**Review of HE student destinations and outcomes data:**

**Third working group meeting**

**Monday 22 February 2016, 11.00am**

**Finlaison House, London, EC4A 1AB**

Paper No: 4

# Contesting “Volatility”

At its December meeting, the working group discussed the questions put to it by the strategic group in the remit document. The first question was:

“How can we better understand the career paths taken by students? Special focus should be given to better understanding the volatility that attends early stages of a career in some industry sectors, and to the impacts of part-time study on careers.”

There was a widely-shared consensus in the working group that the use of the word ‘volatility’ was incorrect. While it is believed that many (mainly young) graduates will undertake a variety of jobs soon after graduating, it is perhaps unfair to characterise this as an imposed ‘volatility’.

Firstly, the current data are inadequate to determine the extent of any impermanence in employment relations. DLHE offers a synchronic snapshot, while the Longitudinal DLHE is a sample, and is also configured as a later snapshot. To understand the nature of early career pathways, a diachronic method is required, which will track changes over time. We do not have enough evidence to make statements about the level or extent of ‘volatility’ experienced by graduates.

Secondly, we do not have evidence to determine that volatility in the labour market imposes impermanence in employment for graduates. Graduates may be acting strategically in their early employment choices, and building on a variety of experiences toward a goal; or they may simply be trying-out a variety of employment possibilities. It is also possible that flexible employment choices are supporting other non-pecuniary goals. As well as not fully understanding the level or extent of volatility; we do not know the reasons why it might exist.

Given this discussion, the working group proposes the following re-wording of the first question:

“How can we better understand the career paths taken by students? Special focus should be given to better understanding the early stages of activity, what amount of job-changing occurs, the motivations for this and in what ways different employment patterns relate to certain careers or industry sectors. We should also discover the impacts of part-time study on careers.”

This proposal is presented to the Strategic Group for their consideration and approval.

Dan Cook

12/02/2016