

# **Linear recruitment in tourism academia: When academic jobs 'go sideways'**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The recruitment and promotion of teaching academics in the UK is constrained by a complex array of career progression barriers. These barriers have led to an increasing trend of horizontal career (lack of) progression. The purpose of our paper is to reveal and discuss linearity and horizontality constrictions, challenges and issues impacting on potential careers in tourism academia.

**Design/methodology/approach:** We use a leading UK national academic recruitment website to gather data and insights from across 137 posted jobs related to tourism between 2020 and 2022.

**Findings:** The main findings of this work note the constrictions of the UK academic job market and the consequences it poses for academics within tourism and beyond. It is proposed that future research to further understand the realities faced by academics is needed to prompt action for change to create more enriching career development.

**Originality:** Our contribution centres around sense making a phenomenon that exists but is not often talked about within academia (whether in tourism or beyond). For academics and managers, the paper presents an opportunity to reflect more holistically on careers with a view to instigating valuable change moving forward (for oneself or others). There is also a dearth of studies relating to career progression of tourism HE educators.

**Keywords:**

Career development; Higher education; Linear recruitment; Academic Jobs; Tourism

**Introduction**

There is a complex array of career progression barriers within the UK's higher education industry that has led to an increasing trend of horizontal mismatch and horizontal career (lack of) progression. With respect to tourism-focused academia, the UK's higher education job market is characterised by limited and quasi-inexistent promotion opportunities that limit career progression. In response to this issue, this paper aims to shed light on a somewhat taboo subject area amidst academics (or an area with a socially accepted normative stance) with a view to prompting action and change.

Recruitment and promotion in academia present a complex phenomenon with substantial cultural and national differences (Levander, 2020). Specifically, the recruitment and promotion of teaching academics is often constrained by different social, political, economic and geographical barriers (Grissom *et al.*, 2015; White *et al.*, 2014). Macfarlane (2010) suggests recruitment and promotion challenges are a result of a variety of issues, but more importantly, the massification of higher education (HE). Clarke (2021) argues this massification has resulted in HE becoming a lucrative product for economic growth, focused on increased business relations and a corporate university model. In consequence, casualization has become a cost-saving strategy in HE (Clarke, 2021), which threatens the idea and meaning of university (Ryan *et al.*, 2017).

Because of these developments, in the UK, the academic job market has become increasingly competitive. New candidates must not only meet the minimum requirements for a role, especially qualifications (EECEA, 2017), but also have the combination of publication records and teaching experience (EUI, n.d.). Although ascension is a traditional route of

progression in most industries, the growing list of requirements for academics in the UK's HE sector demonstrates the cumbersome hierarchical structures and systematic disadvantages of the UK university system.

The promotion of academics in the UK often (but not exclusively) involves moving upwards from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer to Reader, and ultimately to Professor – the most senior position (Frølich *et al.*, 2018). Recently, however, some institutions have 'moved the goal posts' of Professorship by introducing one or two more stages: Assistant Professor and Associate Professor – causing many UK academics to become frustrated and disappointed (Frølich *et al.*, 2018; Tung & McKercher, 2017). While this career progression is nearly impossible for those without a PhD (Jackson *et al.*, 2011), it is further complicated by the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF), which can have major implications for universities and even greater implications for academics, whose job security and promotion are often impacted by REF outcomes (Weinstein *et al.*, 2020).

REF is perhaps most impactful for 'new academics' (i.e. Associate Lecturers, Lecturers, and sometimes Senior Lecturers) who are still building their research portfolio. In 2012, Jung reported increased teaching hours in comparison to allocated research hours negatively impacted on academics' research productivity. More specifically, Jung (2012) argued, the amount of time spent on teaching and teaching related activities are deterrents to research productivity and successful outputs. This issue was observed as being the direct result of a performance-based reward system, in which academics are rewarded with more research hours based on their prior research productivity (Jung, 2012; Valdivieso *et al.*, 2021). Arguably, this inhibits research productivity among new academics, who tend to have more teaching hours on the basis of their lower prior research outputs, despite the expectation that they produce quality research outputs whilst effectively carrying out their increased teaching workload (Manasseh *et al.*, 2024). Unsurprisingly, Kwiek (2018) found top research performers (and therefore those

who are allocated more research hours) are generally Professors. Considering increased teaching hours, when compared to research hours, inhibits higher research productivity, and knowing increased research productivity reinforces rewards, such as promotion, it is arguable that the performance-based reward system, through which research hour allocation is managed, is directly impacting academic career progression and contributing to the systematic disadvantages of the UK university system.

More recently, the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) has been introduced as a new form of academic assessment, whereby universities are assessed by the quality of their teaching and student outcomes, thus placing even greater pressures on academics. Because of this, and in a recent *Times Higher Education* report, Pace (2022) called for academics to be ‘statutorily required’ to undertake a teaching qualification to ensure they are practically qualified for teaching in HE – something that has become mandatory for promotion in some UK universities (van der Sluis, 2023) and often impacts on research productivity time. Exacerbating the pressures for academics are issues relating to lacking support, mentorship, and a competitive allocation of research hours in comparison to teaching hours, all of which have proven as being impactful on academics’ ability to meet and exceed their job expectations, thereby limiting their reasoning and evidence for career progression, whilst also impacting on their personal wellbeing (Alan *et al.*, 2021; Grissom *et al.*, 2015; Laudel and Gläser, 2008; Mathieson *et al.*, 2023).

The complex array of the above expectations and thus, career progression barriers, has led to an increasing trend of ‘horizontal career progression’ – progressing outwards instead of upwards by changing employers (McGinley and Martinez, 2018) or changing field of work (Castro *et al.*, 2020). Although horizontal career progression is not a new term and exists within an array of academic discourses, it is often set within larger discussions of retention and mobility issues (Johnson *et al.*, 2005; Ladd, 2007, 2011) and issues of inequalities, such as

gender (Feng, 2010; Feng and Sass, 2017; Van Ryzin, 2021) and age (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Vagi and Pivovarova, 2017). Despite this presence, focus on horizontal career progression and similar terms (e.g. linear, lateral) remain absent from studies.

Drawing on the above stated issues, this paper focuses specifically on the recruitment and career progression for academics in tourism and its cognate disciplines (e.g. Hospitality, Events Management, Leisure, and Travel). In doing so, this study narrows the literature's scope and utility concerning the academic profession and contingencies of employment and career pathways, which to date, has been largely based on non-specific disciplines (Clark, 2019; Fazarckerley, 2021; Meliou & Lopes, 2022; Stromquist, 2017; Whelan, 2021). Such a focus is imperative at the present time given the growing concerns among tourism academics about employment and job retention as a result of the socio-economic and political impacts on student recruitment, which has inevitably lead to increased casualization, voluntary severance schemes, redundancies and the reorganisation and/or closure of HE courses across the UK and observed overseas. As such, the tourism focus supports the efforts of experience economy bodies (e.g. Association for Events Management Education (AEME), Association for Tourism in Higher Education (ATHE), the Council for Hospitality Management (CHME)), such as AEME's (2024) white paper, which argues the "unquestionable value of tourism, hospitality and events to the economy" and was thus intended to influence government policy about their support (of lack of) for HE institutions providing tourism, hospitality and events management programmes. Moreover, and in light of the rapidly changing academic landscape, the tourism focus that this paper applies echoes Tung & McKercher's (2017) earlier arguments that tourism academia in HE is indeed an unfair system in which the necessary productivity for career progression (and retention) is stifled by a competitive performance-based reward system, and thus the goal of reaching Readership and eventual Professorship remains a pipedream.

To date, no studies have been found relating to career progression or retention of tourism HE educators. Instead, focus on tourism related career progression is generally given to graduates and industry sector employees (see e.g. Lyons, 2010; McKercher et al, 2023). While the findings of this paper may be transferred to other interdisciplinary sectors, its tourism focus enhances the existing literature concerning academic recruitment and promotion practices in the UK, which to date has remained largely general, despite some fields, such as tourism, having specific requirements of academic staff (Ladkin, 2014; Weber & Ladkin, 2008). This article is underpinned by first analysing academic job postings in the field of tourism and related topics in the UK (**Table 1**) advertised on the leading national academic recruitment website in the UK, *www.jobs.ac.uk*, between June 2020 and May 2022. A multi-faceted approach was employed to conceptualise the causes and consequences of horizontal career progression, which was achieved by exploring: a) the key features of horizontal career progression practices, and b) the impacts these practices have on varying stakeholders. The study finds that tourism academia in the UK's HE market is characterised by limited and quasi-inexistent promotion opportunities, further limiting career progression. This paper therefore contributes a critical review and conceptual insights into the current and future state of tourism academia in the UK's HE industry. This debate may be extended to other academic fields as many of the discussion points are potentially poignant for those areas – a key suggestion for future research.

### **Literature review**

Although the academic job market offers some benefits, including a certain level of job security (Carless and Arnup, 2011), it often suffers from a lack of progression opportunities, causing some to feel stuck in a role, and often resulting in them seeking a change in employer, career, or field (Castro *et al.*, 2020; McGinley and Martinez, 2018). Despite efforts to achieve career

progression, such as publishing, changing jobs or institutions, or relocating (Ladkin and Weber, 2009), progression remains challenging (Brunila, 2016; Salandra *et al.*, 2021). However, little is known about these issues within the context of tourism HE, particularly in the UK, as research has, hitherto, not investigated this focus in-depth.

The academic job market has become complicated by increasing opportunities at the same level, creating a horizontal job market. The reason for this is largely cost-saving strategies, including increasing casualization and unbundling the academic role – subdividing the academic role into specialist work (Macfarlane, 2010). Academics are traditionally ‘all-around’ in that they teach, research, advise and support students through a range of administrative duties – much of these skills gained through experience in time served. However, unbundling has led to rising ‘para-academics’, or rather, administrative and university support staff upskilled in student support services (Macfarlane, 2010). Consequently, job opportunities have decreased for the ‘experienced’ academic, or rather, opportunities higher up in the career ladder. In the UK, this has led to a surge of Associate Lecturer and Lecturer posts, creating greater competition between new entrants and experienced academics looking for a new role. More recently, following the COVID-19 pandemic, many UK universities have employed controversial cost-saving efforts by freezing wages, promotions, and recruitment, resulting in greater issues with supply and demand, and ultimately reinforcing a horizontal mismatch phenomenon.

### ***Horizontal mismatch***

Traditionally, academia has seen vertical mismatch, which happens when an academic is over or under-qualified for their role (Banerjee *et al.*, 2019), often resulting in low job satisfaction (Drucker-Goddard *et al.*, 2015). However, given the ongoing complexities within the UK academic job market, there has been a rising issue of horizontal mismatch, which given the

rising costs of living, typically occurs when academics ‘accept’ jobs for their attributes (i.e. type of contract, working hours, salary, etc.) instead of ‘matching’ jobs based on their qualifications (i.e. education, skills, experience) (UNESCO-UNEVOC, n.d.). Although horizontal mismatch could be the consequence of rational decision-making, based on survival needs, rather than sub-optimal markets, some have found this has created a worsening system in which academics are not given opportunities to develop and use the full extent of their skills and expertise (Grissom *et al.*, 2015; Somers *et al.*, 2019). Instead, they use the same skills again and again, while others remain unused (Banerjee *et al.*, 2019; Ge *et al.*, 2020). This mismatch forces academics to then progress horizontally, refining their skills within one set role, but not vertically to take on new challenges and opportunities (Schweri *et al.*, 2020). This often results in feelings of being undervalued and underutilised, low job satisfaction, and general unhappiness at work (Somers *et al.*, 2019).

To overcome this situation, horizontally mismatched academics are often keen to upskill in, for example, educational technologies and innovative pedagogy (Aeschliman *et al.*, 2018). Others, however, have decided to forgo their role and change employers or careers until they find a better matching job (Somers *et al.*, 2019). However, given the challenges and complexities of the current HE job market, many academics have found it difficult to find jobs elsewhere matching their skills, and thus academics often remain in a mismatched role, using it as a stepping stone to one day ascend the academic ladder, or they wait in it until a matching job becomes available (Grissom *et al.*, 2015; Somers *et al.*, 2019). The decision to remain in a mismatched role has created ‘job plateau’, which is exacerbated by inexistent or very limited opportunities for job progression (Huaman-Ramirez and Lahlouh, 2022), thus contributing to the increasing stunting of career progression and swelling of the horizontal job market (Dolton *et al.*, 2005; Harley *et al.*, 2004).

### ***Horizontality in Tourism Academic Job Market in the UK***

Tourism academia in the UK HE market is largely supported by level one posts – Lecturer (see **Table 1**). While this can be attributed to cost-saving efforts, as earlier mentioned, it can also be perceived as a misconception of higher level roles. For example, in a recent study conducted in Switzerland, Fisch (2024) argued that the higher one is in academia, the more difficult it is to breathe because of the shortage of fresh air. This insinuates the higher levels of Readership and Professorship are wrought with increased stress and burden, and thus may be a reason for some (lower-level academics) to not seek vertical career progression. However, as earlier noted in the Introduction of this paper, there are significant stresses for lower-level academics given the often increased teaching hours and CPD expectations on top of the required research productivity. Thus, if drawing from Fisch's (2024) argument alone, it could be argued that both lower and higher levels of academics have an equal amount, yet distinctly different forms of stress. Thus, staying at lower-levels for fear of higher-level stress and work is contributing to the issue of career mismatch. Other reasons for lack of progression may be due to perceived (or actual) reductions in career development opportunities (Meliou & Lopes, 2022). For women, in particular, Meliou and Lopes (2022) suggest HE being unsupportive of biological pressures and caring responsibilities, further calling for HE institutions to “develop, organise, and provide access to career development initiatives and training, especially for women academics” (p. 6). Although this situation is not specific to the UK, nor to tourism, it overlooks existing CPD training (for women) that many UK HE institution already subscribe to, such as Advance HE's Aurora programme – a leadership development initiative specifically for women, intended to “address the under-representation of women in leadership positions in the sector” (Advance HE, 2024). Thus, misconceptions of the academic industry may be further contributing to career mismatch.

Career mismatch, as a result of lower opportunities and/or industry perceptions, can also force academics to move horizontally for better job attributes, rather than for progression opportunities (Ladkin and Weber, 2009). This situation can be summarised by the quote “getting-on, getting-by and going nowhere” (Dolton *et al.*, 2005, p. 237). This horizontal job mismatch in tourism academia is exacerbated by new academics who tend to choose this field because of its perceived flexible hours, quality of life and wanting to avoid industry burnout (Aksatan *et al.*, 2020; Ladkin and Weber, 2009). This can turn into demand horizontal mismatch as new academics work to gain experience and desired achievements (e.g. grants, publications, fellowships) within the competitive teaching environment (Ladkin and Weber, 2009).

Demand related horizontal markets, alongside horizontal mismatch more generally speaking, are frequently presented negatively. However, there can be some positive impacts, including lowering barriers to entry, or removing restrictions (Hochberg *et al.*, 2010) to newcomers with limited or no experience. For instance, in tourism academia in the UK, the lowest “lecturing grade is the most popular grade of entry for academics embarking on an academic career” (Ladkin and Weber, 2009, p.384). This is possible thanks to sub-optimal and demand related horizontal markets in academia. This type of market also motivates academics both to work very hard, and aim for excellence, as progressing is extremely difficult (Harley *et al.*, 2004; Ladkin and Weber, 2009). This view is supported to some extent by Oum *et al.* (2004), who argue that horizontality can be, in some instances, related to performance improvements. Last but not least, this type of market gives academics full control of their career, as it is the strategy that they personally develop and apply that would lead them to success or not (Castro *et al.*, 2020; Ladkin and Weber, 2009; Salandra *et al.*, 2021).

A study carried out by Harley *et al.* (2004) also identified the UK as a market with a linear career progression for academics, even if some academics are acknowledged worldwide

to be leading in their field. Equally important, in their research, Harley *et al.* (2004) established differences between universities in terms of career progression, pointing out the fact that in older universities, which are research led, it is easier to progress as opposed to newer, more vocationally focused universities. These differences have not been revealed in tourism HE, which is mostly taught in newer universities, with opportunities for progression observed as limited in general. However, the result of Harley *et al.* (2004) research, combined with the findings of this article lead to the conclusion that in horizontally mismatched academic job markets, academics generally keep the same position for a long period of time. In the case of tourism and related topics, it might be for their entire career. The results of the above literature review on horizontality applied to the tourism academic job market in the UK are summarised in **Figure 1**, a holistic framework/overview.

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## **Methodology**

This article presents a qualitative study based on data on the recruitment of academics in tourism (and related topics) in the UK over the period June 2020–May 2022 (**Table 1**). To do so, the study used the platform *jobs.ac.uk*, a dedicated website for the recruitment of academics in the UK. This type of platform enables organisations to provide potential applicants with the type of information they need (job description, person specification, information on the organisation) to make an informed decision of whether they should apply or not (Braddy *et al.*, 2006). A qualitative approach is particularly suitable to explore, assess and make sense of information pertaining to social circumstances. In the case of this study, the objective is to

explore, assess, and make sense of data on the recruitment of academics (material), from a career progression perspective.

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This study is based on observation of academic jobs in tourism and related topics advertised on the website *www.jobs.ac.uk* over a period of fifteen months. The advertised jobs were recorded in an excel spreadsheet which included the following entries: Name of the higher education institutions (HEIs) which advertised the job; the location of the HEIs; the type of contract (full-time, part-time, fixed-term, permanent); when the job was advertised and the deadline to apply; title of the job (Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Reader, Professor, Dean, etc.); and the area(s) of expertise required from the applicants.

The data was manually analysed using colour coding – a technique often used in manual Thematic Analysis. This was done by arranging the full data set into 5 subsets based on the job titles: 1) those lower than Lecturer, 2) Lecturer, 3), Lecturer/Senior Lecturer, 4) Senior Lecturer, 5) all top-tier posts. Each set was then colour coded by the content associated with each title list. All words labelled ‘tourism’ were marked in pink, ‘events’ in orange, ‘hospitality’ in blue, and all other words, such as ‘aviation’, ‘marketing’, ‘leisure’, and ‘transport’ were marked in red. These colours were chosen at random and do not signify any specific meaning other than to assist in coding. This colour coding not only helped to locate matching subjects more quickly, but it provided a visual aid of the overall job landscape, with events showing as a dominant focus, and tourism just shortly behind.

Because research (see e.g. Clark, 2019; Fazarckerley, 2021; Meliou & Lopes, 2022; Stromquist, 2017; Whelan, 2021) have explored recruitment beyond tourism, uncovering the

complexities of recruitment and promotion in across the wider HE landscape, this study adopts a discipline specific pathway – that being, tourism. Although a comparative study approach could have provided for more generalizable findings (Groux, 1997; Khoi, 1995, 1981; Lominé, 2003), scholars note its limitations concerning the academic profession, given many fields have their own specifications, and particularly with reference to recruitment and career progression (Weber & Ladkin, 2008; Ladkin, 2014; Séraphin, 2012).

## **Findings**

In review of the academic jobs in tourism and related topics advertised on the website *jobs.ac.uk* between June 2020 and May 2022, 137 posts were found across 50 UK campuses. Of these posts, 13 were below the Lecturer post (i.e., Assistant or Associate Lecturer, Fellow and Tutor). 73 posts for Lecturer, while 23 posts as Lecturer/Senior Lecturer. 19 posts were for Senior Lecturer, with an additional post for Senior Lecturer/Reader. 9 posts were top tier, including Principal Lecturer, Reader, Professor (Full and Associate) and Dean. Although only 21 of the full list of posts were fixed-term, with the remainder being permanent roles, 50% of those fixed-term posts were Lecturer roles, with the remainder being at the Lecturer/Senior Lecturer post or lower. 7 of those fixed-term roles were part-time, with 14 being full-time.

In terms of content, 55% of the 73 Lecturer posts were related to events specifically or events and a complimentary subject, including tourism, hospitality, marketing and/or business. Closely following, 44% of the Lecturer/Senior Lecturer posts were also related to events specifically or events and a complimentary subject. This was surprising considering the timeframe of this review took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the events industry had been significantly impacted from the national lockdowns. Yet, 58% of the Senior Lecturer posts were related to tourism specifically or tourism and a complimentary subject, including hospitality, events, aviation or marketing. 67% of the top-tier posts were equally related to both

tourism and events, often complemented with another supporting subject, including hospitality, aviation, transport or marketing. Similarly, 62% of the posts below the Lecturer role were also equally related to both tourism and events, and generally complemented with a supporting subject.

These findings not only demonstrate the emphasis on events within the wider HE industry, but also that tourism focused roles are statistically promoted higher up in the career ladder. For Lecturers seeking to progress in a tourism focused career, the posts made available appear to hinder that progression. This further reinforces the issue of horizontal mismatch, in that Lecturers who may be seeking tourism focused jobs are being forced to accept an event focused job, or a job in tourism and a supporting subject. This is perhaps a greater statement about the industry itself; however, there is also an argument that it is a way for universities to save on costs by grouping subjects and spreading Lecturers more broadly across the interdisciplinary subjects.

## **Discussion**

The findings present a challenge to Somers *et al.*, (2019) who argued that, in a horizontally mismatched market, when the job market is demand led, the job market is sub-optimal. Indeed, **Figure 1** clearly shows that the nature of the UK academic tourism job market presents more or less the same number of positive and negative impacts. Because the UK tourism academic job market is also supply led (even if to a significantly lesser extent), it is questionable whether the supply dimension of the market is a strong enough variable to change the sub-optimal nature of the market. This is now discussed in more specific detail.

### ***Sub-Optimal Market and Neoliberalism***

Neoliberalism, which has led to a management approach more commonly known as managerialism, is to be defined as a political and economic practice that suggests that individual liberty, free market and trade contribute to overall well-being. Neoliberalism is a result of practices, policies and power relations (Brunila, 2016) that have a direct implication on performance, quality and competition in HEIs (Ayikoru *et al.*, 2009). The power relations described by Brunila (2016) are either relation-based on forces imposed on individuals, which are difficult to sustain, or relation of power, with a certain level of freedom. This level of freedom is the context in which HEIs in the UK are operating through their daily management and operations (Ayikoru *et al.*, 2009).

Through the lens of managerialism, HEIs are now perceived as businesses with related attitudes and attributes, rather than places of production of knowledge (Ayikoru *et al.*, 2009). For instance, the production of knowledge which mainly happens through the production of outputs (full-length articles in leading journals), is now mainly used to assess the performance of institutions and therefore their ranking (Salandra *et al.*, 2021). As a result, mass production is encouraged (Law *et al.*, 2015). Citations, international awards, highly cited researchers, external research grants, written books and monographs are all metrics used to rank individual academics, universities and countries (Law *et al.*, 2015).

Because career progression, whether internal or external, is extremely difficult in the UK academic environment, and despite the achievements and recognitions of academics (Castro *et al.*, 2020; Harley *et al.*, 2004; Ladkin and Weber, 2009), the neoliberal relation of force in managerialism (Brunila, 2016) gives the upper hand to HEIs, which are extracting the maximum value from academics who have no power to resist this pressure upon them as their progression depends on the HEI they work for. As a result, the linear recruitment market or horizontality in tourism academia, and in academia more generally, is positive for HEIs, but less so for academics. Thus, and as earlier described by the favouring of research hours to more

senior academics, it is arguable that for lower to mid-level academics, the HE university system is designed around attractive and ideal benefits, but also unrealistic goals.

Given the above, the UK linear or horizontal tourism academic job is optimal for HEIs, but sub-optimal for academics. In a heterogeneous context, markets can switch from a sub-optimal market to an optimal market and vice-versa, but a certain degree of patience is needed (Abrate *et al.*, 2019). When patience is not possible, the development of a dynamic strategy can help a sub-optimal market to move to being an optimal market (Malasevka and Haugom, 2018). In either case, it is important for policy makers to develop tools that enable the identification of variables that impact on the performance (sub-optimal or optimal) in the specific sector context (Ben-David *et al.*, 2016). For the tourism academic job market in the UK to be optimal, two remedial options appear possible: 1) either tourism academics develop a strategy of resilience (based on patience), or 2) dynamic strategies to overcome the current situation are enacted, as suggested in the following section.

Alongside Sigala (2021), who argued that tourism and hospitality education needs to be reset in terms of value proposition (what learning is about), the revenue model (universities need to think about new business models to generate income), and finally, the delivery model (how to deliver knowledge), this article argues that tourism academia (in the UK) needs to be reset in terms of career progression from a value perspective (criteria for internal progression; and the need for horizontal job opportunities); and a benefits model (despite the fact managerialism is benefiting both academics and HEIs, the balance is mainly towards HEIs).

With this said, academics have a leverage tool to help reset the power direction based on the fact that students are more regularly choosing HEIs based on the institution's profile (Tomlinson, 2008), which is partly based on the profile of academics (Ayikoru *et al.*, 2009; Castro *et al.*, 2020; Harley *et al.*, 2004; Ladkin and Weber, 2009; Law *et al.*, 2015; Salandra *et al.*, 2021), and accreditations, also partly linked with the profile of academics. Accreditations,

such as EQUIS, AACSB and AMBA, are considered as being part of the branding strategies of HEIs (Urgel, 2007). The ‘Holy Grail’ for business schools in the student recruitment market, for example, is to hold the ‘triple crown’, namely AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS (Harker *et al.*, 2016).

HEIs have to constantly report on their performance internally and externally, as a result, they could be said to be fully immersed into the neoliberal, managerial culture of evidence, which also includes the constant quest for accreditations (Morest, 2009). The significance of academics in the marketing strategies of HEIs could therefore be a leveraging tool that they could use to counterbalance the relation of force between them and their HEI. This tool would only work as a leveraging tool, if the HEI considers academic members of staff as talents and investments, and not simply as resources (Neri and Wilkins, 2019).

**Figure 2** summarises the macro context which influences the type of recruitment of academics in tourism in the UK and highlights dyads and complexities related to their recruitment.

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### ***Dyads in the External Recruitment of Tourism Academics in the UK***

Within the context of recruitment processes in the UK HEI environment, this article considers a number of dyads: HEIs Vs academics; patience Vs dynamism; sub-optimal Vs optimal; and internal promotion Vs external promotion. These dyads could partly explain the good performance of UK HEIs delivering tourism (and related subjects) courses. Indeed, the Shanghai Ranking counts five UK institutions in the top 50 worldwide institutions for tourism and related topics.

The dyads highlighted in this study are also fleshing out that the nature of the tourism industry is also to be reflected in tourism education. Beyond tourism academia, it is higher education as a whole which seems to be based on complexity, paradox and ambivalences, as summarised by Brunila (2016, p.393) who argues “to become a professor in academia means struggling with constant ambivalences”. Something Batat (2024) most recently revealed in a study of business and marketing education. Managing dyads in the UK HEI environment can be related to work-life balance, as many have chosen this industry for the quality of life that it offers (Ladkin and Weber, 2009). Some dyadic relationships can be identified as fruitful, such as academic outputs that bridge the gap between academics’ personal career development and HEIs, obtaining research funding or establishing a win-win relationship for both parties (Castro *et al.*, 2020; Harley *et al.*, 2004; Ladkin and Weber, 2009; Salandra *et al.*, 2021).

The contribution of this article centres around recognising and addressing the dyadic relationships and neoliberalism/managerialism within the UK HE market. This is not strongly represented in previous research. While the current process of academic recruitment may be considered adequate, despite the earlier described challenges and limitations, this article sheds light on the fact that having high-level academics (either through internal or external recruitment) is also very important, due to the potential impacts that academics can have on students.

### ***Future prospects for recruitment and career progress in a changing HE landscape***

This study acknowledges conventional paths for academic career advancement might become obsolete due to the rise of online platforms, alternative qualifications, and collaborations with industry in the changing landscape of higher education. Indeed, Sigala (2021) argues that in the future, the delivery model in education will be different with AI, particularly as augmented reality and virtual reality become more prominent within educational settings. Sigala (2021)

also argues that the revenue model of higher education might change, with a focus on reducing overhead cost, and thus making the role of professors irrelevant. This view is further supported by Séraphin et al (2023) who argue that the current ideology of education in the UK (neoliberalism and managerialism) is largely influencing curriculum and recruitment, particularly in tourism and related subjects. However, online content as a replacement for course materials has already raised concerns on the basis of reliability and misinformation (Genota, 2018; Topal & Shargh, 2023; Wyatt, 2024). Such arguments extend to online and AI-related replacements of academic teaching staff. For example, in a study concerning AI learning, Alarie and Cockfield (2021) explain how a key advantage of the human academic is their ability to adapt, particularly when dealing with complex human emotions, as well as deal with peer and student interactions that require subjective interpretations and reactions. Moreover, the replacement of academics (or the academic experience) with AI, or other digital units, is argued to have a negative impact on the university student experience – which, in terms of student satisfaction and enrolment, ultimately dictates the university landscape (Batat, 2024; Crawford et al, 2024). Thus, while the future of digital technology in the classroom (or as the classroom) remains to be fully known, this paper argues that the immediate future still requires the human experience – created and delivered by human academics, and thus, the recruitment and career development support of human academics.

For tourism specifically, the uncertain future of HE programmes in the UK, given the current changing landscape as a result of wider socio-economic and political factors, creates further questions for the future of academic recruitment and career progression. At the moment, London and its surrounding area is considered the main hub (1) for tourism related programmes, followed by hub (2), which includes England's Southeast, West Midlands, East Midlands, and Yorkshire areas, and of course hub (3) to include Wales and Southwest England, and finally hub (4) comprising Scotland alone (Séraphin, 2022). However, as more universities

begin to restructure their tourism offerings in light of the freefall of student recruitment numbers and confirmed enrolments (Hinsliff, 2024; Laker, 2024), changes across the traditional four UK recruitment hubs are likely to shift, thereby causing knock-on changes in recruitment patterns and the potential for career progression opportunities. More certain, however, is that as academic numbers dwindle under the current pressures of tightening budgets, HEIs will be faced with the challenge of rebalancing their priorities between research and teaching to sustain the core of their existence. Ultimately, the immediate future for overcoming linearity/horizontality looks challenging.

### **Conclusion and implications**

Taking neoliberalism and its role in the linearity/horizontality of the job market as the departure point, this article has been designed to define and discuss the linear/horizontal job market from different perspectives and determine both the positive and negative impacts of the job market, with a focus on the specificity of the UK HEIs. As a summary, the horizontal job market creates a mismatch in positions and real potential of the labour force. The reasons for such a market are demand and supply related. Importantly, when it is demand related, the market is said to be sub-optimal and not performing to the best of its capabilities. Horizontal mismatch has been identified previously as a recurrent feature of job markets in the tourism and hospitality industries. In this respect, tourism academia reflects the industry which is its object. This horizontality was also to be expected, as horizontality and sub-optimality is typical to VET as a whole. Horizontality (or linearity) in the job market has some positives, as it removes barrier entries for ECRs, it encourages established academics to work even harder and subsequently plays a major role in increased performance.

As it has been established that the UK is a linear job market, the conclusions of this article go beyond the tourism academic boundaries. They can be considered for other subjects,

including vocational ones. The impact of managerialism and neoliberalism in the UK is profound. Dyadic relationships within the linear/horizontal market highlight the complexity of such a market which relies on a 'merry go round' of external forces.

This article contributes to knowledge at practical and theoretical levels, whereby academic research in tourism education has been largely overlooked (Kırlar-Can *et al.*, 2022; Kozak, 2021; Ladkin and Weber, 2009). This article has not only theorised the job market for the recruitment of academics in tourism but it has also identified the benefits, limitations, and complexity of such a market. This article has been among the pioneers to argue that tourism academia reflects the tourism industry. It is however the first to support this statement using the linear/horizontal feature of recruitment for tourism academia. From that angle, this article adds an additional layer of evidence of why tourism academia and the tourism industry reflect one another.

The dyadic nature of linear/horizontal markets is another contribution of this article. Indeed, linear/horizontal markets present benefits for some stakeholders (HEIs), and limitations for others (academics). Also, for the same stakeholders (academics), it sometimes presents both benefits and limitations. The benefits can be long-term (HEIs) and short-term (academics). Yet, no other research has discussed linear/horizontal job markets from this perspective.

Last but not least, the article has not only highlighted that the UK recruitment approach of academics in tourism and other vocational subjects are worthy of further analysis and reform, but it has also suggested some leveraging tools (dynamic strategies) or to the development of resilience (patience). However, despite the fact this reform of recruitment needs to happen, the article has also highlighted the fact that the dyadic nature of the system plays a role in the good performance of education system, hence the good performance at the international level (Shanghai ranking) of HEIs providing tourism (and related subjects) programs.

As to the possible implications for the future of tourism academia and profession, it appears that the traditional form of tourism education is likely to have some transformations. Among these are the future may be heavily drawn towards online education, not dependent on obtaining the diploma from a single institution, the system could be more flexible allowing the students to participate in a large network of varying courses around the world. Also, the future may also be more interrelated between the subjects so that the knowledge may become easily outdated. These are the external factors forcing the academia to be more dynamic and up-to-date. Thinking the potential influence of artificial intelligence, there are more rooms to open both for the academia and the industry. These developments may also lead to changes on recruitment practices of the tourism academia and industry and its related subjects not only in the UK but also elsewhere in the world.

The conclusions of this article could be applicable to other educational systems which are influenced by neoliberalism/managerialism. The findings are transferable to universities beyond the UK boundaries, particularly since several case examples provided in this paper articulate similar issues occurring outside of the UK. Greater reliability and generalisation is possible with more research that collects similar types of data in other subjects and/or educational systems, and then compare them to the UK. Finally, COVID-19 may potentially be the reference point to restructure the higher education system all over the world so that their needs and prerequisites may also evolve, resulting in the redesign of the academic job market.

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