

Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows (ALTF) Panel

Why we haven't finished with employability

Employability has received significant attention in recent years, but the challenge of embedding employability development within higher education remains in critical need of attention. Moreover, the definitions of employability—and its measurement—are out of sync with the labour market. This interactive panel discussion from the Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows features four, three-minute provocations followed with whole-room discussion about the messages and education provided to higher education students.

Employability: are we barking up the wrong tree?

Dawn Bennett

Curtin University, Perth, Australia
d.bennett@curtin.edu.au

Why does higher education focus on functional aspects of employability such as the ability to succeed at interview? Why not emphasise the cognitive and social aspects through which learners develop as individuals, professionals and social citizens? Why does the rhetoric about a single, full-time job persist despite significant changes in the labour market? And what would it take to develop employability that is defined as the ability to find, create and sustain work and learning across lengthening working lives and multiple work settings?

Do universities over-sell job prospects?

Trevor Cullen

Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia
t.cullen@ecu.edu.au

A recent study revealed that many universities market undergraduate degrees with definite job prospects. But should this be allowed when employment figures for disciplines such as Engineering and Psychology show graduates seriously struggling to find any real employment in these professions, unless, that is, they enrol in postgraduate study. Surely, students should be told before they enrol in First year what the reality is, and what will give them a more realistic chance of employment. Apart from the obvious ethical implications of possible misinformation, there is the unnecessary disappointment and unease for all involved in this process.

Are we watching our greatest employability resource ride off into the distance?

Jessica Vanderlelie

Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia
j.vanderlelie@griffith.edu.au

Over 250,000 students graduate every year from Australian universities. Despite our ability to assess graduate destinations, we are missing the capacity to explore the acquisition of important skills in career management and resilience, as well as the motivational and attitudinal characteristics that impact employability. If we are serious about ensuring success across the life of a graduate's career, it is imperative that our connection to alumni is facilitated beyond our requests of them to provide mentoring, membership on advisory boards, financial 'donations' and brand capital. The opportunity exists to unlock alumni intelligences to truly inform curricular and employability initiatives.

What jobs will exist ten years from now?

Joe Shapter

Flinders University, South Australia, Australia
Joe.shapter@flinders.edu.au

The simple reality is that most predictions indicate that almost half of the current jobs that exist will not exist twenty years from now. When we talk about "employability" it is critical that the discussion is not about jobs but about future learning and flexibility. These are the skills that will make our students "employable". If this is the case, then universities as institutions should mirror this future with an education focused, flexible environment where learning outcomes are measured not by time but required competencies in programs that can be defined by students according to their interests.