

Career trajectories and paths to self-employment for graduates in the new digital economy.

Research Project Code: GEOG2201016

Project detail:

Rapid changes in technology have revolutionized labour markets and the way work is done, obliterating some occupations and enabling others to emerge. Graduates and school leavers are thus entering uncertain new worlds of work, and education providers are doing their best to prepare their students for this uncertainty. This project is concerned with graduate careers and especially, pathways into self-employment and entrepreneurship. Located within the discipline of Geography, it is also concerned with the relationship between places, universities and graduate career trajectories.

Specifically, this project will explore the implications of the knowledge/digital economy for recent graduates of the University of Portsmouth from the disciplines of Geography, Psychology and Fashion & Textile Design. These graduates have entered the economy at a time of major disruption, where the four new forces of 'The Cloud', 'Social Media', 'Big Data' and 'Mobility' (Braun, 2015 (conference presentation)), have transformed the rules as to who can do what work, where and when. Self-employment in the UK has risen markedly in the last decade to around 15% of all employment (Taylor, 2015; D'Arcy and Gardiner, 2014) and forecasts predict that self-employed or portfolio careers will become the norm, especially in the creative sectors of the economy (Gill and Pratt, 2008). However, we do not yet know much about the career journeys for graduates that lead to self-employment in this new digital economy or the roles of gender, race, class, and geographical mobility. There is speculation (but rather less data) that the typical self-employed worker is female, middle-class, home-based, low-earning and economically marginal (Ekinsmyth 2013; Taylor, 2015; Luckman, 2015), but research focuses on the end result (self-employment) rather than the journey. This research project, by focusing upon young adults at various stages across the first 20 years of their career, will attempt to address this gap. It will involve both quantitative and qualitative research methods to gain both a broad picture of the career trajectories of sampled graduates, and detailed portraits of the journeys of some into self-employment.

The successful candidate should have, or expect to have, an Honours Degree at 2.1 or above (or equivalent) in Geography or a cognate discipline such as Sociology, Social Psychology, Economics, Sociology, Organisation Studies or Communication Studies. Knowledge of theories of identity and the related concepts of gender, race, class and disadvantage would be useful. Experience with social survey, quantitative and qualitative methods is desirable.

Supervisors on this project will include Carol Ekinsmyth and Tara Woodyer from the Geographies of Health, Well-Being and Lifecourse Research Group in the Department of

Geography). The group has a strong track record of publishing in high impact journals coupled with a strong network of international collaborations.

Informal enquiries can be made to:

Carol Ekinsmyth (carol.ekinsmyth@port.ac.uk). Candidates will be required to submit a two-page project proposal and are encouraged to discuss this prior to submission.

Key Words: Labour markets, flexible working, career trajectories, graduate employment, creative industries