Foreword

The core of papers published in this book arose through the opportunity for Early Career Researchers (ECRs) to network and collaborate at an ECR colloquium held in Ireland in 2013 and through the Early Career Higher Education Research (ECHER) network, established in 2011. Networks such as this are valuable in providing a forum for ECRs to exchange information, interact, and engage. This level of peer support is essential, as many ECRs have reported a sense of being isolated in their work; therefore, building networks is critical in enabling ECRs to develop strong ties with peers and develop extended support networks above and beyond those offered by supervisors or associated principal investigators. These networks also allow ECRs to build their scholarly profile and begin a process of developing an academic identity. The quality and breadth of the chapters in this book demonstrates the values of early career researchers in developing networks and building up a body of integrated knowledge in their chosen field; it is hoped that many of the authors in this book will continue to forge working relationships that they have developed as a consequence of this project through the continued formulation of future research grants and publications.

Most of the chapters in the book come from a consortium of authors early in their research careers. The fact that they are in the initial stages of their research careers does not negate the breadth and quality of papers that explore a wide range of issues related to research into higher education. Early Career Researchers (ECRs) are those who are currently undertaking, or have completed, doctoral studies in the last five years and are an important part of research structures within higher education systems. Developing and supporting early career researchers is essential for the future development of disciplinary knowledge. In particular, in the field of research into higher education, ECRs are crucially important to the development of understanding of, and identifying solutions to, the challenges facing higher education systems both nationally and globally. They are also a key component of, and contributor to, the development of higher education systems. In addition, they provide the foundation for the future workforce in all aspects of higher education including teaching, research, policy, and governance in both the public and private sectors.

Although the importance of ECRs to the higher education sector is without question, their voice has not always been heard, and in many cases, their expertise and experience is underutilised. There is also evidence that ECRs are dissatisfied with aspects of their careers, especially in terms of opportunities to take on leadership roles and in accessing forums to highlight and disseminate their work (Åkerlind, 2005; Petersen, 2011). It is important that ECRs are provided with opportunities to publish and present their research findings; projects, such as this book, are imperative in not only allowing ECRs to present their work but also to provide them with an opportunity to publish independently and display their knowledge to a wide audience on their area of study.
Foreword

In addition, the involvement of ECRs from a variety of disciplines in bringing together the chapters in this book adds scope and innovation in exploring the challenges that face higher education. Bringing together ECRs from different disciplines provides a fresh perspective on higher education research that may not be evident in previously published research. The quality of research in the future is based on the development of skilled researchers who can work together in multidisciplinary teams in advancing knowledge in the field of higher education.

The papers presented in this volume demonstrate how the research undertaken by ECRs can develop new perspectives on higher education research as well as progressing an understanding of areas previously unexplored. In this book, the authors have tackled a diverse range of contemporary challenges facing higher education, including the impact on higher education of information and communications technology, managerial control, academic autonomy, professional development of teachers and academics, the experiences of minority groups in society accessing higher education, non-traditional aged students, internationalisation in higher education, comparative research in higher education, methodology, and doctoral supervision. As well as contributing debate and research on the traditional functions of universities (teaching and research), the authors provide a welcome exploration of new innovations in higher education, not least in the areas of knowledge transfer and the relationships between higher education and industry. The increasing collaborative nature of research into higher education and the enthusiasm of early career researchers in this regard are evident in that the book presents papers by authors from Australia, Chile, Croatia, France, Ireland, Mongolia, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the USA. This international interaction and collaboration is to be welcomed as not only does it facilitate understanding of higher education within a global context, but it also allows for cross-national sharing of ideas and methodological innovations. In addition, early career researchers who authored the chapters in this book are using innovative and multiple methods to investigate areas of interest in higher education research. In this book you will find methods, such as case studies, documentary analysis, reflective students’ papers, social network analysis, techno-biographies, testimonials, secondary data analysis, and action research, among others, used. All of which push out the boundaries in enhancing our understanding of higher education systems and the actors that work within these systems.

The challenges for ECRs in higher education both in entering the system and progressing careers are well documented; this book demonstrates the value that ECRs can bring to the field and how the future of research into higher education is in safe hands. This is not least down to the editors of the book, all early career researchers themselves, who have shown exemplary leadership skills in bringing together this fine volume of work that will be of interest to all those who work in or research the field of higher education.

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REFERENCES
