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Evidencing student success and career outcomes among Business and Creative Industries graduates

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The teaching performance of higher education institutions is increasingly gauged by graduate employment outcomes. Measuring outcomes in full-time employment terms does not capture the complexities of underemployment, the rise of portfolio careers, the constraints of the labour market and graduate motivations for working arrangements that can allow greater flexibility and work-life balance. This study explores the career outcomes of Business and Creative Industries graduates using both traditional measures (full-time employment outcomes) and a suite of broader measures that examine career satisfaction, perceived employability, perceived career success, underemployment, and graduate motivations for seeking new roles. Findings confirm disciplinary differences in graduate experience, and raise some broad concerns about the quality of graduate employment, particularly given the lack of improvement in outcomes over time since course completion. Findings suggest graduates are optimistic about their career futures, despite unmet expectations – particularly on income.

Keywords: employment; graduate outcomes; career outcomes; student success; employability.

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There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that graduates, particularly millennials (Deloitte, 2018), are seeking work that is meaningful, provides them with a sense of purpose and enables them to help others (Allan et al., 2017). The value of higher education may therefore also be gauged using subjective measures such as career satisfaction, wellbeing, and the graduates' feelings of worth and their ability to contribute to society. Rising student fees, increasing enrolments and softening graduate labour markets, however, have led to increasing pressure from the government to demonstrate the return on investing in higher education in economic terms, such as job attainment and salary premiums (Burke, Scurry, Blenkinsopp, & Graley, 2017). It has thus become commonplace for higher education providers' performance and profile to be gauged in terms of career outcome indicators, particularly full-time employment outcomes. In some countries, such as the United Kingdom and Australia, there is discussion of government financial support for higher education becoming contingent upon graduate outcomes (Commonwealth Government of Australia, 2017). While young people are motivated by extrinsic factors (Twenge, Campbell & Freeman, 2012), this lack of acknowledgement of their intrinsic and altruistic values creates a tension that needs addressing.

Jackson and Bridgstock (2018) advocated for a broader range of graduate outcome measures that extend beyond full-time employment, acknowledging that the future of work is shaped by digital disruption, globalisation and the peer-to-peer economy (Hajkowicz et al., 2016). It is also defined by workers having multiple job roles over the course of their careers (McCrindle, 2015), moving horizontally across different industries and sectors on short-term contracts and gig-like arrangements (Deloitte, 2018). The focus on full-time employment outcomes could, therefore, be considered antiquated and perhaps never relevant for the creative industries where portfolio working rather than full-time roles is the norm (Bridgstock, 2005; Throsby & Petetskaya, 2017). Indeed, the Foundation for Young

Australians (FYA) (2018) reported that full-time work is ‘increasingly precarious and difficult to attain’ for young persons across all industries (p. 5). Jackson and Bridgstock also recommended using subjective measures of graduate outcomes that are aligned with intrinsic values, including career satisfaction, perceived employability and perceived career success. They also suggested extending objective measures to include, for example, student participation in the creation of their own employment (start-ups, consultation) and vertical/horizontal progression across different roles, industries and organisations.

This study explored the career outcomes of both Business and Creative Industries graduates between one to five years after course completion and therefore at various stages of their career trajectory. It explored not only their full-time employment outcomes but a broader range of career outcomes, including contract type and subjective measures which may more meaningfully align to work of the future, such as career satisfaction, perceived employability and perceived career success. The two disciplines were chosen given their contrasting employment outcomes and working arrangements. The research objectives were to: (i) examine the career outcomes of Business and Creative Industries graduates more than one year after course completion, and (ii) compare and contrast the use of objective and subjective measures to gauge graduate career outcomes.

Literature review

This section considers the context for gauging contemporary notions of student employability through graduate outcomes and the value of highly publicised graduate employment metrics.

Graduate career outcomes

Graduate outcomes in Australia are largely reported in economic terms and with mixed results. For those graduating in 2018, there was a slight rise in full-time employment outcomes although there was significant variation by discipline (Social Research Centre, 2019). Notably, Business and Management (77.9 per cent) was slightly above the average compared with all disciplines (72.9 per cent) while Creative Arts was considerably lower (52.2 per cent). The Australian Productivity Commission (2017), however, argues that ‘university students do not always get great outcomes from their education’ (p. 102), flagging concerns with attrition rates, declining full-time employment rates, underemployment and graduate starting salaries growing relatively more slowly than others in the labour market. It seems, therefore, the relationship between graduate employability and career outcomes is not always perfectly aligned. In contrast to the human capital perspective, investing in a degree does not always ‘pay off’ in employment terms (Burke et al., 2017), meaning an individual and their attending institution may not always see the immediate returns on investing significantly in quality curricula designed to enhance student outcomes. This may be attributed to external factors, such as geographical location, skills demand and business confidence (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005), and psychological attributes such as job seeking behaviours and flexibility (Guilbert, Bernaud, Gouvernet, & Rossier, 2016). Social and cultural capital may also create a positional advantage for some in the graduate labour market (Clarke, 2017; Tomlinson, 2017).

Measuring graduate career outcomes

In Australia, the full-time employment outcomes measured in the national Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) are translated to a ‘star’ rating (Good Education Group, 2017) which forms a league table for gauging institutional quality and performance. Similarly, the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education measures graduate employment outcomes in the UK. A significant failing of these national surveys are their implementation so soon after

course completion, at four to six months, when many are still transitioning to the labour market (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2018). Notably the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey will soon be transitioning to a new national survey (Graduate Outcomes survey) with a shift in the implementation cycle from six to fifteen months after course completion.

Another perceived failing of the Australian GOS is its use of full-time employment as a primary measure (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2018) as this does not account for the increasing prevalence of contract, independent and part-time working (FYA, 2018). Further, employment outcomes 'largely reflect non-educational variables, such as entry standards, socioeconomic background and subject studied' and reveal little about the quality of attained employment (Blackwell & Edmondson, 2016, p. 41).

In recognition of rising graduate underemployment (Karmel & Carroll, 2016), the Australian GOS now utilises the Scale of Perceived Over-qualification (Maynard, Joseph & Maynard, 2006). This focuses on the extent to which graduates are securing roles which utilise the skills and knowledge gained from their formal degree qualifications, although there lacks deep exploration of graduates' motivation for preferring to work in a different role. It is possible that graduates may opt for reduced working hours or lower-status roles to balance life-work commitments (Cunningham, 2016). Despite its shortcomings, however, the Australian GOS remains highly publicised and forms a national benchmark for performance among higher education providers.

Jackson and Bridgstock (2018) supported using a range of subjective measures to gauge graduate outcomes. First, perceived career success, defined by Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman (2005) as 'the accumulated positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from one's work experiences' (p. 367). This can reflect actual accomplishments and augment well-being and improved job-performance (see Oliveira et al., 2016). Importantly,

perceptions of career success may vary, with some graduates still focused on the extrinsic factors related to their work, while others wish to make a difference and are driven by well-being, opportunities for continuous learning, flexibility and a positive workplace culture (Deloitte, 2018). Second, career satisfaction which is particularly important among the younger generations given their higher career expectations (Kong, Wang & Fu, 2015). A final measure was perceived employability, an individual's confidence in their ability to succeed in the labour market (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2010).

Interestingly, the UK's new Graduate Outcomes survey includes subjective measures in gauging graduate outcomes. These explore motivations for taking up current employment; reflecting on activity to date (the extent to which their current role/study fits with future plans, is meaningful, utilises what was learnt during their studies); and different aspects of their well-being, including anxiety, happiness, and satisfaction with their life and the extent to which things they do feel worthwhile (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2018).

Method

Participants

The study's sample comprised 510 graduates of Creative Industries and Business undergraduate programs (Business $N=279$, Creative Industries $N=194$, double degree $N=37$). Participants were graduates of three Australian universities, each located in different States (university 1 $N=101$, university 2 $N=131$, university 3 $N=278$). The three universities were selected to achieve diversity in the sample by geographic location and based on the research team's access to graduates in the chosen disciplines. Participants had graduated either one to two years ($N=242$) or four to five years ($N=268$) previously and their background characteristics are summarised in Table 1. In this study, Creative Industries aligns to the classification operationalised in the Australian GOS, including media disciplines (such as

journalism and media & communications), the arts (such as visual arts, acting and music), and design (such as architecture and graphic design) (Bridgstock & Cunningham, 2016). It was noted that approximately two-thirds of the sample were female and the vast proportion of graduates were aged 34 years or less. These differences reflect the broad demographic trends in higher education. The high proportion of domestic graduates was expected given the time elapsed since course completion and many international students returning home by choice or due to visa restrictions. Distribution by discipline was fairly uniform by time since course completion with proportionately more business graduates in the sample.

[Insert Table 1]

Procedures

Eligible graduates, those that had graduated between 2013 and 2016 in Business or Creative Industries undergraduate programs, were invited to participate in an online survey. Graduates from university 1 ($N=3665$), 2 ($N=1056$) and 3 ($N=2680$) were contacted via email, their addresses obtained via their respective university's alumni database, along with two follow-up reminders. The sample of 620 graduates yields a response rate of 8.4 per cent; however, if the number of emails that bounced back had been recorded, the calculated response rate would have been higher. One hundred and ten responses provided incomplete data for the specified research objectives and were removed from the sample. The final sample of 510 graduates was deemed sufficient for the intended analysis although caution is always recommended when generalising findings. Survey data were gathered between October 2017 and March 2018. Prize draw entry for four retail gift vouchers (\$100-\$150) were offered to each university's graduates upon completing the survey.

Measures

In addition to background characteristics, the survey comprised questions on both objective and subjective measures of graduate career outcomes.

Objective measures

These focused on employment outcomes and underemployment although it is acknowledged that additional measures – such as innovative behaviour, creation of own employment, and knowledge creation – may have further enriched the findings. For employment outcomes, participants were first asked if they had worked in a professional role - including unpaid work and volunteering - since completing their course. They were asked to consider their primary role, providing the sector within which they work, employment type, contract type, and length of employment. To capture portfolio working, they could provide this information for up to two additional roles they were operating in. They were also asked to state the number of hours they engaged in paid work across their roles.

For underemployment, participants were questioned (in line with the Australian GOS and using a five-point scale) ‘to what extent is it important for you to have a Business/Creative Industries degree to be able to do your job?’ and ‘to what extent do you use the skills and knowledge you acquired during your degree in your current work roles?’ Participants were asked if they wished to work more or fewer paid hours than they did at the time of surveying. They were then given the option to multi-select reasons as to why they worked the number of hours they did. Participants also rated, on a five-point scale, the extent they would prefer to be working in different jobs/roles and could choose multiple reasons for this. Finally, participants completed a slightly adapted (to cater for multiple roles) version of the nine-item Scale of Perceived Over-Qualification, using a five-point agreement scale.

Subjective measures

A range of subjective measures were introduced and, given survey length constraints, were focused on the personal benefits of higher education study rather than societal and cultural value. The survey explored their level of satisfaction with their career, their perceptions of their own employability, and how successful they felt they were in their career, based on their own definition of career success. These were selected as preferred measures for gauging personal benefits of studying – compared with others such as aspirations, personal confidence, and identity (Brennan et al., 2010) – given their extensive use in career-related and employability literature.

Career satisfaction was measured using satisfaction with progress in four items (were ‘meeting my overall career goals’, ‘meeting my goals for income’, ‘meeting my goals for advancement’ and ‘meeting my goals for the development of new skills’), each using a five-point Likert scale. The items were derived from Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley’s (1990) five-item measure with their first measure disregarded (‘I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career’) given the participants’ early career stage. Perceived employability was measured using two items, developed and used by Bridgstock in several studies (e.g., Bridgstock, 2011). The items were ‘how employable in your field/s of career interest do you feel that you are right now’ and ‘how employable in general do you feel that you are right now’ and were measured on a five-point Likert scale.

As acknowledged by Oliveira et al. (2016), the meaning of career success for new graduates lacks clarity and may differ from that for other workers, given they are in the university-to-work transition phase of their careers. Further, traditional measures of career success may not reflect the diversity of careers (Oliviera et al., 2016). For these reasons, the graduates were first asked to provide an open response to ‘how would you define career success?’ and then rate their career success according to this definition, using a five-point

scale for how successful they felt they were in their career at the time of completing the survey.

Analysis

Objective measures

Descriptive techniques were used to compute frequency counts and percentages for employment outcomes and, where appropriate, average measures and standard deviations. For underemployment, mean ratings and standard deviations were computed where appropriate. Cronbach alpha was computed for the Scale of Perceived Over-Qualification (SPOQ) (.78) and the items were tested for normality. As the data violated assumptions of normality, non-parametric tests were used to draw comparisons among groups. The Kruskal-Wallis was used when comparing multiple groups and the Mann-Whitney test for comparing only two groups. In accordance with the Australian GOS, a composite measure was computed for the nine SPOQ items and graduates with an average scale score of 3.5 or higher were classed as perceiving themselves to be over-qualified. Cross tabulations and chi-squared test were used to detect any differences in over-qualification between the three discipline groups. Nominal data gathered on underemployment included graduate preferences for working additional hours, their desire to change roles, and their reason for the number of hours they work. These were analysed using frequency counts and percentages and, where appropriate, variations using cross tabulations and chi-square tests. All tests were conducted at significance level of .05.

[Insert Table 2]

Subjective measures

Open responses by graduates on how they defined career success were thematically analysed at an individual response level using inductive coding processes. A frequency count was

computed for each theme by discipline group. Descriptive techniques were used to analyse career success. Cronbach alpha for the career satisfaction items (.91) ensured reliability and Principal Components Analysis indicated that all four items loaded cleanly onto one factor with loadings ranging from .83 to .90. Average measures and standard deviations were computed for both perceived employability and career satisfaction ratings, as well as a composite average for the latter. Kurtosis and skewness were within acceptable limits for career success, career satisfaction and perceived employability yet normality tests were significant thus non-parametric tests were used to draw comparisons among discipline and year groups. While data are reported for those completing a double degree in Creative Industries and Business, it is acknowledged that these are a heterogeneous group, with some pursuing a career in one discipline and others in another, making interpretation difficult.

Results

Objective measures

Of the 510 graduates, 86 per cent had worked in a professional role since graduation, and this proportion did not vary much with the length of time since course completion. Around one-fifth of all graduates, however, were not working at the time of the survey, which raises concern. As expected, more Creative Industries graduates and those graduating with a double degree were employed across multiple roles. The breakdown by employment type highlights further disparity between the disciplines, with relatively more Business graduates in full-time work and Creative Industries graduates in self-employment. Interestingly, the proportions in permanent and contract work were fairly similar, with minor differences between the two main discipline groups. Approximately 30 per cent of Creative Industries graduates were working fewer than 29 hours each week, compared with 15 per cent of Business graduates. The distribution across different sectors was fairly uniform for the two main discipline groups.

Table 3 presents the findings for underemployment. For the two main discipline groups, the mean rating for the importance of their degree to their work roles was between 'fairly important' and 'important', a reasonably positive result. Less assuring was the mean rating for the use of their degree skills and knowledge to their current roles, which equated to just above 'to some extent'. The Kruskal-Wallis test reported no significant differences between all three discipline groups.

The distribution of perceived over-education ratings was broadly consistent across the two main discipline groups, one scoring marginally higher in some items and marginally lower in others. The majority of mean ratings hovered between 'neutral' and 'agree' although relatively lower ratings were assigned to the two items relating to work experience. This would suggest graduates place more value on accruing work experience, relative to degree education, for succeeding in their current role(s). This could be exacerbated by recall bias where graduates emphasised work experience for job success because it is more recent than their degree studies. Kruskal-Wallis tests detected no significant differences across the three discipline groups. Using the SPOQ average, 38 per cent of all graduates perceived themselves to be over-educated. Cross tabulations and chi-squared test reported no significant differences by discipline.

[Insert Table 3]

When asked if they would prefer to work more or fewer paid hours than they currently do, 58 per cent stated they were content with their hours, 28 per cent would like more, and 14 per cent wanted to work fewer hours. This varied significantly by discipline, $\chi^2(4, N = 481) = 17.61, p = .001$ with far higher proportions of Business and double degree graduates reporting contentment with their number of paid hours. Of concern, 38 per cent of Creative Industries graduates would like to work more paid hours compared with 23 per cent (Business) and 14 per cent (double degree). This aligns with the earlier finding of Creative

Industries graduates working relatively fewer hours than those in Business. Table 4 presents the reasons for the 135 graduates wishing to work more hours, and the 65 graduates wishing to work fewer hours than they currently do. The availability of suitable work – in terms of locality, hours and skill level – was the main cause of people not working the hours they preferred. Current study was also a barrier to those who wished to work more. Interestingly, their young age was considered by 15 per cent of those who wished to work fewer hours to be a barrier to securing the hours they wished.

[Insert Table 4]

The mean rating for the extent to which graduates would prefer to be working in different roles was 2.85 for all graduates ($SD = 1.22$) and a Kruskal-Wallis test indicated this did not vary across the three discipline groups. The Mann-Whitney test also indicated no significant variation between the two groups determined by years since course completion. The 299 graduates who stated they would prefer to work in a different role to either some, a great or a very great extent were filtered from the data set and their reasons are presented in the lower half of Table 4. Over one-half of these graduates attributed their preference to a lack of alignment with their career goals, and just under one-half to insufficient use of their skills and knowledge. Around one-quarter felt their current role was not senior enough, a similar proportion found it difficult to maintain work-life balance and 27 per cent believed the conditions of their current role were unsatisfactory conditions.

Subjective measures

The means and standard deviations for career satisfaction, presented in Table 5, indicated that overall participants were positioned only marginally above the neutral point on the five-point scale, with none — on average — reaching ‘agree’. Satisfaction with progress made towards meeting goals for income obtained the lowest average score while progress towards goals for the development of new skills obtained the highest. Interestingly, those who studied a double

degree of Creative Industries and Business achieved higher ratings across the board, followed by Business graduates and then Creative Industries graduates. Kruskal-Wallis tests indicated career satisfaction varied significantly by discipline only for income, $\chi^2(2, N = 451) = 7.45, p = .024$. The Mann-Whitney test indicated no significant variation among the two groups determined by years since course completion.

[Insert Table 5]

Table 5 shows that results for perceived employability were reasonably positive, with the average for both items (relating to field/s of interest and employability in general) hovering around the 'agree' point on the five-point scale. Graduates appeared more confident in their employability in general than in their field/s of career interest and, again, those graduating from both disciplines achieved the highest ratings, followed by those from Business. Kruskal-Wallis tests indicated no variations by discipline. The Mann-Whitney test indicated no significant variation by years since course completion.

Graduates gave their own definition of career success, and 13 categories emerged from the thematic analysis. These are presented in Table 6 with a count for each discipline grouping. Almost three-quarters of graduate responses spanned multiple themes, and both intrinsic and extrinsic factors were evident. Some comments related to career stage, rather than meaning of success, so were not coded. Approximately one-quarter of all graduates emphasised enjoyment and interest and the next most frequently cited theme was sufficient earnings. There was broad similarity across the two main disciplines although proportionally more Creative Industries graduates' definitions featured sufficient earnings and job security. A further disciplinary difference related to the greater emphasis on learning/skill development and career advancement/progress among Business graduates.

[Insert Table 6]

Using their own definition, respondents rated how successful they felt they were in their own career at that point in time. One-third of Creative Industries graduates felt they were either not at all or not very successful, compared with one-quarter of business graduates or those who completed a double degree. The proportion who considered themselves reasonably or very successful were uniform, 43 per cent for both Creative Industries and Business. The mean ratings were 3.17 ($SD=1.09$), 3.11 ($SD=1.23$) and 3.59 ($SD=1.05$) for Business, Creative Industries and double degree respectively, with Kruskal Wallis test reporting no significant difference. Cross-tabulations were used to explore any differences in perceived career success between those classed as under-employed and those not with no significant variation detected.

Discussion

Given the scope and depth of the study, the key findings are summarised in Table 7. Findings align with traditional notions that Creative Industries graduates tend to operate in a more precarious labour market environment (Comunian, Faggian & Jewell, 2015), characterised by multiple concurrent or overlapping roles, relatively high levels of casual and self-employment, and recurrent attempts to obtain or create work. The finding that Creative Industries graduates were less likely to be in full-time work and more likely to wish to work more hours aligns with their relatively low level of satisfaction with progress in achieving income goals. Meanwhile, a relatively high proportion of Business graduates are still employed in more secure, full-time roles with fairly limited evidence of portfolio working. Although there was not overwhelming evidence of over-qualification among either discipline group, more than one-third of Creative Industries graduates reported a desire to work additional paid hours, attributed largely to a lack of availability of suitable work.

[Insert Table 7]

Across the whole sample, almost two-thirds would prefer to work in a different role to at least some extent, with a considerable proportion indicating their current employment was not aligned to their career goals and they felt they were not fully utilising their skills and knowledge. Findings therefore raised some broad concerns for graduates' satisfaction with their quality of employment, aligning to previous studies indicating a mismatch between education and graduate roles (see, for example, Holmes & Mayhew, 2015). The lack of variation by years lapsed since course completion suggests this does not necessarily improve with time, at least not in the first five years after course completion. Shifting the focus from external, labour market-related factors, one might attribute the differences to a higher level of employability support in business fields (O'Leary, 2017).

With regard to subjective measures of career outcomes, career satisfaction was reasonably uniform across discipline, although extrinsic satisfaction was lower for those from Creative Industries, contributing further to their relatively bleak career outcomes. The elevated ratings among double degree students may be based on experience in their careers, or perhaps the 'type' of student who studies a double degree. The lack of noted improvement in satisfaction scores over time — particularly in relation to income — is surprising. Despite concerns for a saturated graduate labour market, longitudinal graduate outcomes data indicates improvement in full-time employment and underemployment three years after course completion (Social Research Centre, 2018). This improvement, however, does not — for this sample at least — appear to translate to increased career satisfaction with time.

Findings confirm the roles of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors in graduate career success (see Oliviera et al., 2016), emphasising the importance of gauging both subjective and objective measures when considering graduate outcomes (Scurry & Blenkinsop, 2011). Indeed, enjoyment and interest constituted the most popular definition of career success, aligning with Deloitte (2018), which found both intrinsic and extrinsic factors featured in

graduates' wish lists when choosing work, and also the broader literature that suggests that people across the working population hold a wide variety of career motivations (Schein, 1996). The disciplinary disparity in emphasis on sufficient earnings and job security is perhaps indicative of greater awareness and concern for employment prospects in the Creative Industries. There was only limited evidence of a relatively greater emphasis on extrinsic factors among Business graduates, somewhat surprising and counter to expectations.

Young workers need to be adaptable and operate across diverse and changing contexts (FYA, 2018) and assuredness of their capabilities to succeed in the labour market may assist. Graduates' reasonable levels of confidence in their own employability may indicate competence but, equally, could be attributed to a lack of awareness of how employable they actually are in the labour market (Dunning-Kruger effect), highlighting the need for complementary objective measures. That perceived employability did not improve with time could reflect graduates on a continuous learning journey where their career trajectory helps them to recognise the need to develop capabilities to engage with certain opportunities and they are attuned to the level of competition in the market. Alternatively, it could evidence an ongoing lack of insight into their own development and their positioning in the labour market. Perceived employability is dynamic and relative to the individual's career aspirations and context.

Graduates were largely satisfied with their skills development and appeared optimistic about their own employability and yet, on average, did not feel they were highly successful in their careers. This finding supports Greer and Waight (2017) who found that graduate alumni were 'more confident in their future prospects (PE) than the progress that they have made so far in their careers' (p. 202). The observed mediocre levels of subjective career success may reflect the early stage of the graduates' careers, yet they also found 'unmet expectations do not appear to dampen their optimism for the value of their ... degree in the external

marketplace' (p. 203). The lack of variation over time elapsed since course completion could, however, suggest the interplay of labour market factors which may be constraining graduates in achieving their personal definition of career success. The effects of Karmel and Carroll's (2016) declared oversupply of graduates in Australia and ongoing reports of underemployment (Productivity Commission, 2017) and lengthier transitions to graduate-level employment (FYA, 2018) could be evident here.

Findings confirm the importance of looking beyond full-time employment outcomes as a measure of graduate outcomes, at least for certain disciplines. Indeed having strong career aspirations is not related to being in full-time employment. Greater exploration into the number of roles held by graduates and their contract type will further develop our understanding of graduate working patterns in different discipline areas. Exploring the reasons behind underemployment, or over-qualification, better enables us to gauge the interplay of external factors on graduate outcomes and education-skills mismatch, such as the availability of work in the local economy. The Australian GOS makes some headway exploring the reasons for underemployment but more is required.

Concluding remarks

Subjective measures can give insight into graduates' motivations, experiences and satisfaction with their career pathways. Gauging perceived employability in graduates at least one year post-course completion provides an indication of their confidence beyond study and their assessment of labour market success beyond the transitioning phase of university to work. Examining career satisfaction facilitates a better understanding of the importance of extrinsic and intrinsic factors to graduates in contemporary working environments and self-defined perceptions of career success reveal the relative value placed on intrinsic and extrinsic factors which can inform entry-level job and graduate program design. The latter is particularly important for improving high turnover and burgeoning loyalty among new

graduates (Deloitte, 2018). Systematic collection of national data on subjective measures of graduate outcomes would allow fine grained analysis by region, discipline, institution and a wealth of individual characteristics. This would help to inform educators on the success and, in combination with course experience data, relative value-add of pedagogy, curricular and co-curricular design.

The study adopts a broader notion of career outcomes and, in line with Oliviera et al. (2016), recognised the importance of measuring career satisfaction, perceived employability, career progress and extrinsic outcomes. With respect to limitations, the study relies on cross-sectional data using a single method (online survey), raising concerns with bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). It also relies on self-report data, deemed problematic in some studies (Douglass, Thomson & Zhao, 2012) yet critical here given the study's focus on exploring graduate personal definitions of career success. For future research, the study could be extended to examine to more disciplines and include a raft of objective and subjective measures beyond economic terms, such as the value added by graduates as an altruistic individual and a socially engaged citizen (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2018).

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Table 1. Summary of participant background characteristics

Variable	Sub-category	Graduates 1-2 years after course completion (N=242)		Graduates 4-5 years after course completion (N=268)		Overall (N=510)	
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Gender	Male	61	30.0	67	30.2	128	30.1
	Female	140	69.0	149	67.1	289	68.0
	Other	2	1.0	6	2.7	8	1.9
Age	18-24	104	51.7	106	48.2	210	49.9
	25-34	78	38.8	91	41.4	169	40.1
	35-44	15	7.5	15	6.8	30	7.2
	45 plus	4	2.0	8	3.6	12	2.8
Residency	International	33	16.4	31	13.8	64	15.1
	Domestic	168	83.6	193	86.2	361	84.9
Status at enrolment	School leaver	137	66.8	158	69.9	295	68.4
	Mature-age	68	33.2	68	30.1	136	31.6
Professional career prior to degree	None	39	58.2	36	52.9	75	55.6
	Yes, similar to degree	12	17.9	15	22.1	27	20.0
	Yes, unrelated to degree	16	23.9	17	25.0	33	24.4
Parental status	First-in-family to attend university	69	34.5	80	35.4	149	35.0
	Not first-in-family to attend university	131	65.5	146	64.6	277	65.0
Discipline	Business	125	52.5	154	57.5	279	54.7
	Creative Industries	97	39.2	97	36.2	194	38.0
	Double degree	20	8.3	17	6.3	37	7.3

Table 2. Summary of participant employment outcomes and work characteristics

Variable	Sub-category	Business (N=279)		Creative Industries (N=194)		Double degree (N=37)		Overall (N=510)	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Worked in a professional role post-degree	Yes	235	84.2	169	87.1	35	94.6	439	86.1
	No	44	15.8	25	12.9	2	5.4	71	13.9
Number of roles currently held	None	58	20.8	38	19.6	3	8.1	99	19.4
	One	185	66.3	93	47.9	23	62.2	300	58.9
	Two	32	11.5	56	28.9	10	27.0	99	19.4
	Three	4	1.4	7	3.6	1	2.7	12	2.3
Sector of primary role	Commercial	167	75.9	110	71.5	26	78.8	303	74.5
	Community	5	2.3	15	9.7	1	3.0	21	5.1
	Government	34	15.5	21	13.6	5	15.2	60	14.8
	Not-for-profit	14	6.3	8	5.2	1	3.0	23	5.6
Employment type of primary role	Casual	15	7.8	17	12.5	2	6.9	34	9.5
	Full-time employee	154	79.8	81	59.6	24	82.9	259	72.4
	Part-time employee	14	7.2	12	8.8	1	3.4	27	7.5
	Self-employed	4	2.0	24	17.6	1	3.4	29	8.1
	Volunteer	6	3.2	2	1.5	1	3.4	9	2.5
Contract type of primary role	Contract (fixed-term)	45	23.6	41	30.8	8	28.6	94	26.7
	Permanent (ongoing)	146	76.4	92	69.2	20	71.4	258	73.3
Total hours working (p/week)	0-14 hours	19	8.0	27	15.6	2	5.7	48	10.8
	15-29 hours	16	6.7	25	14.5	1	2.9	42	9.4
	30-44 hours	148	62.2	98	56.6	27	77.1	273	61.2
	45-59 hours	49	20.6	17	9.8	5	14.3	71	15.9
	60 plus hours	6	2.5	6	3.5	0	0	12	2.7

Table 3. Underemployment among participants – ordinal measures

Variable	Business (N=279)		Creative Industries (N=194)		Double degree (N=37)		Overall (N=510)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Importance of Business/Creative Industries degree to do current work roles	3.70	1.26	3.42	1.33	3.46	1.14	3.58	1.29
Use of degree skills/knowledge in current work roles	3.30	1.11	3.34	1.20	3.46	0.99	3.32	1.34
On average, my work roles require less education than I have	3.12	1.23	3.10	1.16	3.21	1.12	3.12	1.20
On average, the work experience that I have is not necessary to be successful in my work roles	2.74	1.21	2.85	1.16	2.47	1.11	2.76	1.18
My education level is above the education level required for my current work roles	3.28	1.21	3.11	1.25	3.38	1.10	3.22	1.22
Overall, I have more abilities than I need in order to perform my work roles	3.44	1.06	3.36	1.14	3.50	0.90	3.41	1.08
My previous education is not being fully utilised in this role	3.32	1.21	3.26	1.19	3.12	1.20	3.28	1.20
I have a lot of knowledge that I do not need in order to do my work roles	3.37	1.14	3.26	1.16	3.12	1.05	3.31	1.14
I have more abilities than I need to do my role/s	3.46	1.05	3.37	1.12	3.50	0.93	3.43	1.07
Someone with less work experience than myself could do my role/s just as well	3.02	1.27	2.93	1.26	2.82	1.24	2.97	1.26
I have job skills that are not required for my role/s	3.56	1.08	3.69	.95	3.59	1.13	3.61	1.04

Table 4. Underemployment among participants – nominal measures

Variable	Sub-category	Prefer more hours (N=135)		Prefer fewer hours (N=65)		Overall	
		No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)
Reasons for working current hours (N=200)	No suitable job in my local area	73.3	26.7	87.7	12.3	78.0	22.0
	No job with a suitable number of hours	69.6	30.4	78.5	21.5	72.5	27.5
	No suitable job in my area of expertise	72.6	27.4	81.5	18.5	75.5	24.5
	Considered to be too young by employers	91.9	8.1	84.6	15.4	89.5	10.5
	Considered to be too old by employers	96.3	3.7	95.4	4.6	96.0	4.0
	Short-term illness or injury	96.3	3.7	100.0	0	97.5	2.5
	Long-term health condition or disability	95.6	4.4	95.4	4.6	95.5	4.5
	Caring for family member with a health condition or disability	97.0	3.0	98.5	1.5	97.5	2.5
	Caring for children	96.3	3.7	96.9	3.1	96.5	3.5
Studying	80.0	20.0	93.8	6.2	84.5	15.5	
Reasons for preferring to work in a different role (N=299)	There is not enough alignment with my career aspirations					48.8	51.2
	There is not enough use of my skills and knowledge					55.9	44.1
	The job/role is not senior enough					76.6	23.4
	There isn't enough autonomy					91.0	9.0
	It is hard to maintain work-life balance					76.6	23.4
	The conditions of the job/role are unsatisfactory (e.g., pay, allowances, safety)					72.9	27.1
	I receive insufficient recognition in the role					84.3	15.7
	My employment location is not satisfactory					94.3	5.7
I experience challenges in my work team/with my supervisor					91.3	8.7	

Table 5. Career satisfaction and perceived employability

Variable	Business (N=247)		Creative Industries (N=173)		Double degree (N=34)		Overall (N=454)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Career satisfaction								
I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my overall career goals	3.43	1.08	3.25	1.18	3.62	.85	3.38	1.11
I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my goals for income	3.24	1.09	2.98	1.21	3.47	1.02	3.16	1.14
I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my goals for advancement	3.28	1.08	3.20	1.14	3.62	.78	3.28	1.09
I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my goals for the development of new skills	3.45	1.06	3.38	1.09	3.61	.97	3.43	1.06
Perceived employability								
How employable in your field/s of career interest do you feel that you are right now?	3.93	1.11	3.88	1.07	4.18	.87	3.92	1.07
How employable in general do you feel that you are right now?	4.09	1.08	4.03	1.00	4.38	.65	4.08	1.02

Table 6. Definitions of career success

Themes	Business (N=279)		Creative Industries (N=194)		Double degree (N=37)		Overall (N=510)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Enjoyment and interest	74	26.5	49	25.3	15	40.5	138	27.1
Sufficient earnings	33	11.8	33	17.0	3	8.1	69	13.5
Recognition	17	6.1	11	5.7	2	5.4	30	5.9
High earnings	16	5.7	6	3.1	5	13.5	27	5.3
Work-life balance	27	9.7	15	7.7	6	16.2	48	9.4
Community / colleagues	11	3.9	3	1.5	2	5.4	16	3.1
Learning / skill development	31	11.7	12	6.2	1	2.7	44	8.6
Career advancement / progress	34	12.2	10	5.2	1	2.7	45	8.8
Positive impact on others	11	3.9	7	3.6	1	2.7	19	3.7
Challenge / achievement	19	6.8	14	7.2	1	2.7	34	6.7
Autonomy / responsibility	15	5.4	7	3.6	4	10.8	26	5.1
Job alignment to skill level	12	4.3	15	7.7	2	5.4	29	5.7
Job security	4	1.4	8	4.1	0	0	12	2.4

Table 7. Summary of top-level findings

All graduates	Business Graduates	Creative Industries Graduates
<i>Employment and work characteristics</i>		
<p>About one in five not working at the time of the survey with no disciplinary differences detected.</p> <p>Work experience more important than degree education for success in current roles.</p>	<p>More likely to be employed full-time in a single role</p>	<p>More likely to be self-employed and working in multiple roles</p>
<i>Underemployment</i>		
<p>About 4 in 10 perceived themselves as overeducated for current roles with no disciplinary differences found.</p> <p>Barriers to more paid hours for both disciplinary groups were availability of suitable work due to locality, hours and skill level, current study.</p> <p>6 in 10 wanted to work in a different role due to poor alignment with career goals or underuse of skills, with no disciplinary differences found.</p>	<p>No differences in underemployment with Creative Industries</p> <p>2 in 10 wanted to work more paid hours</p> <p>No differences in role preference with Creative Industries</p>	<p>No differences in underemployment with Business</p> <p>4 in 10 wanted to work more paid hours</p> <p>No differences in role preference with Business</p>
<i>Career satisfaction</i>		
<p>Overall career satisfaction ratings were neutral, with ratings for income lowest, and skill development highest. Double degrees highest ratings. Lack of improvement over time.</p>	<p>Higher career satisfaction ratings with income</p>	<p>Lower career satisfaction ratings with income</p>
<i>Perceived employability</i>		
<p>Overall perceived employability ratings were reasonably positive, with general employability more positive than field-specific employability, and double degrees more positive than single degrees.</p>	<p>No differences in perceived employability with Creative Industries</p>	<p>No differences in perceived employability with Business</p>
<i>Career success</i>		
<p>Both intrinsic and extrinsic elements were found in definitions of career success. The most common themes were ‘enjoyment and interest’ (about 3 in 10) and ‘earnings / job security’ (about 3 in 20).</p> <p>Overall self-defined career success ratings were just above neutral.</p>	<p>More likely to define career success in terms of learning, skill development and advancement</p> <p>Less likely than Creative Industries to indicate that they were ‘not at all’ or ‘not very’ successful (1 in 4), but equally likely to indicate that they were ‘successful’ or ‘very successful’ (4 in 10)</p>	<p>More likely to define career success in terms of earning and job security</p> <p>More likely than Business to indicate that they were ‘not at all’ or ‘not very’ successful (1 in 3), but equally likely to indicate that they were ‘successful’ or ‘very successful’ (4 in 10)</p>