encouraged PhD student not to think about 'the right way to get a job', but to think about what 'tools' they have in their kit. The first tool Gleeson recommended was working with the people who have 'lived experience' in your desired field, for example working with refugees and refugee group if you are interested in

refugee advocacy. Gleeson also advised students to learn a second language as another tool to add to their kit (she recommended the NaTakallam language partner initiative as a good place to start). Networks were another tool students should develop. Gleeson noted that ‘traditional networking’ opportunities favoured a particular type of person so she recommended being creative and thinking laterally to build a community of diverse people—mentors, colleagues, area stakeholders—and to do this early, organically, and to not be afraid of making contact with unknown people. Gleeson said students should learn from the private sector about the ways people marketed themselves and how they were recruited. She echoed the need to keep a living document about achievements and for students to build their own personal strength and resilience. Gleeson stressed that PhD graduates must genuinely believe that they were worthy of the positions for which they applied and to remember that they were equals of the people with whom they wished to work. Thus, she said PhD graduates should project confidence, but not arrogance, and remember that if they had a PhD, they were already experts.

### **Questions from the audience**

‘Rebecca’ asked Dr Olliff, ‘what do you recommend to people entering academia but who do not want to stay there?’. Dr Olliff responded that if students were not interested in academia and wanted to work for an NGO, they should remember that they could always come back to academia later. Dr Olliff reminded the audience that there was no ‘right way’ to progress their career and to always keep in mind that having a PhD is in itself highly valuable.

‘Rebecca’ followed with another question on whether current ambitions should guide what one wrote and published. Dr Olliff answered by saying that students should consider who is going to value their knowledge and let that guide their writing. She also added that students should think about how they could repackage their research for different audiences.

Prof McLeod agreed that repackaging research is a very useful skill in academia as well because communicating knowledge with other audiences is always necessary. Frehse also agreed but with reference to industries outside of academia, especially with consideration for repackaging knowledge according to what employers might be seeking.

For PhD students with experiences of being displaced Gleeson added that the Kaldor centre provided networking opportunities for students and mentoring opportunities.

Kelly thanked the speakers for their participation and sharing their expertise. Kelly reminded attendees to check the organisations mentioned throughout the seminar for opportunities.

### **Concluding remarks**

Panellists noted that career paths were now becoming less linear, and that individual adaptability is a most valuable quality to possess. Regarding this, panellists were all in agreement that acquiring a PhD qualification gave students a highly versatile skillset and learning how to repackage skills and knowledge for various career options was vital. Panellists also agreed that there is no ‘right way’ to forge a career and to be open to different opportunities as they arise, and to make the most of the opportunities they seize.

## Chair and Speaker Biographies

### Kelly Soderstrom (chair)

Kelly Soderstrom is a PhD Candidate in International Relations at the University of Melbourne. She holds a Bachelors degree in Political Science and International Relations from Carleton College and a Masters degree (distinction) in International and European Politics from the University of Edinburgh. Her PhD thesis examines responsibility in the context of Germany's response to the 2015 refugee crisis. Her research interests include German and EU asylum policies, European integration, identity, and citizenship. In 2018, she was awarded a graduate fellowship at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy.

### Warren Frehse

Warren Frehse is a career strategist, coach and advisor who engages with graduates, professionals, and senior executives. He is currently Senior Advisor for Careers and Employability at the University of Melbourne.

### Kate Taylor

Kate Taylor is the Executive Director, Research Strategy in Chancellery (Research and Enterprise). She is the most senior professional staff member in this Portfolio, which is led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research). Kate has worked in various research strategy, policy, and management roles for over twenty years across industry, government, and higher education.

### Julie McLeod

Julie McLeod is Professor of Curriculum, Equity and Social Change, Melbourne Graduate School of Education and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research

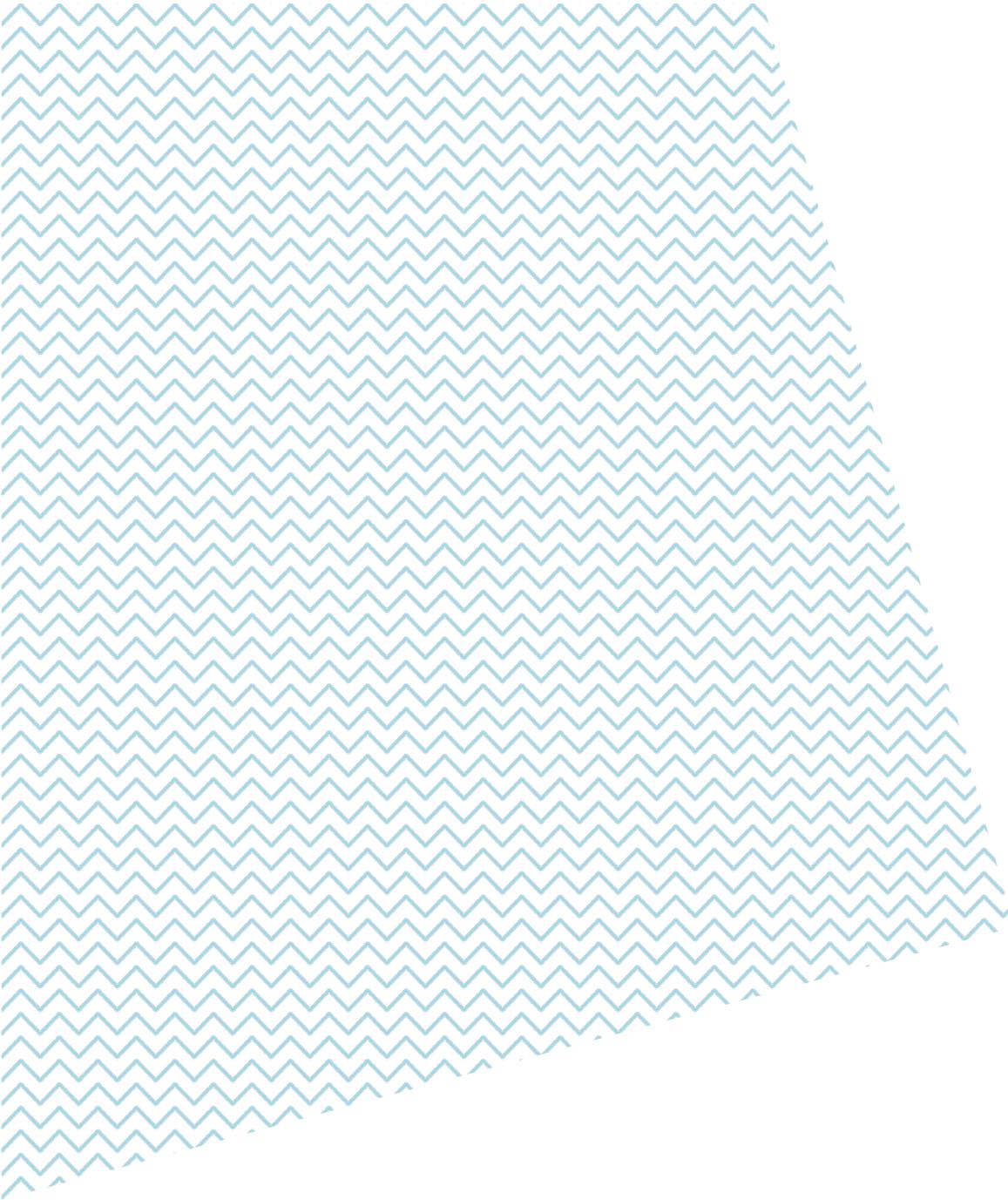
Capability), University of Melbourne. She does research in the history and sociology of education, focussing on youth, gender, and educational reform. Current projects include 'Progressive Education and Race: A Transnational Australian History'; and a qualitative longitudinal study of secondary schooling, Making Futures: Youth identities, generational change, and education.

### Louise Olliff

Dr Louise Olliff currently works as a Senior Policy Advisor for the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA), a consultant for the Asia Pacific Network of Refugees (APNOR) and as a sessional academic. Louise has worked for NGOs in various research, policy and advocacy roles in Australia, Cambodia and Ghana since 2001. Her PhD in Anthropology and Development Studies (University of Melbourne) explored the modalities, motivations and implications of refugee diaspora humanitarianism. Louise is an Adjunct Fellow at the Humanitarian and Development Research Initiative (HADRI), Western Sydney University, and will be joining the research team for the recently-announced ARC Linkage Project - 'Diaspora Humanitarians' - as a post-doctoral research fellow in 2021.

### Madeline Gleeson

Madeline Gleeson is a lawyer and Senior Research Associate at the Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at UNSW Sydney, where she directs the Offshore Processing and Regional Protection projects.



This report was prepared by CONREP event assistant Nathan Gardner in August 2021