Reimagining postgraduate career support and education

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/elizabeth-cook/19/
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What postgraduates say they want and need

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Outline

• About the research
• What postgraduates think and feel about institution-led career supports and education
• Recommendations for universities from postgraduate students
About this research

Secondary analysis of data from Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching Strategic Priority Project

Primary research citation:
Engaging postgraduate students and supporting higher education to enhance the 21st century student experience

Final Report 2016

Lead Institution
Bond University

Project Co-Leaders
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Associate Professor Shelley Kinash

Project Managers
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Team Members and Partner Institutions
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Associate Professor Helen Partridge – University of Southern Queensland
Associate Professor Ken Uda – University of Southern Queensland
Dr Sarah Richardson – Australian Council for Educational Research
Harry Rolf – Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations
Jim Smith – Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations

http://PostgraduateStudentExperience.com
Primary research aims

1. Comprehensively analyse the broad experiences of Australian postgraduate students, and the relationship to learning.

2. Establish evidence-based recommendations to impact and enhance Australian postgraduate students’ broad experiences.
Primary research design

1. Universities across all eight Australian states and territories
2. Postgraduates from diverse disciplines
3. Variety of methods:
   - Student engagement breakfast workshops
   - Focus groups
   - One-to-one interviews.
The secondary research

Kinash, S., Crane, L., Cook, E. J., & Judd, M-M. (under review). Are postgraduate students getting the employability and career support they want and need? *Higher Education Research and Development*

Focus of this presentation
Literature review: gaps

Prior research on postgraduate career supports and education was limited to:
1. Single institutions
2. Single discipline of study and, subsequently, a single employing industry
Literature review: gaps

Lack of empirical data that explored university-led employability and career supports as an embedded factor in the overall postgraduate student experience.
Research questions

1. Do Australian postgraduate students value university-led employability and/or career supports as a salient part of their student experience?

2. Do Australian postgraduate students feel satisfied with the employability and career supports and services provided by their universities?

3. Based on these findings, how can the Australian postgraduate student experience, in the context of employability and career supports, be improved?
Primary research design

Participants
• 319 postgraduate students, enrolled in research and course-based degrees at all levels across all Australian states/territories.

Data collection
• 7 student engagement workshop/breakfasts (word cloud activity)
• 7 student focus groups
• 38 individual interviews with students
Postgraduates by method and Australian state/territory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection method</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>NSW</th>
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<td>Workshop</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>223</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus group</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>319</td>
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</table>
Participant demographics

Average age: 35 years
Age range: 21-60 years

- 69% Female
- 31% Male
- 1% Undisclosed
Secondary analysis

• Four independent reviewers
• Extracted and clustered themes and quotes related to postgraduate students’ depictions of their experiences/perceptions related to:
  – employability and career prospects
  – university-led careers services, supports and education.
Secondary analysis

• Data categorised into themes in Excel
• Counted to determine relative frequency by theme
• Patterns identified
• Quotations collated in Word and thematically analysed using frames and codes.
Results: Breakfast workshops

10% of all student experience themes were focused on employability and careers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme type</th>
<th>Done well</th>
<th>Not done well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employability and Careers</td>
<td>5 (4% of themes)</td>
<td>9 (6% of themes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Student Experience</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## University-driven and supported employability initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Done well</th>
<th>Not done well</th>
<th>Mixed reviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practical career-related fieldtrips and/or field research</td>
<td>Career-related professional development of staff and students</td>
<td>Career counselling planning and pathway support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sufficient practical application of curriculum</td>
<td>Development of transferable skills and curricular development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Encouragement of student-driven employability efforts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Done well</th>
<th>Not done well</th>
<th>Mixed reviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing opportunities for tutoring in study area</td>
<td>Fitting and mapping other relevant paid student work (other than tutoring) into formal studies</td>
<td>Embedding extra-curricular activities into student experience as co-curriculum</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# Formalised professional networking and building relationships with industries and professions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Done well</th>
<th>Not done well</th>
<th>Mixed reviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formally networking with student peers as professionals by creating opportunities for peer engagement</td>
<td>Inviting professionals and industry experts into the learning experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategies/recommendations

• Enhanced employability through more support for career planning, especially for pursuing academic careers
• Internships and/or volunteer work in the field of study for all students as part of the degree
• Increased network opportunities with industry.
Strategies/recommendations

- Workshops to ensure teamwork and develop:
  - interpersonal skills
  - industry and career management
  - practical experience
  - networking interactions
  - academic influence on business.
Results: Focus groups

• Students reported that their employability and career-related needs were supported in their undergraduate experience, but not in their subsequent postgraduate experience.
• Postgraduates have particular needs that are not being met.
• The primary unmet need is for enhanced networking.
Results: Interviews

Postgraduate student perceptions of university-led employability and career supports

- Positive: 45%
- Negative: 22%
- Neutral: 33%

$n=30$
Results: Interviews

Postgraduate student perceptions of graduate employment

- Positive: 57%
- Negative: 30%
- Neutral: 13%

n=27
Illustrative quotes

“You look at them [academics] and they’ve all got bags under their eyes and they all look as if they are on the verge of a nervous breakdown at any time. This is hideous. I don’t want to live like that.”
Illustrative quotes

“I would go anywhere where there’s a permanent position. However, I’ve been told by the workforce that I’m unemployable. So I’ve spent 10 years perfecting a CV that’s suited to academia, which essentially, I’m told that I can’t even get a job answering phones with.”
“I’ve had to make my own opportunities. There essentially was no career development that take you from your degree into academia.”
Research questions

1. Do Australian postgraduate students value university-led employability and/or career supports as a salient part of their student experience? Yes!

2. Do Australian postgraduate students feel satisfied with the employability and career supports and services provided by their universities? No 😞

3. Based on these findings, how can the Australian postgraduate student experience, in the context of employability and career supports, be improved?
• Have **intentional** and **explicit conversations** about ‘why people are doing it [postgraduate study] and what they want to get out of it’ to **better identify** postgraduate student **needs**

then

• **Personalise** appropriate supports through **mentoring**
• **Recognise** prior learning and experiences and

• **Scaffold, build-upon and personalise** postgraduate career development and employability through bespoke supports
• Align postgraduate curriculum with industry needs and
• Provide work-relevant experiences through authentic assessment, career development, integrated networking opportunities, funded research, internships…
• Emphasise professional development through regular and robust networks of students, alumni, academics and industry professionals

and

• Manage these networks more intentionally and effectively
• Provide **after-hours** and **post-degree** career/employability support

• **Formalise mentoring** programs

• **Increase** early-career academic pathways.
Take time to think about what you can do to improve the postgraduate student experience at your university
Thank you!

Want to connect?
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