

## **'You need to be willing to move anywhere for work': The impact of COVID-19 on mobility in higher education**

Jess Harris<sup>1</sup>

Kate Smithers<sup>1</sup> and Nerida Spina<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Newcastle

<sup>2</sup> Queensland University of Technology

Decreased proportions of funding to higher education in Australia over the past two decades has left many universities reliant on income sourced from international student enrolments and short-term research funding. Complexities and uncertainties prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic have had a significant impact on funding available to Australian universities in terms of student fees, research funds and government support (Herman et al., 2021). The increased workload of academics, particularly female academics with caring responsibilities, during the transition to online learning has been widely recognised (Utoft, 2020). Further, international and intranational travel restrictions have significantly impacted on the ways in which academics collaborate, engage in research development, and present their work (Raby & Madden, 2021).

This paper reports on the necessity of mobility for early career researchers, particularly those in precarious employment, and examines the implications of COVID-19 on academics' work and identity. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 27 contract researchers in Australia and the United Kingdom as the *point d'appui*, we employ Dorothy Smith's feminist sociological method (Smith, 1990) to examine how these academics' lives have been shaped by changes in organisational and government policy. Understanding how academic work has been reshaped in this critical period provides important new knowledge that can be used to consider the potential long-term effects on academic work and the university sector.

This paper argues that in a COVID-19 world, the taken for granted ways of thinking and knowing about academic work and identities are being challenged. In this critical moment, the global higher education sector needs to reimagine the role of flexibility and mobility in academic work. We argue the need for flexibility and mobility has long excluded those who have caring responsibilities, disabilities, and those in precarious roles. The current COVID-19 climate challenges traditional notions of the globalised higher education and the working lives of academics.

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