

EPSRC

Engineering and Physical Sciences
Research Council



BALANCE NETWORK

Post-event report | January 2017

Digital scholars in a mobile world: One-day symposium exploring work-life balance in increasingly mobile and digitised academic environments

Organised by Anastasia Gouseti & Josef Ploner

14th December 2016 | FACE, University of Hull

The Balance Network is funded by:

EPSRC

Engineering and Physical Sciences
Research Council

Table of contents

3	The Balance Network
4	Executive summary
5	Aims of the activity
6 – 12	Activity programme
13	Conclusions
14	Attendees
15	Planned outputs
16	Organisers' biographies

Activity information

The Balance Network provided a total of £1,909 in support of this symposium, which was hosted by Dr Anastasi Gouseti and Dr Josef Ploner at the Faculty of Arts, Cultures and Education (FACE), University of Hull.

The event was run in collaboration with:



The Balance Network

Digital technologies are changing our personal lives, the way we work, and the interplay between the two.

In this context, the [Balance Network](#) has worked to facilitate an interdisciplinary approach to research and practice relating to Work-Life Balance issues within the Digital Economy. Founded in 2013, it is funded until early 2017 by the UK's Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. It was funded alongside three research projects (Digital Brain Switch, Digital Epiphanies, Family Rituals 2.0) exploring related themes. Its purpose has been to both facilitate links between these projects, and use them as a springboard to create a wider network.

The Network has offered a framework for both academics and non-academics to communicate, share experience and practice, nurture and explore new ideas, disseminate knowledge and inform policy. It does this through events, a monthly bulletin, and funding for member-led activities. We have built a membership of over 300, across >50 universities, a dozen international academic institutions, as well as professional practice organisations ranging from start-ups to the CIPD, government departments, research council and media representatives. We are deliberately interdisciplinary and open in our approach, and welcome membership from anyone interested in our core themes of work-life balance and digital technologies.

In March 2016, we launched an invitation for members to propose Balance Network activities as part of a second series of member-led projects. This resulted in nine events and collaborations which ran over October 2016 – January 2017, including the *Digital scholars in a mobile world* symposium. You can read about all the events, as well as our previous series of activities which were funded over winter 2015 / spring 2016, and the Beyond Balance conference held in June 2016, on the [Balance Network website](#).

Dr Rosie Robison

*Principal Investigator, Balance Network
Global Sustainability Institute, Anglia Ruskin University*

Executive summary

Academics in general, and Early Career Researchers (ECRs) in particular, are often heralded as a new generation of 'knowledge nomads' or 'creative migrants' who are highly skilled in managing new technologies and navigating fluctuating and often stressful work/life mobilities. As academics become increasingly mobile and engage in digital scholarship they also seem to become less defined by their institutional affiliation and more defined by the online identity they ascertain. To some extent the emergence of digital and networked technologies has allowed an 'always on' pattern of internet use which in turn has facilitated anywhere/anytime working conditions and blurs the boundaries between professional and private identities. Whilst there is a growing interest in the use of digital/social media in academia and in the effects that increased mobility has on academic identities, research on how these two phenomena interrelate and affect work-life balances remains scarce and requires further exploration.

The aim of this one-day symposium was to critically explore the largely under-researched links between mobility, technology and work/life balance in contemporary academic/Higher Education settings. Contributions were provided both by emerging and established researchers who addressed these links from different disciplinary vantage points (Education, Sociology and Psychology) and from different professional and career-stage perspectives. The symposium featured four 20-minutes 'keynote' papers covering the following topics: 'Technology-mediated nomadicity and work-life balance in academic settings' (Dr Fabiano Pinatti), 'Digital practices, academic identity-building and work-life balance of Early Career Researchers' (Dr Jude Fransman), 'Conference time: academics aiming (not) to have been there' (Dr Emily Henderson), as well as 'Work-life balance and wellbeing in academics' use of technology' (Prof Gail Kinman).

The well-attended symposium provided ample space for discussion among speakers and participants, who addressed timely issues including the form and purpose of academic work in increasingly mobile, technology-led and neoliberal higher education settings; the increasingly complex processes of identity formation and subjectivity among academics (particularly early career researchers), the role of (institutional) cultures in managing and negotiating work/life; the development of unequal power-relations and precarious work situations within unbalanced work/life contexts; as well as individual strategies and experiences of resilience-building in and beyond the mobile academic workplace.

Aims of the activity

The main aim of this symposium was to bring together experts from across the disciplines, who undertake research in the largely overlooked area of work-life balance in academic/higher education settings. Within this aim, the symposium should provide a platform to critically explore how increased mobility (physical, social, virtual) affects lifestyle choices and career trajectories of both early career and established academics, and to examine how the use of digital technologies characterises and permeates their professional lifestyles, identities and work-patterns. Besides sharing current and ongoing research into work-life balance within academic contexts, another key aim of the symposium was to build a collaborative network of core researchers in view of future research activities and the dissemination of outputs among academic and other relevant professional communities.

Activity programme

The keynote speakers presentations are available online through the event's website hosted by the University of Hull and the Balance Network. During the event, a twitter hashtag was created ([#hulldsmw](#)) to share key moments and outputs of the event with a wider social media public.

Time	Programme
10:00 – 11:00	<i>Registration and coffee reception</i>
11:00 – 11:15	Prof Michael Gratzke: <i>Introduction</i>
11:15 – 13:15	Keynote presentations:
	Dr Fabiano Pinatti, Universität Siegen: <i>Dissolving Boundaries: Technologically-mediated Nomadicity and Work-Life (Im)Balance in Academic Settings</i>
-	Prof Gail Kinman, University of Bedfordshire: <i>Work-life balance, wellbeing and technology use in UK academics</i>
-	Dr Emily Henderson, University of Warwick: <i>Conference time: academics aiming (not) to have been there</i>
-	Dr Jude Fransman, The Open University: <i>Becoming academic in the digital university: Digital practices, academic identity-building and the 'work-life balance' of Early Career Researchers (ECRs) in the UK</i>
14:15 – 15:15	Roundtable discussions
15:15 – 15:45	Coffee and tea break and networking
15:45 – 16:15	Closing: Exploring future avenues for collaborative research

Welcome and introduction

Following the registration and coffee reception, which provided an appropriate environment to meet and greet both speakers and attendees, the symposium was formally opened by the Prof Michael Gratzke, Associate Dean for Research at the Faculty of Arts, Cultures and Education at the University of Hull, who welcomed the participants and emphasised the very timely and interesting scope of the event. Following Prof Gratzke's address, Dr Anastasia Gouseti and Dr Josef Ploner welcomed the participants, introduced the speakers and provided a brief overview of the day's programme, which included four 20 minute keynote lectures in the morning, and a research workshop in the afternoon.

Keynote

Dissolving boundaries: technologically-mediated nomadcity and work-life (im)balance in academic settings

Dr Fabiano Pinatti, Universität Siegen



Dr. Aparecido Fabiano Pinatti de Carvalho is currently a Researcher at the Department of Information Systems of the University of Siegen working in the EU/NWR Project 'Cyberrüsten 4.0'. He holds a B.Sc. and a M.Sc. in Computer Science from the Federal University of São Carlos, São Paulo, Brazil, and a Multidisciplinary PhD developed within a joint project between the Interaction Design Centre of the Department of Computer Science and Information Systems, University of Limerick, Ireland, and the Department of Sociology of the same university. Fabiano's interests span Human-Computer Interaction, Interaction Design, Computer Supported Cooperative Work, Ubiquitous and Mobile Computing, Mobile and Nomadic Work and Informatics in Education. He has published several articles on topics related to these fields of research and presented at prestigious international conferences. Before joining the University of Siegen, he was working at the Multidisciplinary Research Group of the Vienna University of Technology as Project Manager of the EU TOPIC Project.

The series of keynote lectures was opened by Dr Fabiano Pinatti (University of Siegen), who delivered a fascinating paper on the fluidity and flexibility of academic work from an international comparative perspective. Drawing on auto-biographical accounts as well as ethnographic research he had undertaken with academics across Europe, Fabiano was able to illustrate some of the contradictions and ambivalences of work-life balance in academia, which can generate a sense of empowerment among academics, but are also characterised by frequent 'trade-offs' that help to negotiate the always fluid and permeable work-life boundaries.

Keynote

Work-life balance, wellbeing and technology use in UK academics

Professor Gail Kinman, University of Bedfordshire



Gail Kinman is Professor of Occupational Health Psychology at the University of Bedfordshire. She is a Chartered Psychologist and an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Gail is also the Director of the Research Centre for Applied Psychology here at the University of Bedfordshire. Her research interests focus on work-related stress, work-life balance, emotional labour and emotional literacy and how they influence the wellbeing of employees, their clients/customers/students and their families. Gail has conducted research in these areas with various occupational groups with a particular focus on 'helping' professionals such as social workers, teachers, police officers and fire and rescue personnel and 'knowledge workers' such as academics.

The second paper, by Professor Gail Kinman (University of Bedfordshire) presented findings from a series of recent mixed-method research projects exploring academics' use of technology for work purposes and the implications for their recovery, work-life balance, wellbeing and job performance. Gail paid particular attention to the role of e-mailing as a set of practices that can generate various job stressors and levels of demand, and determines individuals' job involvement, schedule flexibility and technology management. Besides the predominantly stressful impacts that emailing has on more traditional academic work (i.e. research and teaching), Gail also highlighted interventions which may help academics manage technology more effectively.

Keynote

Conference time: academics aiming (not) to have been there

Dr Emily Henderson, University of Warwick



Dr Emily F. Henderson is Assistant Professor of International Education and Development in the Centre for Education Studies at the University of Warwick, UK. She completed an ESRC-funded PhD studentship at the UCL Institute of Education; her research project was an ethnographic study of the conceptual knowledge production of gender at international Women's Studies conferences. Her first book, entitled Gender Pedagogy: Teaching, Learning and Tracing Gender in Higher Education, was published by Palgrave in 2015. At Warwick, she is developing a new MA entitled 'Global Education and International Development'. She is co-convenor of the SRHE (Society for Research into Higher Education) International Research and Researchers Network and co-convenor of the University of Warwick's AMIN – Academic Mobilities and Immobilities Network.

The third paper, by Dr Emily Henderson (University of Warwick) offered fascinating insights in the ways in which academics' conference participation fit into, or rather disrupt their everyday work routine both within and beyond the neoliberal university. Based on her ethnographic research of/at academic conferences, Emily theorised three different temporalities with which academics engage in when attending conferences. These temporalities (clock time, subjective time and event time) are often intertwined in complex ways and pose challenges to academics when it comes to managing conference travel, networking, pending work commitments, email correspondences, as well as their subjective ideas of presence and absence.

Keynote

Becoming academic in the digital university: Digital practices, academic identity-building and the 'work-life balance' of Early Career Researchers (ECRs) in the UK



Dr Jude Fransman, The Open University

Dr Jude Fransman is a sociologist currently holding a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship at the Institute of Educational Technology (IET). Her research focuses on the processes of research/evidence production and use. Jude is interested in questions such as: who participates in research processes? What types of skills and languages count? How do different methods/texts/technologies change the research process and the accessibility/relevance of evidence? How are different kinds of evidence valued by different institutions? Jude has a background in international development and is particularly interested in how evidence about development is produced and used in different ways.

The final paper, presented by Dr Jude Fransman, was a revealing and conceptually challenging account of academic identity-building in the context of the 'digital university' and work-life balances in higher education. Combining research findings from a previous project with academics across the UK and auto-ethnographic accounts, Jude critically outlined how the binaries between work/life and 'the 'digital' often amalgamate to form a complex 'vignette of failure' which is tightly linked with the shifting structures and affordances of the neoliberal university and impacts on academics' wellbeing as well as their sense of 'multiple' and 'possible' (professional and private) selves.

Afternoon discussions

The keynote lectures were followed by a one-hour lunch break which provided the perfect setting for networking among speakers, organisers and attendees.

The afternoon roundtable session generated a lively discussion around some of the key themes brought forward in the keynote presentations. It was also a fantastic opportunity for attending early career and PhD students to voice their own thoughts and professional experiences, as well as to establish relevant links to their individual interdisciplinary research projects.

Among other themes, the notion of altering academic temporalities, subjectivities and identities was discussed in view of increasingly neoliberal and pressured higher education environments. It was argued that in order to manage both technology use and everyday work expectations, academics need to build resilience and engage in democratic forms of organisation in and beyond the workplace. Another key theme that emerged in the discussion was that culture and cultural relativism plays an important role in the ways in which work/live balance is (and can be) interpreted, managed and negotiated. This point was particularly emphasised by participants with international work experience who referred to the often ritualised and synchronised work/life patterns elsewhere, which not only form part of different institutional cultures and (tacit) work/live balance contracts, but are also characterised by inequalities, asymmetries and anachronisms in culturally diverse work environments.

Whilst the 'digital', and new technologies more generally were frequently seen as obstacles and negative influences on work/life balance, some discussants also observed that the potentials of technology in successfully managing and reducing work pressure remains largely underexplored and offers great opportunities in facilitating sustainable academic work places in the future.

Besides the key points outlined above, the discussion featured a number of additional valuable contributions relating to the impact of technology-led academic work and mobility in view of mental and physical health. The discussion also reflected on the formation of multiple 'work/life' identities among academics which are closely linked to uneven power relations in and beyond the workplace and relate to the multiplicity of everyday engagements with students, colleagues, and superiors. It was argued that in order to manage these different work/life identities, academics need to turn to democratic forms of collaboration and embrace sustainable institutional ecologies of work.

After a very stimulating debate, the final 30 minutes of this session were dedicated to exploring future avenues for collaborative research in the discussed areas (which was one of the main aims of the event).

Conclusions

In view of the stimulating programme and discussions outlined above, the immediate impact of the event was extremely positive. This was evidenced by feedback provided by the guest speakers, both during and immediately after the event, who highlighted the appropriateness, congruence and relevance of the presented topics, as well as the (unexpected) synergies emerging from the discussion both during the keynotes and in the round-table session.

"It was wonderful to meet all and I think the event worked really well as a whole (so rare to have such varied but compatible perspectives on the same topic – I learnt a lot)."
- Keynote Speaker

Attendees stressed the applicability and compatibility of the presented concepts and topics to their own interdisciplinary work and research areas (i.e. in Education Studies, Nursing, Social and Youth Work, Computing, etc.). Another positive impact links to one of the main aims of the event which envisaged the formation of a collaborative group of researchers in order to continue the synergetic and productive debate beyond the event. A mailing group has been formed to further communicate and take forward the interesting and productive discussions produced on the day.

Attendees

A total of 22 people registered for the event and attended the keynote lectures. The majority of attendees were members of staff and PhD students at the University of Hull who covered a range of disciplines, including Education, Sociology, Media and Cultural Studies, Modern Languages, Computing and Nursing. Whilst the majority of attendees were local, the event also attracted scholars from further afield, with one participant even travelling from Sweden (Karlstad University) to attend the symposium.

Planned outputs

The final discussion of the day, which aimed at generating ideas of how to take this project forward, has produced a wealth of ideas which are being evaluated. One suggestion put forward was to produce an edited publication in the form of a Special Issue in a suitable academic journal or to produce an edited book on the topic, and the organisers are currently exploring options. Due to the fact that the symposium was attended by scholars working in or across different European countries (i.e. UK, Germany, Sweden, Greece, Austria, etc.) the idea of adding an international/European comparative dimension to this publication project was welcomed by all participants.

Organisers' biographies

Dr Anastasia Gouseti

Dr Anastasia Gouseti is a Lecturer in Digital Education at the Faculty of Arts, Cultures and Education at the University of Hull. Her main area of interest in teaching and research lies in the use of digital media in educational settings, and the role of new technologies in promoting teaching, learning and collaboration. She was awarded a PhD in Educational Technologies in 2012 by the Institute of Education, University of London. Anastasia has undertaken research into the use of digital technologies for formal and informal learning and online collaboration, the place of digital media in everyday life, and the changing nature of teaching and learning through the innovative application of technology. Among other research outputs, Anastasia has recently published a monograph titled *Digital Technologies for School Collaboration* (2014, Palgrave Macmillan)



Dr Josef Ploner

Dr Josef Ploner is Lecturer in International Education at the Faculty of Arts, Cultures and Education at the University of Hull. He received his MA from the University of Vienna (Cultural Anthropology), a PhD (Cultural Studies) from Leeds Beckett University. He has also worked as Exhibition Curator and educational practitioner in Innsbruck, Austria. Josef's main research interests focus on the experiences of internationally mobile HE students and academic staff, intercultural communication, and narratives of identity and belonging in globalised higher education settings. Josef's other main area of research relates to cultural and heritage tourism as sites of education, ideological contest, narrative ordering and memory formation. Josef has undertaken commissioned research and review projects for the Higher Education Academy and the Equality Challenge Unit UK and the British Council. He has published widely across the areas of Higher Education, Tourism and Heritage Studies.



