

Letter from the guest editors

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Letter from the guest editors

Denise Jackson & Ruth Bridgstock

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to this Special Issue, the fifth issue for 2019, which focuses on employability and employment outcomes as drivers of higher education practice. Your guest editors are Associate Professor Denise Jackson from Edith Cowan University, and Professor Ruth Bridgstock from Griffith University.

The return on investment of higher education is attracting increasing scrutiny in the context of rising fees, mass student participation, and a perceived oversupply of non-employment ready graduates. Some have argued that the strategic directive of developing student employability in a bid to improve (often short-term and narrowly-focused) employment outcomes devalues higher education learning. For others, it may provide some assurance that the higher education sector is committed to developing future-capable graduates with skills of relevance to the workforce. Either way, preparedness for work is a critical issue, as graduates transition to an uncertain world of work characterised by digital disruption, intense competition for roles, and precarious working arrangements. To accommodate these trends, the notion of graduate employability has broadened to encompass constructs such as career self-management, professional identity, a collaborative mind-set, enterprise and entrepreneurship, cultural capital and social networking capabilities. Developing these dimensions is intended to empower students to achieve their career goals while developing future workers and leaders that can drive innovation and prosperity, as well as make meaningful contributions to community and society.

The special issue includes eight articles which consider the impact of an employability agenda that is largely driven by graduate employment outcomes. Jackson and Bridgstock highlight the limitations of current, narrow measures of student employability and explore the career outcomes of more than 500 Business and Creative Industries graduates using traditional measures (full-time employment outcomes), along with a suite of broader measures that examine career satisfaction, perceived employability, perceived career success, underemployment, and graduate motivations for seeking new roles. Their second paper considers how higher education institutions might productively approach student employability at a strategic level, given the three concurrent and contrasting aims of enhancing short-term graduate outcomes, develop-

ing professional readiness, and enabling graduates to live and work productively and meaningfully across the lifespan. Their actionable principles to enhance employability serve to inform institutional strategy and address the tensions and challenges between the three employability aims.

Divan and colleagues then explore how eight institutions in Canada, the UK and Australia conceptualise employability and the extent to which these conceptualisations are reflected in their websites' marketing narratives. Their consideration of tensions arising from misaligned internal and external narratives on employability segues into Campbell and colleagues' useful case study of how an Australian university has aligned its strategic vision for preparing students for the future world of work to its academic and student support practices, resulting in the transformation of organisational structures, allocations of human resources, and curriculum practices.

Brown and colleagues acknowledge that the higher education sector's approaches to developing student employability are evolving amid challenging graduate labour markets and the impetus for institutional performance in employment outcomes. They examine current conceptualisations of careers and employability practice by analysing program descriptions of postgraduate career development qualifications, position descriptions for careers and employability jobs, and conducting focus groups with career development practitioners. They identify some useful opportunities to better align university careers and employability programs and the capabilities of career development practitioners, in turn enabling students to meet the demands of future work.

Paull and colleagues explore the intersecting influence of policy and forms of graduate capital on students' access to meaningful work integrated learning in Engineering programs in four Australian universities. Their policy and practice recommendations to improve equity and access to work placements are timely given wide recognition of work integrated learning as a valuable platform for enhancing student employability.

Given the importance of job attainment to prospective international students' choice of study destination, and the economic role of international education in host countries, Cameron and colleagues compare the employment intentions and outcomes of over 1100 international graduate alumni from two Australian universities. Their findings can inform the marketing of higher education to overseas markets, as well as identify strategies for promoting international graduate employability.

The special issue concludes with Mullen and colleagues' consideration of the employer perspective of student employability. Using case study vignettes, they analyse

employer expectations of graduates in different industries and sectors and, in the context of the UK's forthcoming departure from the European Union, offer guidance on curriculum design and policy to help prepare students for future work.

The contributions to this special issue engage critically with the wide variety of ways that graduate employability imperatives impact upon higher education practice, from institutional strategy, to curriculum and pedagogy, to marketing, internationalisation, careers practice, and work integrated learning. We hope the special issue provokes and informs thinking and research, policy and practice for developing a concurrently future-capable and employment-ready workforce. We hope you enjoy reading the articles, and welcome any feedback.