

COCAG Launch Event

Career and Career Guidance in Europe: Assessing Strengths and Addressing Gaps

**Manchester Metropolitan University Business School Oxford Road,
Manchester, M15 6BH**

Hosted by the Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre

Programme

Tuesday 20th May – 08:30 until 17:00

Registration: 8:30-9:30 (Business School foyer)

Morning: All sessions will take place in room BS G.27

9:30-10.00 – Opening ceremony

Welcome to MMU and the Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre (Fiona Christie & Katy Jones)

Welcome to the conference (Tristram Hooley)

10:00-10.45 – Plenary Session 1

Invited Lecturer: Earning while learning: student jobs, gender and future work imaginaries' (Kim Allen & Kirsty Finn)

10.45-11:00 Break

11:00-13:00 – Presenting COCAG 3 main thematic strands

WG 1: The challenges and changes in career in the contemporary world

Speaker: Mariana Lucas Casanova

Abstract This session will present the agenda of Working Group (WG) 1 “The challenges and changes in career in the contemporary world”. These contemporary challenges and changes in career are the result of shifts in the social, technological, political and economic contexts in which power, class, gender and ethnicity must be considered. This WG will explore them by scrutinising the concept of career and the experience of work to reconceptualise and recontextualise it for likely futures. Therefore, this session will present the main aims of this WG, provide an update of activities and outline future steps, reflecting on the strategy to coordinate scholars across a range of countries to promote activities that follow critical approaches (e.g., webinars, summer school, scientific meetings, and academic outputs). It will conclude by framing the research subthemes that were developed based on an analysis of participants interests according to the COST Actions’ Memorandum of Understanding.

WG 2: Policy responses to contemporary challenges to individuals’ careers

Speaker: Petra Elftorp

Abstract: The focus of Working Group 2 is on ‘Policy responses to contemporary challenges to individuals’ careers’. In particular, the attention is given to public policy in the area of lifelong guidance as a horizontal policy design and related areas, such as employment and education policies

and policy in other, relevant sectors. This presentation will outline the aims of the group, along with an outline of our activities to date, and some key research areas of interest to the WG2 members. Examples of key thematic areas include critical perspectives on policy developments related to Social/Labour Market Inclusion, Ethnicity; Demographic Changes; and Non-Linear Career Paths. Several WG2 members have a keen interest in contributing to Summer Schools, submitting abstracts to joint publications such as articles and handbooks, and to developing further grant applications. The hope is that this event will provide an opportunity to further develop a set of objectives and deliverables for and by the group members.

WG 3:

Speaker: Kristina Mariager-Anderson

Abstract: Working Group 3 (WG3) of the COST Action COCAG focuses on critical practice in career guidance. WG3 brings together app 150 scholars and practitioners from across Europe and beyond, aiming to investigate how practitioners engage with critical perspectives in response to global challenges such as socio-political shifts, environmental change, and increasing diversity. Through our initial meetings and discussions, we have established five preliminary subgroups: *Technology and Digital Transformation*, *Critical Professional Practice and Development*, *Educational Settings and Life Stage Transitions*, *Cultural, Contextual and Community-Based Influences*, and *Methodologies and Knowledge Production*. In addition, *Inclusive and Social Justice Approaches* have been identified as a cross-cutting perspective embedded within all thematic areas. This presentation will outline our progress to date and the collaborative structures we are building to support critical reflection and knowledge co-creation in the field of career guidance.

13:00-14:00 – Lunch (on site) exec lunch (near G27)

Afternoon

14:00-17:00 – Parallel workshops

Including 15.15-15.30 break

Workshop 1: Building networks and social capital for a paradigm shift

Facilitator(s): Ricky Gee, Limor Kessler Ladeksky, and Mariana Lucas Casanova

Rapporteur: Mariana Lucas Casanova

Room BS 3.19 (N Atrium) – Seminar Room, Cafe Style

Abstract This workshop will provide reflexive insight into the aims of the working group 1 (WG 1: The challenges and changes in career in the contemporary world) of the COST Action on “Critical perspectives on career and career guidance”. Considering that this project’s main feature is its focus on the development of critical perspectives on career and career guidance, through this workshop the leadership of WG 1 aims to offer participants the opportunity to reflect on what it means to be critical so that WG 1 members develop a clear conceptualisation of critical approaches that can then influence the work developed within this project.

Therefore, during this workshop main interdisciplinary influences to critical theory and critical approaches will be presented, from the Frankfurt School (e.g., Adorno; Horkheimer), Poststructuralism

(e.g., Foucault, Derrida), Decolonial perspectives (e.g., Spivak), as well as the career studies literature that outline critical and radical conceptualisations to career development (Watts, 1996; Mignot, 2001; Hooley et al, 2018). This introduction aims to frame what is expected from WG members: to question who benefits from particular research, policy or practice. Examples of critical approaches to different areas of research related to WG 1 will be presented to then offer participants a practical exercise in which they will be invited to develop critical research questions for previous work or for the six subgroups that have been identified within WG 1. Thus, through the network and social capital developed within this WG we hope to contribute to a paradigm shift in work and career studies, taking on our social and political responsibilities for the development of scientific knowledge, policy-making and career counselling practice.

Workshop 2: Critical review of the current lifelong guidance policy landscape

Facilitators: Sioban Neary and Petra Elftorp

BS 3.20 (N Atrium) – Seminar Room, Rows

Abstract: As education and employment policies seek to widen choices and to create systems that can respond to varying needs across the lifespan, career guidance becomes increasingly important for public policy. (OECD, 2004 p 7) In the two decades since the WB and OECD research series in the early 2000s, career guidance policy has received increasing attention around the world. Its role has become increasingly important in the context of transition management (c.f. school-to-work, job-to-job, etc.) and the changing labour markets, employment patterns, decent work and skills policy agendas.

Regional/ national career guidance strategies have been developed in many countries, and after the Irish presidency of the European Union in 2004, national career guidance (lifelong guidance) councils were set up in many EU countries and are still in operation today. Understanding of the careers guidance systems and policies at the level of the individual has been challenged. This workshop will explore the current challenges in this area.

Workshop 3: A Critical Approach to Career Guidance Practices for a Changing World

Facilitator(s): Kristina Mariager-Anderson

BS 3.22 (N Atrium) – Seminar Room, Cafe Style

Abstract Context and Purpose

The COST Action Critical Perspectives on Careers and Career Guidance (COCAG) aims to critically examine how careers are evolving in today's world and what policy and practice responses are necessary. This action seeks to deepen our understanding of the complex relationship between individual agency, technological change, and the political economy (COCAG, 2024).

In alignment with this overarching goal, WG3 explores the question: How can career guidance practice adopt a more critical stance to address the changing world more effectively? Our focus is on examining evolving approaches in career guidance, identifying gaps in current practices, and developing innovative, socially just responses (COCAG, 2024). Career development, from a critical perspective, does not occur in isolation but within systems of power and inequality. Career choices and experiences are shaped by broader societal structures that enable or constrain opportunities (Thomsen et al., 2022).

Workshop Aim and Focus

This 3-hour workshop aims to facilitate a collaborative discussion to explore and refine the themes that have emerged from our initial WG3 meetings, ensuring they provide a strong foundation for our work over the next three years.

The workshop will explicitly address key questions including:

- What do we mean by 'critical practice' in career guidance?
- What examples of critical practice exist in career guidance and related educational and labor market settings?
- What barriers and opportunities arise when adopting critical practices more widely?
- How can different national and cultural contexts inform our understanding of critical practice?

Emerging Themes

Based on data from the initial meetings in WG3, these are the key themes for our group:

1. Technology and Digital Transformation
2. Critical Professional Practice and Development
3. Educational Settings and Life Stage Transitions
4. Cultural, Contextual and Community-Based Influences
5. Methodologies and Knowledge Production

With *Inclusive and Social Justice Approaches* as cross-cutting perspective that informs all other themes

Workshop Structure and Process

The workshop will be highly participatory, encouraging attendees to share their perspectives on critical practice within their own contexts. We will:

- Introduce the concept of 'critical practice' and its relevance to career guidance
- Explore the identified themes through facilitated small group discussions
- Consider how these themes manifest differently across various national contexts
- Discuss how researchers and practitioners can collaborate to develop critical practices, with special attention to participatory research approaches
- Collectively identify practical next steps for developing our work

Expected Outcomes

- Refined descriptions of each thematic area, with clearer boundaries and focus
- A collective understanding of how these themes intersect and complement each other
- Initial ideas for potential directions within each theme (to be developed further in future meetings)
- Strategies for research-practice partnerships that can advance critical approaches
- A strengthened foundation for WG3's work over the next four years

Rapporteurs will summarize the key points emerging from the workshop and the contribution to the COCAG

End of day 1: Networking/social event *Options:*

Guided Walk around Manchester Evening
meal (street food) meets up

Wednesday 21st May – 08:30 until 17:00

Refreshments on arrival near G27

Morning: All sessions will take place in room BS G.27

9:30-10:15 – Plenary Session 2

Taking a critical approach to career and career guidance. Setting the conceptual framework for COCAG (Tristram Hooley)

10.15-13:00 – Shaping Ideas into Book chapters Proposals – Part 1

Including 11.15-11.30 Break near G27

Have the 5-minute-pitch from 1 author of each selected abstract organised around the 5 topics Have Q&A before the break and at the end of the session

TOPIC 1: Critical perspectives on frameworks and concepts of career

TOPIC 2: Critical perspectives on equity and diversity

TOPIC 3: Critical perspectives on career learning and skills

TOPIC 4: Critical perspectives on career and professional practices

TOPIC 5: Critical perspectives on changing labour markets and contexts

13:00-14:00 – Lunch (on site) exec lunch near G27

14:00-16:00 – Smaller Group discussions around the topics of the morning presentations

Participants move into the Lecture Theatre and the 3 Seminar Rooms for smaller groups meetings (3.19; 3.20; 3.21)

16:00-17:00 – Rapporteurs report & discussion around next steps and key ideas/issues emerging from the two-day conference, including closing session

Room: BS G.27

End of day 2: Networking/social event