



# PROJECT PARTNERS

- University of Warwick – co-ordinator
- University of the Algarve, Portugal
- University of Ireland, Maynooth
- University of Lower Silesia, Poland
- Stockholm University, Sweden
- University of Seville, Spain



# EMPLOY

Enhancing the Employability of  
Non-traditional Students in HE

# OBJECTIVES

- Understand employability from the student and graduate perspective
- Identify the strategies graduates are currently utilising to enter the labour market
- Explore the impact of age, gender, class, ethnicity and disability on students' employment prospects
- Examine the perspectives and needs of employers (public, private, 3<sup>rd</sup> sector) and university staff
- Increase knowledge and understanding of what promotes or limits employability of NTS

- Map the different HE contexts in relation to the employability of NTS in partner countries
- Identify best practice and policy strategies
- 2 handbooks (non-traditional students & employers & HE staff)

# NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

- We define non-traditional students as including those from low-income families, under-represented ethnic and socio-economic groups, mature students, first generation into HE and people with disabilities.
- We include both younger and older students

# Why non-traditional students?

- Tomlinson (2008) - lack of research on non-traditional students & employability
- Issue of inequalities – class, gender, ethnicity, age, disability
- NTS - longer transition period than ‘traditional’ students to gain employment
- Often at below graduate level.

- Research indicates that employers are more reluctant to employ older graduates
- Brown and Scase (1994) = those from privileged backgrounds have higher levels of cultural capital which puts them at an advantage in the labour market. They are also more likely to possess extensive social capital and networks which helps in terms of links and connections to employers.



- Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission  
- *Study into non-educational barriers to top jobs – June 2015*. The study concluded that recruitment to top jobs is now favouring ‘poshness’.
- Working class students are less likely to be able to afford to do unpaid workplacements and internships

# METHODOLOGY

- Biographical narrative methods
- Voices of students central to the research and the dissemination process

- Country contexts: overview of research and statistics in each partner country
- Interviewing and research and analysis:
  - Students in their final year of study (20)– to follow through with a small sample a year after they have left (10) – biographical interviews
  - Graduates up to 5 years after leaving (15)
  - Employers (10)
  - University staff (10)

# SOME ISSUES FROM THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

- Precarity
- Class and capitals
- Unpaid internships
- Adults, age & locality
- Perceptions of racism
- Disabled disadvantaged
- Gender inequalities
- Institutional inequalities- not a level playing field

# HE STAFF PERSPECTIVES

- Use of the word career rather than employability (at Warwick)
- WP strategies to enter university but less so when they're here

'...there is the question about what happens when they get here to assist them in making the most of the opportunities ...there seems to be an assumption that it's not useful for students to be identified as coming from a widening participation background because once they're here as students the opportunities are the same for them as they are for everyone else and the academic standards are expected universally across whatever you're studying. And, therefore, why should they be picked out as a separate group of students'.

# STAFF

- However some careers sessions are focused at adult students and their needs
- Recognise that working class students lack social and cultural capital eg for getting an internship

# EMPLOYERS

- Top companies only focus on the top universities
  - careers fairs, supporting student societies
- Looking for a ‘fit’ with their company

‘I think ultimately they are looking for a fit, someone who fits within their organisation, someone who fits with their values as a company...Employers are looking for students who are motivated by exactly the same things that their company is motivated by.’

# EMPLOYERS

- Need for soft skills, communication and presentation skills, to show self-awareness and give examples of relevant abilities and experience
- Academic study not necessarily the most important aspect
- Importance of internships
- Need to research the organisation they are applying to
- The capacity to present oneself in a certain way – cultural and social capital but some interested in diversity



# DISSEMINATION

- Regular newsletters: Every 6 months
- National workshops
- European conference
- Policy leaflets
- Publications & conference papers
- Use of social media
- Video podcasts
- Website: <http://employ.dsw.edu.pl/language/en/>
- Twitter: @employ2016