

# **Challenging the purpose of higher education: how well do universities prepare graduates for employability?**

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Participants will engage in critical debate on three key questions. What evidence is there of a match between university marketing of employment readiness, the reality of work and workplaces awaiting graduates, and the effectiveness of courses in preparing graduates for employability? Considering the difference between (the occurrence of) employment and (capability for) employability, what are the roles and responsibilities of universities? Where do educators fit in the contested educational space between university management and student populations?

Higher education institutions are committed to the delivery of high quality education and to prepare individual students for their future careers and to promote the growth and wellbeing of society. This requires universities to pursue, through research and industry collaboration, a deep understanding of what graduates' work involves. We could question, whether the gulf is unacceptably wide between the consequential, lived reality of actual workplaces and the hypothetical, research-construed nature of taught curricula.

We talk a great deal about higher education as a market place. As such, education is interpreted by some as a commodity to be purchased by students who want to buy future employment opportunities, and to be sold by institutions who are competing for customers in a highly competitive marketplace. We may wish to challenge this reduction of learning and life/work preparation to a commodity. However, there remains a commitment by universities to honour the contract made with enrolling students to provide good quality education. What is meant by this label is open to interpretation.