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**Abstract**

While the studies of Early Career Researchers (ECRs) have contributed politically important insights into factors hindering ECRs, they have not yet achieved a theoretical understanding of the causal mechanisms that are at work in the transition from dependent to independent research. This paper positions the early career phase in a theoretical framework that combines approaches from the sociology of science and organisational sociology and emphasises the transitional process. In this framework, the early career phase is considered as containing a status passage from the apprentice to the colleague state of their career in their scientific communities. In order to capture the mechanisms underlying this transition, it is important to analyse the interactions of these careers as they unfold over time. The usefulness of this approach is demonstrated with a pilot study of Australian ECRs. We show (a) that misalignments of the three careers stretch the transition phase; (b) that the two major factors affecting the transition are a successful PhD and a research-intensive phase prior to normal academic employment; and (c) that the most important condition hindering the transition is the lack of

**23.4.2025**

time for research. It can be concluded that as a result of a 'market failure' of the university system, the transition from dependent to independent research is currently being relocated to a phase between the PhD and the first academic position. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Laudel, Grit, E-Mail: [grit.laudel@anu.edu.au](mailto:grit.laudel@anu.edu.au)