

SUSANNA MENIS

Birkbeck School of Law, London University , United Kingdom

**THE VOCATIONAL AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE:
UNDERSTANDING BIRKBECK LAW STUDENTS' ACCOUNTS OF
THEIR LEARNING JOURNEY**

Abstract:

Due to Government Reform of Higher Education (HE) and specifically introduction of the wider participation agenda, the legal profession has seen a greater number of candidates competing for a relatively small number of vacancies. Subsequently, to guarantee a 'return' to students' investment in education, especially following the introduction of tuition fees in 2012 (IFS, 2017), HE quality assurance regulations (QAA 2015; LETR 2013) have encouraged universities to enhance the acquisition of vocational skills, hence making students 'attractive' for employers upon their graduation. The recent announcement of the future introduction of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination has further enhanced this conception. However, pedagogical research suggests that students engagement in HE and choice of subject is purposeful but there is little indication that students perceive the 'returns' as predominantly related to direct vocational employability outcomes (Anderson, Murray and Maharg, 2003; Giroux, 2004; Mercer, 2007; Francis and Sommerlad, 2011; Wilkins et al, 2013; Geven, 2015; Menis, 2017). This is particularly so given the argument presented by Barnett (2004, 2017) where he questions the essence of higher education in a context of what he calls a 'supercomplex world'. Accordingly, this supercomplexity is fed by the incompatibility of two values: the first sees universities as producers of resources, whilst the second recognises universities as sites of transformatory engagement. Then, it is of significance to explore the tension and balance between employability (as "direct" return on investment) and personal development (i.e. transformative experience) from students' perspectives and experiences.

Keywords:

Law studies, vocational, transformative, non-traditional student