LITERATURE REVIEW: 'MIND THE GAP!' EXPLORING THE POST-GRADUATION OUTCOMES AND EMPLOYMENT MOBILITY OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE FIRST IN THEIR FAMILY TO COMPLETE A UNIVERSITY DEGREE

2019 NCSEHE EQUITY RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

Sarah O'Shea

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'Mind the Gap!' Exploring the post-graduation outcomes and employment mobility of individuals who are first in their family to complete a university degree

Literature Review

2019 EQUITY RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP: PROFESSOR SARAH O'SHEA

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This Fellowship considers university-graduate outcomes for students from equity backgrounds, with particular reference to those who are the first in their families to attend university. Adopting a mixed-method approach, the Fellowship study will examine available statistics on employment outcomes for specific student cohorts and qualitative data from surveys and interviews with recent graduates and key stakeholders. This literature review is the first output from this Fellowship project; it provides the context for the planned research that will be undertaken between April and July 2019.

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List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AGCAS	Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing
AUD	Australian dollar
ANU	Australian National University
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
B&B	Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study
CHEEDR	Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research
CSU	Charles Sturt University
DLHE	Destination of Leavers from Higher Education
FiF	First in family
GLSNZ	Graduate Longitudinal Survey New Zealand
Go8	Group of Eight
GOS	Graduate Outcomes Survey
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HESA	Higher Education Standards Authority
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
IRU	Innovative Research Universities
MLDE	Multistate Longitudinal Data Exchange
NCES	National Centre for Education Statistics
NCSEHE	National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
NZ	New Zealand
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
QILT	Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching
RUN	Regional Universities Network
SES	Socioeconomic status
TEQSA	Tertiary Education and Qualification Standards Authority
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USD	United States dollar
UTS	University of Technology, Sydney

Executive Summary

This literature review provides the context for the NCSEHE Fellowship entitled '*Mind the Gap!' Exploring the post-graduation outcomes and employment mobility of individuals who are first in their family to complete a university degree*'. This one-year study will explore how learners intersected by a range of equity categories enter the employment market and how individuals experience this entry qualitatively. Adopting a mixed-method approach, the study will draw on statistics related to post-graduation outcomes for the general student population, comparing these to those cohorts from key equity groups. This literature review considers both the available scholarly literature and existing statistics to situate this study both within Australia and internationally. The review has been divided into five sections. It commences with a background to the fellowship project. Section 2 provides an analysis of the available statistics on graduate employment in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Section 3 explores the research and scholarly writing on contemporary and global issues noted in the graduate landscape. The focus then narrows in Section 4 to specifically apply an 'equity' lens to an understanding of this field, drawing upon sociological literature and foci. The review concludes with an overview of the key areas of interest that have been identified and recommendations for future research and scholarly attention.

Keywords

First-in-family students, graduate employability, higher-education equity and access, social and cultural capital.

Introduction and Overview

Background to the Fellowship

This Fellowship is focused on the post-graduation experiences and outcomes of students who are the first in their family to attend university. These 'higher-education pioneers' (Greenwald, 2012; May, Delahunty, O'Shea & Stone, 2017) are a growing cohort of the student population (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013), and are often collectively intersected by a range of equity categories or markers of educational disadvantage. Growth in the first-in-family (FiF) cohort can be partially attributed to increasing activities designed to 'widen participation' within the tertiary sector, including mandated government targets for participation rates amongst particular populations such as students from backgrounds of low socioeconomic status (SES).

The term 'widening participation' has been used to describe activities designed to encourage or support learners from diverse backgrounds to consider university as an option in their post-schooling futures. This term has gained traction across the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia, featuring in policy documents and political polemic in relation to the higher-education environment. Within the UK, this widening participation agenda was largely a response to New Labour's objective of 50 per cent participation of all 18- to 30-year-olds in higher education by 2010. However, this concept already had some currency, reflecting a trend across OECD member countries toward wider access to university and, thus, increased participation rates (OECD, 2001).

While appearing to be embedded within social-justice and equality discourses, widening participation is regarded as being contested and politically loaded. Stevenson, Clegg and Lefever (2010) describe it as a 'contradictory and unstable amalgam of economic rationality and social justice arguments' (p. 105). Activities performed under the umbrella of widening participation are also incongruous, as higher-education institutions are simultaneously inviting and encouraging students from a diversity of backgrounds to participate in further learning and expecting these individuals to both wholly fund this endeavour and adapt themselves to conform to institutional expectations of the 'successful learner' (O'Shea & Delahunty, 2018). This assumption includes the expectation that if individuals are provided with educational access, this will in turn 'translate' into positive achievement after graduation regardless of 'prior educational or social disadvantage' (Pitman, Roberts, Bennett & Richardson, 2019, p. 46). Within the policy field this is clearly shown by the fact that while national targets have been set for higher-education participation in both Australia and the UK, these are not matched by similar targets for employment. This is quite a discrepancy, as these students are exiting into a highly stratified employment market. This lack of focused attention seems to reveal an assumption that equality is achieved by getting students into higher education with little regard for the 'uneven playing field' experienced as they progress out.

This literature review seeks to map this field by providing details of the international landscape before contextualising this to the Australian higher-education environment. The review also narrows focus to explore the particularities of the graduate employment market from the perspective of students from recognised equity groups, with specific reference to those students who are the first in their family to attend university.

Key Questions and Methodology

This Fellowship is guided by three overarching questions that seek to analyse the characteristics of the employment market for those graduates who come from diverse backgrounds. While the focus is on those students who are the first in their family to attend university, this group is intersected by a range of equity categories (O'Shea, 2016-2019) and

can be usefully designated as a 'supra' category to explore disadvantage in the higher-education sector (O'Shea, May, Stone & Delahunty, 2017).

The questions used to frame this study are exploratory, and are guided by the need to understand both the quantitative or statistical nature of the graduate employment market and the more embodied aspects of this field. Combining broader numerical understandings with not only the narratives of students who have navigated this graduate environment but also insights from key stakeholders and scholarly investigators internationally, the Fellowship hopes to contribute new understandings and insights that have direct application to the Australian setting.

Three key questions guide this study:

1. How does obtaining a degree actually translate into employability within an increasingly competitive labour market?
2. How do learners from intersecting equity categories enter the employment market and how is this 'entry to employment' experienced at an individual, qualitative level?
3. How do learners negotiate existing and new forms of capital to achieve competitiveness in shrinking employment fields?

Methodologically, this is a mixed-method study that is grounded in the Interpretivist tradition. The Interpretivist approach, as conceived within a social-constructivist framework, regards reality as being not only multiple but also constructed and negotiated (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This framework has been further informed by both grounded theory and narrative analysis to highlight how FiF graduates manage and move from the university environment to the employment market, and the various issues encountered in this transition. This understanding is enriched by the close analysis of available statistics on graduate employment and experience. The result is a study that recognises the diverse and heterogeneous nature of this tertiary landscape and gathers data from the students themselves to inform future university policy and practice.

Given the multiple layers of data used across the Fellowship, this literature review draws upon materials derived from a range of international sources and disciplines. They encompass reports, policy, empirical research, theoretical papers and grey literature such as presentations and newspaper articles. This search was a three-step process:

Step 1: A series of database searches were conducted to obtain a broad overview of the field. These included combinations of key words such as 'post-graduation', 'equity', 'higher education' (1,000+ resources), 'graduate outcomes', 'equity' and 'university or college' (1,200+ resources). Resources included newspaper articles, books, reports and traditionally published articles.

Step 2: Search terms were limited to published, peer-reviewed articles and reports; the references in these were then used to locate other relevant resources.

Step 3: Open-access e-newsletters (such as The Conversation and University World News) were explored to locate key resources on related topics, and links embedded within the articles were consulted for further possible sources.

The result is a comprehensive overview of this field that pays attention to a variety of perspectives. Such a holistic understanding provides the necessary mix of scholarly data to contextualise the Fellowship research activities during 2019.

Why Is This Work Needed?

Undoubtedly, employment is a key reason why students enter higher education: gaining productive employment after graduation is an important outcome at the completion of studies. Within Australia and beyond, under the guise of 'widening participation' and the

associated access targets, a more diverse population of students has been encouraged to apply for university studies (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008). Yet, as Pitman et al. (2019) point out, this focus on access has not been matched by a rigorous assessment of how these students fare post-graduation. Successive governments in Australia, the UK and the United States (US) have engaged in strategies designed to ensure 'more bums on seats' within the higher-education sector, but there is little sustained focus on post-graduation targets specifically for equity students.

Students experience the graduate labour market in different ways, with persistent and ongoing differences in graduate outcomes amongst populations (Cherastidham & Norton, 2014). This issue has been identified internationally (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility, 2017; Ashley, Duberley, Sommerlad & Scholarios, 2015; Ford & Umbricht, 2016; Thomas & Zhang, 2005; Kirby, 2016), but within Australia, an understanding of this area is still incomplete. This Fellowship will build upon the NCSEHE funded study *Investigating the relationship between equity and graduate outcomes in Australia*, which advocates for focused analysis about whether 'patterns of disadvantage persist after graduation' (Richardson, Bennett & Roberts, 2016, p. 8), as this relates to those who are the first in their families or communities to attend university.

 In focusing on FiF students, this study recognises that this cohort is frequently intersected by multiple equity markers. Within Australia, the FiF status of students is generally defined at an institutional level and measured via parental educational levels, but this is not reported systematically. Being defined as FiF is not recognised within existing Australian equity definitions[1], so these students may unintentionally 'slip through cracks' in the system. While we cannot assume that all FiF students encounter the same barriers or levels of disadvantage (much like any other equity grouping); both qualitative and quantitative indicators suggest that being the 'first' can lead to more-complex journeys into and through university (ABS, 2013; AIHW, 2014; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013).

Within Australia, this is a large and growing student cohort, currently estimated at 51 per cent of the student population (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013) but characterised by substantially poorer university outcomes (ABS, 2013; AIHW, 2014). This cohort's growth in numbers and lower rate of academic success are not unique to Australia; they are replicated across a number of countries. High departure rates are particularly noted in countries such as the US (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012), Canada (Lehmann, 2009) and the UK (HEFCE, 2010), where statistics on this cohort are collected more systematically. Collectively, research indicates that those who do not have a history of higher-education attendance are less likely to go to university and, after arrival, may not perform to the same level academically as their second- or third-generation peers (HEFCE, 2010; NCES, 2012).

There are multiple reasons why this FiF cohort is particularly vulnerable to attrition and disengagement from university. For example, the lack of a higher-education imprint within the family, or 'transgenerational family scripts' (Ball, Davies, David & Reay, 2002, p. 57), has been regarded as affecting their educational preparedness. In my own research (O'Shea, 2016a), commencing FiF students reported 'feeling isolated and lonely, feelings that were exacerbated by uncertainty related to university language, expectations and protocols of behaviour' (p. 62). This Fellowship focuses specifically on those FiF students who have successfully navigated both their entry into university and their progression through the institution. For the purposes of this article, being FiF means that no-one in the student's family, including parents, siblings, partners and children, has previously attained a university qualification. This definition deliberately directs attention to those students who do not have

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[1] There are six identified equity groups: students from low socio-economic backgrounds; students with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, non-English speaking background students, rural and remote students and women studying in non-traditional areas.

access to significant others within the household to ask questions about life beyond university or from whom they can seek necessary institutional 'insider' knowledge about professions or graduate destinations. How these learners navigate the transition from university and the types of issues they encounter in obtaining employment are the focus of the overarching Fellowship project. This literature review will contribute the broader scholarly context to this study, highlighting key and contemporary issues in the graduate employment field.

Review Focus and Structure

This review is internationally focused and draws upon empirically validated literature and statistics from a range of sources and contexts. While the literature is global in context, research and scholarly analysis from the UK is particularly referenced, as many correlations exist between its higher-education sector and Australia's. Both sectors have similarly undergone an expansion in numbers in the last two decades, with an emphasis on students from recognised equity groups. Both sectors are also somewhat stratified, with students in both countries similarly affected by demographic indicators related to socioeconomic, geographic and sociocultural factors.

Given the diverse range of data that this review will draw upon, the document has been divided into five sections; each emphasises specific related themes within the broad field of graduate employment. This overview commences with an initial focus on the available statistics on graduate outcomes, both internationally and nationally; these statistics are then complemented in the following section with details of scholarly work within Australia and beyond. The review then narrows to examine critical sociological aspects of this field, before presenting final discussions and conclusions. The sections are detailed below:

Section 2: This section sets the *quantitative scene* for this Fellowship and explores the most recent statistics on graduate employability within Australia and overseas. Commencing with a broad-based analysis of these data, the section then explores what is broadly known about the graduate outcomes and employment of equity groups. These data are further enriched by reference to the UK, where government agencies and not-for-profit organisations have presented compelling data on the vagaries of the employment market for those students from low-SES or culturally diverse backgrounds. This section concludes with recommendations about how statistical collections on diverse student cohorts might be reconfigured to better balance an understanding of the implications of the widening participation agenda.

Section 3: The next section draws on literature from a range of countries to provide a high-level overview of the post-graduation landscape. Given the changing nature of the employment and higher-education sectors, the focus is largely on literature produced in the last decade, but the review also includes seminal works in this field from earlier years. This section initially adopts a broad perspective to map the parameters of this area before focusing on elements of the post-graduation field for students within Australia and the particular characteristics of this employment context.

Section 4: This purpose of this section is to narrow the focus and explore the main issues identified in Section 3 through an equity lens. Drawing on literature from the UK and Australia, this section considers key areas such as employability, internships, careers and aspirations to consider how these reflect broader and dominant discourses and political agendas. This understanding underpins the analytical approach adopted during the data-collection and analysis stages of this project; thus this literature merits close attention.

Section 5: The final part of this report focuses on the key insights derived from the literature review. A number of key foci are identified which will frame the final report at the completion of the project. Many of these identified themes are related specifically to the FiF student population, which is the focus of this Fellowship.

Statistical Understandings of Post-graduation Outcomes

It has been reported internationally that people who hold degrees experience a range of benefits over those with lower levels of education, including better health, higher rates of employment and increased earnings (NCES, 2019a; Universities New Zealand, 2018). This section draws on a range of national graduate outcomes survey data to review the current employment outcomes of graduates of universities both internationally and nationally.

What Do the Statistics Say?

This section discusses the findings of national graduate outcome surveys administered in the UK, the US and Australia. The high-stakes statistics, which indicate the general trends in each country's graduate labour market, are presented initially. The section then looks beyond these statistics to the 'negative spaces': those statistics that are not emphasised in the reports but that highlight the potentially unsatisfactory outcomes that some graduates experience. Finally, this section explores the available statistics for FiF or equity graduates. This information is presented under the following broad themes:

- large-scale national data collection
- positive trends in graduate data
- unemployment, underemployment and underutilisation
- outcomes of graduates from equity groups.

The review begins with an account of how data in this area has been collected.

Large-scale National Data Collection

This section discusses what is known about post-graduation outcomes generated from quantitative methods; specifically, large-scale national surveys of university leavers. Graduate employment data are of high interest to government bodies, economic groups and political parties as they are partly an indicator of the strength of a nation's economy and the success (or otherwise) of a government's economic policy. Higher-education institutions also value graduate data as it helps them to understand the value of their product, report on their activities and compete in the tertiary-education market. As a result, national data on graduate employment outcomes are collected in many countries in a systematic way, often jointly funded by governments and higher-education bodies.

In the UK, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) administers and publishes the *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education* (DLHE) survey on behalf of the UK government and higher-education councils (HESA, 2019b). Students of higher education are invited, 15 months after graduation[2], to complete an online survey about their current situation and general wellbeing (HESA, 2019a). A range of data on graduate destination, salary, type and region of employment and occupation are compiled and published online in the *Destinations of Leavers* report (HESA, 2018c). In Australia, the *Graduate Outcomes Survey* (GOS) is administered by the government-funded Social Research Centre and completed by graduates of higher-education institutions four months after completion (QILT, 2019b). The annual *Graduate Outcomes Survey National Report* details a range of data including employment rates, skills utilisation, salary and institutional outcomes (QILT, 2019a). In the US, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the federal body responsible for collecting and analysing educational data (NCES, 2019d). The NCES's

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[2] This approach to data collection is relatively new; thus the data reported on in this review are derived from a previous format in which surveys were administered six months and three years after graduation (HESA, 2019b).

annual report, *The Condition of Education,* provides limited information on graduate employment, specifically employment rates and earnings (NCES, 2019e). Other US data are available from various reports on the website, though none as comprehensive, current and accessible as the Australian and UK national reports.

In addition to surveys of leavers, increasing numbers of longitudinal studies that follow graduates for years after completion are a rich source of data on graduate outcomes. In New Zealand (NZ) , the *Graduate Longitudinal Study* (GLSNZ), jointly funded by the government and Universities New Zealand, surveyed final-year students in 2011 and followed up with them two and five years post-graduation, with an additional survey planned for 2021 (GLSNZ, 2019). In Australia and the UK, medium-term graduate outcomes have begun to be captured: three years and three-and-a-half years post-completion, respectively (QILT, 2018). The findings from the latter have been included in the data below.

While the UK and Australia have comprehensive, systematic systems for collecting graduate-outcomes data, the US data are predominantly limited to employment and earnings, and focus on younger graduates. Broader and richer information about graduate outcomes appears to be collected and shared in a piecemeal manner by individual institutions, states and regions (Cowan, 2015). For example, a longitudinal study by the NCES, *Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (B&B)*, examines the graduate outcomes primarily of teachers (NCES, 2019b). However, it is suggested that the data void on graduate outcomes in the US will soon be filled as institutions better collect and share their data (Cowan, 2015). This is already occurring in the Multistate Longitudinal Data Exchange (MLDE), a program enabling data sharing amongst states and institutions in one region of the US (Prescott, 2014).

The following section draws on the available national sources to examine the outcomes of graduates in Australia and internationally. Each of the countries is diverse in outcomes and experiences for graduates; the next sections explore these differences across locations.

Positive Trends in Graduate Data

The outcomes for graduates reported in national studies across countries are primarily positive. In the UK, US and Australia, graduate employment rates are improving, earnings are increasing and graduates can regain in the medium term any employment shortcomings encountered immediately after graduation.

Graduate employment in the UK looks promising, with graduate employment up, unemployment down and more graduates acquiring full-time, professional-level jobs over the short and medium term. The most recent results from the *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education* survey indicates that six months after graduating, 71 per cent of graduates from UK universities are in employment (HESA, 2018c), an increase from the previous year (AGCAS, 2017). The longitudinal study of 2015 graduates indicates that, encouragingly, this rate rises to 86.4 per cent three years later (HESA, 2018a), revealing that many graduates unemployed shortly after completing their degree do manage to find employment within the next three years. In combination, the statistics reflect a continued strengthening of employment outcomes in the last five years. The data on the type of employment held by graduates six months post-completion show that 59.2 per cent of leavers were employed full-time, which increased to 73.6 per cent three years later (HESA, 2018a). These figures are regarded as indicating that a large proportion of those who begin in part-time work do move into full-time work (HESA, 2018a, 2018c) over a period of time. Additionally, more employed graduates are in a professional-level job six months after graduating: 73.9 per cent, up from 71.4 per cent the previous year, rising to almost 85 per cent three years on (AGCAS, 2017; HESA, 2018a). Thus, over time, 60 per cent of graduates who start out in non-professional roles make the transition to professional employment (HESA, 2018a).

The recession experienced by the **US** between 2007 and 2009 affected the employment outcomes of most of its citizens, with the economy only now gradually recovering (NCES, 2019c). Generally, employment rates and earnings are both worse when compared to rates prior to the recession, but have been improving every year since 2010 (NCES, 2018c, 2019a). There is limited information about how graduates are faring in this post-recession economy. The NCES reports only on young graduates (those aged between 25 and 34 years of age). While somewhat limited, the statistics do indicate that in 2017 the unemployment rate for young people with a bachelor's degree or higher was 3 per cent, slightly lower than just after the recession in the previous year, when it was 3.1 per cent (NCES, 2018c, 2018d). The median earnings of full-time employed young adults with a bachelor's degree was $51,800 (US) in 2017, a slight increase from $50,000 (US) in the previous year (NCES, 2018a, 2019a). However, these statistics provide little understandings on the whole cohort of graduates, as there is no reporting on graduates who are older than 35, or further information about graduates who may continue with further study, work part-time or undertake other activities.

In **Australia**, the outcomes of higher-education graduates are also, at first glance, positive (QILT, 2018, 2019a). The continued improvement in undergraduate employment since 2014 has continued, with 87 per cent of graduates employed four months after completion (QILT, 2019b). Encouragingly, this rate improves over the medium term, with the overall employment rate of graduates at 92.4 per cent after three years (QILT, 2018). Levels of full-time employment also improve over time. A survey of the 2015 graduates conducted three years after graduation indicated that half of those employed part-time or unemployed immediately upon graduation were able to secure full-time jobs three years later (QILT, 2018). As a result, in the medium term, 89.2 per cent of graduates were in full-time work (QILT, 2018). These strong rates of graduate full-time employment are found across the sector, with all institutions in 2018 reporting full-time rates above 81 per cent (QILT, 2018) and some universities indicating full-time rates exceeding 92 per cent; these include CSU (93.6 per cent), Murdoch (93.2 per cent), UTS (92.7 per cent) and ANU (92.2 per cent) (QILT, 2018). Salaries have also continued to improve for graduates employed full-time from every study area. Indeed, in 2017, the median undergraduate salary was $61,000 (AUD), an increase of 1.7 per cent from the previous year (QILT, 2018, 2019a). Furthermore, the 'weaker' employment outcomes immediately after graduation experienced by graduates in some fields of study, particularly those degrees that are more general in focus, seem to diminish or narrow longitudinally (up to three years) (QILT, 2018).

The next section examines statistics from the national surveys that are not widely reported, or may not even be calculated, but are important in understanding the outcomes for all graduates. The percentages discussed here are those that represent groups of graduates that may be experiencing unsatisfactory graduate outcomes.

Unemployment, Underemployment and Underutilisation

While there are many positive trends in national data, a close examination of the 'negative spaces'—those statistics that are not calculated or stated in the national reports—provides another perspective on graduate outcomes. For example, in the latest Australian Graduate Outcome Survey (QILT, 2019a), an unemployment figure has not been calculated, nor is the percentage of graduates who are not in suitable employment explicitly stated. This is an example of a negative space, as the data offer limited understanding about those graduates who are not employed, or are not employed in their preferred work role. In this section, unemployment, underemployment and underutilisation are all explored to bring to the foreground those population cohorts that may be experiencing below-average outcomes relative to the broader population.

Despite having a degree, some graduates remain unemployed in the short and medium term; that is, they are available for employment but unable to find full-time, part-time or

casual employment (QILT, 2018). Shortly after completing their degree, this group numbers in the tens of thousands. In the UK, approximately 5.1 per cent of respondents (n=412,300) were unable to find paid work (HESA, 2017), while in Australia this figure was 13 per cent of respondents (n=120,564), or a total of 15,673 graduates. National surveys of graduates do not explain who these people are or why they do not obtain work straight after their degree. Positively, most of these people do manage to find employment eventually. Unemployment rates for graduates in the medium term appear to be much lower in NZ (3 per cent), the US (3 per cent) and Australia (3.6 per cent) (NCES, 2018c, 2018d; QILT, 2018; Universities New Zealand, 2018). However, despite these graduates' eventually obtaining employment, there is evidence that suggests that they are working only part-time despite indicating that they would prefer full-time roles (QILT, 2019a, 2019b).

Another under-addressed issue in the national reports is that of 'underemployment', which refers to graduates who are in paid employment fewer than 35 hours a week and would prefer to work more hours (QILT, 2019a). There is evidence that underemployment could exist for a proportion of Australian graduates (QILT, 2019a). Indeed, almost one-fifth (19.2 per cent) of employed undergraduates were part-time workers, and indicated that they were underemployed due to lack of work (QILT, 2019a). In the QILT survey, these graduates indicated that they desired more hours of employment but were unable to obtain them. In general, these students cited labour-force reasons for working part-time, such as: lack of suitable jobs in their area of expertise (18.0 per cent), lack of jobs with a suitable number of hours (16.8 per cent) or lack of jobs in their local area (11.5 per cent) (QILT, 2019a).

Although the Australian government's definition of underemployment is part-time work when full-time work is required (QILT, 2019b), underemployment can also result from the underutilisation of skills and qualifications. There is evidence that graduates internationally are not fully utilising the knowledge, experience, skills and university qualifications in their post-graduation employment they acquire post-graduation. High numbers of employed graduates in Australia report that they are not being employed in professional and managerial occupations requiring 'a level of skill commensurate with a bachelor degree or higher' (QILT, 2019a, p. 23). A similar situation is found in the UK, where 15 per cent of graduates fail to obtain a professional job in the medium term, with these graduates often populating sales and customer-service occupations (HESA, 2017). In Australia, four months after graduation, almost 30 per cent of full-time and 40 per cent of part-time employed graduates did not work in jobs appropriate to their level of skill (QILT, 2019a). A reasonably high proportion of Australian students felt that their qualification was 'not at all important' (22.6 per cent) or 'not that important' (14.5 per cent) for their current employment (QILT, 2019a). Graduates responded similarly in the UK, with the importance of graduates' qualification in gaining their current employment being either 'not very important' (21.2 per cent) or 'not important' (15.5 per cent) (HESA, 2018a). It is suggested that in the US there is also a skills mismatch, where workers and job candidates have more education than their current job requires (Cowan, 2015). Clearly these are important statistics that indicate that many graduates are not fully utilising the knowledge, skill and experience they derive from their degree, and as a result may not be fully realising the benefits of their university education.

This evidence of unemployment, underemployment and underutilisation highlights the unsatisfactory graduate outcomes experienced by some graduates and raises questions about *who* is experiencing these poorer outcomes. This review now turns to examine the national survey reports to seek to understand the quality of graduate outcomes for different groups of students, with a specific focus on equity groups, including those who are the first in their family to attend university.

Outcomes of Graduates from Equity Groups

National reporting of graduate outcomes for different groups of students varies in its breadth across the world. The UK *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education* (DLHE) survey provides statistics on graduate outcomes by gender, age, disability status, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, residence, parental education and own educational background (HESA, 2018b). In contrast, the United States' *National Centre for Education Statistics* reports limited findings based only on gender, age, ethnicity and parental education (NCES, 2016, 2017, 2018b). In Australia, graduate outcomes for different groups of students appear to be better addressed by QILT than its UK and US counterparts. The *GOS annual* and *longitudinal* reports provide more detail on Australian graduates' outcomes by demographic groupings including age, indigeneity, disability, home language, socioeconomic status and location.

The latest research from these countries shows that graduates with a **disability** had poorer employment outcomes than those without. In the UK, those with a disability had higher unemployment rates (7 per cent) than the average (5 per cent) (HESA, 2018b). In Australia, the full-time employment rate for undergraduates who reported a disability was much lower than those without (62.8 per cent and 73.5 per cent respectively), and a higher proportion (44.7 per cent) than average graduates (38.9 per cent) were in a job that did not fully utilise their skills or education (QILT, 2019a).

National reports from these three countries show that **ethnicity** is also related to poorer graduate outcomes. For example, in the US, the median earnings of full-time working young graduates (25-34) who were African-American (USD$45,700) or Hispanic (USD$41,700 (US)) were less than those of white graduates (USD$53,800) (NCES, 2019a). In a similar vein, in the UK, graduates from ethnic backgrounds were reported as having higher rates of unemployment (7-8 per cent) compared to white graduates (5 per cent) (HESA, 2018b). In Australia, where 'language spoken at home' is an indictor similar to ethnicity, those students whose home language was other than English had a 'substantially' lower rate of full-time employment (57.6 per cent) than students whose home language was English (73.4 per cent) (QILT, 2019a, p. 4), although this gap does close over the medium-term (QILT, 2018).

The findings of the national reports in the US and UK do not indicate any impact of familial levels of education on the outcomes of their graduates. For example, an analysis of the outcomes of US FiF graduates found that there was no difference in the rates of full-time employment or median salaries for this group four years after graduation (Cataldi, Bennett, Chen & RTI International, 2018). Similarly, in the UK, the level of parental education made no difference to the employment rates of graduates (HESA, 2018b).

In Australia, **socioeconomic status** (SES), or the 'educational and occupational level of communities', does affect the outcomes of university graduates (QILT, 2019a, p. 4). In 2018, graduates from high-SES locations performed better in all employment areas (QILT, 2019a). Specifically, 74.9 per cent of high-SES[3] undergraduates were employed full-time, compared with 72.7 per cent of those in medium-SES and 69.8 per cent in low-SES locations (QILT, 2019a). The pattern is similar in terms of overall employment, with high-, medium- and low-SES graduates recording overall employment rates of 88.1, 87.2 and 84.7 per cent respectively (QILT, 2019a). Only 'marginal' differences in the salary levels of undergraduates by socioeconomic status were reported, with median salaries for graduates from high- and medium-SES categories equal at $61,000 (AUD), and with those from the low-SES category earning $1,000 (AUD) less (QILT, 2019a, p. vii).

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[3] Within the population as a whole, the top 25 per cent of the population aged 15-64 are classified as high SES based on where they live; the middle 50 per cent of the population are classified as medium SES; and the bottom 25 per cent of the population as low SES (GOS, 2019, p. 4)

The results of national surveys do show, to some extent, poorer outcomes for certain groups of students: those with a disability, those from minority ethnic groups and those from low-SES backgrounds. However, emerging Australian research suggests that the magnitude of disadvantage is hidden in aggregated data (Richardson et al., 2016). Further analysis performed on Australian national data by researchers looking specifically at equity groups reveals that multiple categories of disadvantage have a negative impact on graduate outcomes (Richardson et al., 2016). For example, the likelihood of employment decreases when a graduate comes from a low-SES background and is also Indigenous, has a disability, has a home language other than English, is born outside Australia or is a women in a technical area (Richardson et al., 2016). Indeed, multiple disadvantages influence more than employment rates: they also affect various aspects of employment including sector, type of employer, role, contract and means of finding work (Richardson et al., 2016). Specifically, graduates from the top three **SES** quartiles were approximately 1.2 times more likely than those from the bottom SES quartile to be working, with low-SES graduates experiencing more-tenuous work situations (Richardson et al., 2016). These more financially disadvantaged students also earned less. Graduates from the top two SES quartiles earned AUD$6,999 and AUD$3,059 *more*, respectively, than graduates from the bottom SES quartile (Richardson et al., 2016). Furthermore, graduates from many disadvantaged groups are clustered within the sub-fields of broad disciplines that are arguably regarded as lower-status occupations, and are generally less well paid (Richardson et al., 2016). For example, 36.9 per cent of employed low-SES graduates worked as education or health professionals, in comparison to 28.3 per cent of all employed graduates (Richardson et al., 2016). Also, 4.9 per cent of Indigenous graduates were in the field of law, in contrast to 21.5 per cent of all graduates (Richardson et al., 2016). The authors highlight that '"multiple disadvantage" nuances the likely outcomes of graduates and should be taken into account in interpreting graduate outcomes data' (Richardson et al., 2016, p. 7).

Students from **regional and remote** areas (in other words, who live outside of a state or territory capital city) face additional complex challenges throughout their higher-education journeys. These learners complete high school, enter university and finish their university courses at lower rates than metropolitan students (Lamb, Jackson, Walstab & Huo, 2015; Polesel, Leahy & Gillis, 2017). This cohort is also half as likely to hold a bachelor degree or higher (Maslen, 2019) and these graduates are generally clustered in low-status, low-paying careers such as education and health (Richardson et al., 2016). Despite being 1.3 times more likely to be working than graduates from metropolitan institutions, regional graduates experienced employment in a qualitatively different manner. This includes having more-tenuous working conditions, including fixed-term contracts of up to 12 months. Interestingly, this cohort was more likely to use direct approaches to obtain work, suggesting a relatively better developed social network in these regional areas (Richardson et al., 2016).

As this section shows, research has confirmed that employment outcomes for graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds diverge significantly from those for graduates from non-equity backgrounds (Richardson et al., 2016). The next section highlights the conclusions from an analysis of national data and puts forward recommendations in light of those issues.

Preliminary Conclusions from the Statistical Data

The analysis of the statistics derived from the national large-scale graduate outcomes surveys presented previously (Section 2.1) highlights some important issues for Australia and other countries around the world.

First, and positively, Australia and the UK are routinely collecting national short- and medium-term data on graduate outcomes. These data are comprehensive and accessible, and include information about equity groups. The US appears to be lagging behind in this regard and would benefit from adopting a similar approach that enables data to be collected

on *all* of its graduates, including those who are mature-age as well as those from a range of equity groups.

Second, although employment rates are high, close analysis of national data raises some concerns about the quality of that employment. There is evidence that underemployment and the under-utilisation of skills, qualifications and experience exist for large numbers of graduates in their post-graduation employment in Australia and the UK. Almost 20 per cent of Australian graduates were in part-time work when full-time work was desired. Also, one-third of graduates felt that their qualification was of low importance to their post-graduation position (QILT, 2019a), which suggests that graduates might not be obtaining appropriate positions. Additionally, there is evidence (discussed more fully in Section 5.1) that many graduates stay with the same employer as they move from student to graduate. Such evidence suggests that while they report being employed after obtaining their qualification, graduates might be staying in their same student-level job rather than obtaining a professional position. From these data it appears that large numbers of graduates are simply not finding the desired full-time, professional-level employment that fits their qualifications and skills.

A final issue emerging out of the discussion above is that national survey data may be misleading in their representation of the outcomes of equity groups. Often the aggregated statistics in the national reports find only minor disparities between the outcomes of equity groups and those of the average graduate. For example, the median salary for graduates from high- and medium-SES categories was $61,000, and that from the low-SES category was only $1000 less (QILT, 2019a). However, Richardson et al. (2016) found that the magnitude of disadvantage is hidden in aggregated data, and that outcomes are reduced further when multiple categories of disadvantage exist.

Given the concerns about the quality of graduate employment and the evidence (Richardson et al., 2016) for the compounding effect of multiple disadvantages, which is not captured in national survey results, it is clear that the employment outcomes of graduates from diverse backgrounds need closer examination. More-nuanced data-collection instruments that capture the qualitative aspects of graduate employment are required (Richardson et al., 2016).

At this point, this review makes three recommendations. **First,** adjustments should be made to the Australian Graduate Outcomes Survey to allow for the collection of more information about the quality of graduate employment. Specifically, asking for employed graduates' sector and type of employer, their role, their contract type and how they found work will inform an understanding of the extent to which they are using their higher-education qualifications. The addition of fields into which qualitative comments can be made would also enable a broader diversity of information to supplement the statistics. **Second,** it would be beneficial to track graduates longitudinally and check in at 'critical moments' more frequently than the current six-month and three-year QILT surveys. More-timely feedback about graduate outcomes could be collected, for example, via an app that would send graduates a short quiz every month to check in on their 'job health' status. **Third,** additional research, including this fellowship, is required to examine how students from diverse backgrounds experience the transition to employment. Statistics only provide a limited picture of this process, and further research is required in order to fully understand the embodied experience of finding employment after graduation. This should include ongoing interviews and focus groups via a range of media (such as Skype and video conferencing). In this vein, this review now turns to examine the broader body of literature.

Mapping the Graduate Employment Landscape

This section moves the analysis away from more-quantitative framing to focus on the literature and research in the field. Beginning with an overview of the key issues that have emerged internationally, the discussion focuses on higher-education participation rates, increasing numbers of graduates in the market and an exploration of the term 'employability' and its connotations. This high-level overview is then followed by a narrower perspective that contextualises the higher-education landscape within Australia.

What Are the Key Issues Internationally?

> The current climate of the massification of higher education, a simultaneous shrinkage of the graduate labour market and an increasing neo-liberal emphasis on students to improve their own employability makes the transition to employment a complex one. (O'Connor & Bodicoat, 2016, p. 446).

This timely observation from Henrietta O'Connor and Maxine Bodicoat concisely summarises the post-graduation landscape that faces university students in many countries in the 21st century. This section explores the key issues that shape the environment in which today's graduates experience their transition from higher education to the workforce, focusing on the following broad themes:

- university participation across the sector
- graduate oversupply and underemployment
- the meaning and implications of the term 'employability'
- how 'employability' affects institutions and employers
- the burgeoning need for work experience and internships.

University Participation Across the Sector

As previously indicated, increasing access to and participation in higher education has been a key strategy for many countries, including Australia, the UK and the US, in addressing issues of equality and social mobility for their citizens. Australian university equity policy focuses on access and participation in higher education, with the implicit assumption that disadvantage will be ameliorated through educational achievement (Lamb et al., 2015; Richardson et al., 2016). Similarly, the UK government asserts that education and access to career opportunities helps citizens realise their potential to be socially mobile, participate fully in society and access the full range of rights, resources and socioeconomic advantages that UK citizenship and economic growth are assumed to confer (Purcell et al., 2013).

However, there is growing evidence to challenge the assumption that access to higher education does actually enable social mobility. The Bridge Group (2016) claims that in the UK, economic and other forms of disadvantage are not necessarily negated by securing a university place. Statistically significant employment differences exist across socioeconomic groups; for example, it continues to be the case that former private-school and Oxbridge students are more likely to enter the UK's top occupations (Gore, Holmes, Smith, Southgate & Albright, 2015; Kirby, 2016; Macmillan, Tyler & Vignoles, 2014). In Canada, inequalities persist for three underrepresented groups: women, low SES and Indigenous citizens (Andres 2015). In the Southern Hemisphere, inequities also remain. New Zealand Indigenous students graduate from university with significantly higher student debt burdens and financial strain than other graduates, which potentially affects their graduate employment options (Theodore et al., 2017). In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have significantly lower rates of participation in higher education than the broader population (Day, Nakata, Nakata & Martin, 2015; Edwards & McMillan, 2015).

Furthermore, there are claims that instead of supporting equality, mass higher education is replicating social-class inequalities found across the school system and wider society (Reay, 2016; Tomlinson, 2012). Reay (2016) observes that an expanded university system has led to a stratified and differentiated one in which working class students, for the most part, are clustered in the low-status, poorly resourced institutions. An enduring necessity to educate the elite for leadership as well as the masses for skilled employment means that diversification will remain within the system, with universities providing different kinds of education to different strata of the population, opening (or closing) entirely different employment opportunities for their students (Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Kirby, 2016; Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller, 2013). In this hierarchical system not all graduates may be able to exploit the benefits of participating in further education (Tomlinson, 2012), thereby negating the assumptions upon which social-equity policies are based. How this situation actually affects the students themselves will be revisited in Section 4, which explicitly defines equity implications.

Graduate Oversupply and Underemployment

While the success of policies for increasing higher-education participation is under debate (e.g. Abrahams, 2017; Reay, 2016; Southgate, Grimes & Cox, 2018), there is no doubt that globally there has been an increase in the number of students undertaking university study and graduating with a degree qualification (Marginson, 2016). This increase in formal university qualifications has a number of implications for graduate employment. This rise in student numbers has not been matched by employer demand, resulting in an oversupply of graduates and intensified competition for jobs in some countries (Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth & Rose, 2013; Purcell et al., 2013). There also exists a mismatch between levels of qualification and their market utility (Tomlinson, 2008). UK students have reported feeling that the increase in the number of graduates holding formal credentials has lowered the status of these qualifications and their exchange value in the labour market (Tomlinson, 2008). Thus, the returns that graduates can expect from higher education are more volatile (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006b); that is, the rewards of higher education are becoming more unevenly distributed as the relationship between education, jobs and entitlements becomes increasingly reconfigured (Allen et al., 2013).

As the statistics clearly indicate, graduates are underutilised in the global job market. The previous section indicated how underemployment is occurring across Australia, the UK and the US (HESA, 2017; NCES, 2018c; QILT, 2019a). An important implication of this is that the concept of the *graduate labour market* itself is arguably now redundant, as graduate employment is increasingly segmented into zones of greater or lesser security with differing levels of correspondence to graduate-level skills (Morrison, 2014). For example, US graduates from nursing and mechanical engineering have above-average earnings and below-average unemployment rates (NCES, 2018d). Conversely, graduates from the fine arts, liberal arts and humanities have both below-average earnings and above-average unemployment rates (NCES, 2018d). Graduate outcomes across the globe are strongly related to the field of study. However, within each broad field of study exists a range of graduates, some more employable and successful than others. The following section closely examines the concept of employability to further explore reasons for differences between graduate outcomes and who might bear responsibility for them.

The Meaning and Implications of the Term 'Employability'

It is clear that with an oversupply of credentialed graduates, a degree is no longer enough to secure well-paid and high-skilled employment. As Tomlinson (2012, p. 415) writes, '[i]t now appears no longer enough just to be a graduate, but instead an employable graduate'. To compete in these oversupplied labour markets, graduates need to set themselves apart from other applicants and offer potential employers more; effectively, individuals need to strive to be *more* employable than the competition.

The term *employability* is now used across the global higher-education sector to describe a set of attributes that make individual graduates inherently more attractive to employers (Boden & Nedeva, 2010), successful in the labour market (Tholen, 2015) and capable of moving self-sufficiently within it to realise potential through sustainable employment (Allen et al., 2013). Employability is then regarded as a set of achievements, skills or understandings that an individual possesses (Boden & Nedeva, 2010) . These attributes are made up of relative and subjective dimensions (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013), some innate and others learnable (Williams, 2005). While many authors (Gunawan, Creed & Glendon, 2018; Pouratashi & Zamani, 2019; Williams, 2005) attempt to explicitly identify particular employability attributes, it is argued that defining the content of employability specifically is not possible, as the needs of heterogeneous employers and attributes of equally diverse individuals at specific points in time intersect to determine what employability looks like (Boden & Nedeva, 2010).

In many countries, governments are greatly interested in graduate employability, as it is expected that higher education contributes to national economic growth (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006b; OECD, 2016; Zajac, Jasinski & Bozykowski, 2018). Historically, governments paid attention more broadly to levels of employment and the labour market, but recently this has narrowed, and focus is now on employability and the qualities of individual workers (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006b). Current government policy largely positions learners as responsible for their own employment, rather than this being an outcome of the wider structures of the labour market (Fejes, 2010). This situation affects not only the individual student but also the employers and universities; these effects are detailed next.

How Employability Affects Institutions and Employers

The employability discourse has somewhat changed the role of higher-education institutions. Traditionally, universities educated elites for leadership and prioritised critical thinking and intellectual ability, but Boden and Nedeva (2010) claim that today a major role of universities is the production of an appropriately trained workforce that fits employers' needs so that the nation can better compete in the global knowledge economy. As a result of the employability discourse, universities now have a responsibility to ensure that their graduates have the requisite knowledge and skills to be competitive and employable (Andrews & Russell, 2012; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006b; Tran, 2015).

This discourse has also been charged with contributing to the commodification of higher education (Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Tomlinson, 2008). In this relationship, the modern student population is cast as a customer and education as an investment, an affiliation that has, in turn, considerably reduced the agency of most universities over the employment skills they develop, their curricula and the type of education and graduates they produce (Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Fallows & Steven, 2000). Universities competing in a marketplace may, intentionally or unintentionally, shape their degree programs around employability (Andrews & Russell, 2012; Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Pouratashi & Zamani, 2019); however, this equally may reinforce the stratification of higher education. For example, prestigious universities such as Oxford ensure that their students are highly employable by educating them with broad-based knowledge and endowing them with cultural capital, whereas newer technical universities address employability by teaching very specific skills on behalf of employers (Boden & Nedeva, 2010).

This review will return later to the discourse of employability, considering it in a critical and sociological way, with particular emphasis on its effect on outcomes for equity students. The next section explores another key facet of the global graduate employment market: the emergence of the need for work experience and internships that contribute to 'employability' skills.

The Burgeoning Need for Work Experience and Internships

Undertaking work experience is increasingly recognised as a valuable resource for obtaining postgraduate employment. Work experience may include programs such as internships, practicums, clerkships, residencies and clinical experience (NCES, 2018e). In an ideal work-experience scenario, participants develop relevant skills and new knowledge, and there is evidence that graduates frequently receive offers of paid employment with the host organisation (Oliver, McDonald, Stewart & Hewitt, 2016). Indeed, for some sought-after graduate jobs, internships are now the norm before taking on a formal role (Montacute, 2018), particularly in certain industries such as the creative sector, where these roles are a 'widespread phenomenon' (O'Connor & Bodicoat, 2016, p. 437). The importance of internships is further highlighted by top graduate employers in the UK, who report that candidates who have not gained work experience through an internship will have lower or no chance of receiving a job offer from their organisations graduate programs, regardless of academic qualifications (Montacute, 2018). Similarly, the Bridge Group (2016) reports that large recruiters in the UK expect approximately one-third of full-time graduate positions to be filled by graduates who have already worked within their organisations through internships, placements or vacation work. Not surprisingly, perhaps, graduates with no work experience were more likely to be in non-graduate jobs or unpaid work (Purcell et al., 2013). A similar picture exists in the US, where those graduates who had undertaken a work-experience program were more likely to be employed (81 per cent) than those who had not participated in this type of opportunity (74 per cent) (NCES, 2018e).

The timing of this unpaid work experience can lead to different employment outcomes (Purcell et al., 2013). Students who undertook work placements integral to the course, vacation internships and paid work for career experience during their studies were more likely to consider their postgraduate job as being very appropriate for them (Purcell et al., 2013). Working unpaid for career experience after graduation, however, was associated with poor employment outcomes. There is evidence that undertaking unpaid work after graduation diminishes the odds of being employed in graduate jobs (Purcell et al., 2013), and graduates who participate in unpaid work may unintentionally reduce future earnings (Montacute, 2018). According to Montacute (2018), 10,000 UK graduates are carrying out an internship at six months post-graduation, with 20 per cent doing so unpaid. Amongst applicants for these post-graduation internships, over two-thirds had been either unemployed or in temporary work since graduation, and one-third had applied for a role because they had not been able to secure other long-term employment (O'Connor & Bodicoat, 2016). Unsurprisingly, graduates who take up internships due to lack of other opportunities suffer from low satisfaction in their post-graduate employment in relation to their skill and qualification utilisation (Purcell et al., 2013). These findings highlight an important point: during their studies, students who undertake unpaid work experience have strong graduate employment outcomes, but taking up an unpaid internship post-graduation is connected with poorer outcomes and dissatisfaction. Thus, undertaking an internship whilst studying is a valuable strategy for successful transition into graduate employment. This point will also be revisited in Section 4, which considers the ramifications of participating in internships for equity students and the restrictive nature of this participation.

Summary Overview

This section has provided a broad overview of the current issues in the global graduate employment market, with reference to literature from the UK, US, Australia and New Zealand.

The last two decades have seen huge changes to the university sector as student populations increase in both number and diversity. While policy and procedures have engaged with the implications of this as students consider and enter university, those who are exiting the higher-education system have not attracted a similar level of attention. The

literature indicates how this is a competitive job market with a global oversupply of graduates; this, combined with the need to be 'employable', means that those students with less access to necessary material and personal resources may be at a marked disadvantage. These and other issues will be explored in more critical depth in Section 4, which explores the implications of these issues from an equity perspective.

The following section narrows the focus to specifically explore the Australian context, examining its unique nature and the specific issues encountered within the graduate landscape.

What Are the Key Issues for Australia?

While most of the international issues identified equally affect the graduate employment market within Australia, there are additional characteristics that are specific to the Australian context. Understanding the intricacies of both the Australian education system and the specifics of Australia's employment market are key to understanding the particular focus taken in this Fellowship. Specifically, this section addresses:

- equity and education
- university prestige
- regional and remote students.

To provide context, the next section highlights the inequitable nature of the Australian education sector more broadly.

Equity and Education

Even a cursory examination of the distribution of students across school sectors by Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)[4] quartiles indicates the social segregation of schools in Australia (Kenway, 2013; Perry & McConney, 2010). This measure includes a composite aggregation of factors known to be associated with educational advantage (and disadvantage), such as parental occupation and education, a school's geographical location and the proportion of Indigenous students enrolled at a school. Based on these characteristics, the Australian schooling system is a stratified one, with learning opportunities mediated through unequal access to academic curriculum, learning resources and experiences, and quality pedagogy (Lamb, Hogan & Johnson, 2001). For example, emphasising a vocational focus in lower-SES schools can limit a student's access to the academic subjects required to produce high levels of school achievement (Perry & Southwell, 2014; Teese & Polesel, 2003; Tranter, 2012), which in turn restricts access to post-school education.

The differences in opportunity within the Australian education system and how these affect access to higher education continues to be borne out in research. For example, Australian researchers (Polesel et al., 2017) provide strong evidence for a perpetuating discourse of deficit operating within the school sector. In their study of high schools located in varying socioeconomic contexts, Polesel et al., (2017) indicate the ways educational futures and ambitions can be radically and prematurely foreclosed. When school leavers were asked to articulate their long-term goals and expectations, the SES of learners significantly affected employment aspirations. Of those in the highest SES quartile, 68 per cent expected to be in a 'professional' role, whilst only 'a minority of young people from the lowest SES quartile saw themselves as professionals when they reach the age of 30 years (43.2 per cent)' (p. 802). Interestingly, these authors reveal how teachers' expectations of where students would go

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[4] The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is based on parental education and occupation (ACARA, 2018) and is set at an average of 1000. The lower the ICSEA value, the lower the level of educational advantage of students attending that school. Similarly, the higher the ICSEA value, the higher the level of educational advantage.

post-school also differed to actual post-school destinations: a lower number of teachers expected learners to attend university compared to the number that did attend, with this gap being the largest for those students who were in the lowest SES quartile. This is a particularly relevant finding when the important role of teachers in developing and supporting students' educational goals is considered. Overall, Polesel et al. (2017) point to a

> fundamental misalignment between the teachers' perceptions of students and both the students' own perceptions and the objective reality of their actual outcomes (p. 804).

Such educational demarcations hinder individuals' ability to 'imagine' themselves at university, which is a fundamental factor in attendance (Harwood, Hickey-Moody, McMahon & O'Shea, 2017). Equally, for those who do attend university, such negative expectations may accompany them into the university environment as additional and unwanted baggage that profoundly affects educational experiences.

Aside from the differences in choices that this system continues to perpetuate, the types of institutions that students access are also highly differentiated. The next section explores the university sector in Australia, drawing attention to how universities construct themselves in a very competitive market and are similarly constructed by others.

University Prestige

The Australian higher-education system is not as stratified as those in the UK and US, but it is still differentiated based on the particular history and focus of different institutions. Australia has 40 universities, which serve 91 per cent of the 1,482,684 students enrolled in higher-education courses (TEQSA, 2018). The majority of universities offer courses in at least nine of the 10 broad fields of study (Norton & Cherastidham, 2014), and 40 per cent of universities are accredited to deliver both higher and vocational education (TEQSA, 2018). Public universities cater to a range of students by offering qualifications across the Australian Quality Framework (AQF) levels 5-10, including undergraduate and postgraduate awards (TEQSA, 2019), and are responding to changing demands for how their courses are delivered by offering more courses externally (distance) or via flexible delivery (i.e., a combination of face-to-face and distance education). Indeed, in 2016 there was a 54 per cent increase in students choosing flexible delivery from the previous year (TEQSA, 2018).

Australian universities with similar histories, goals and challenges have been classified in four recognised groupings (Koshy, Seymour & Dockery, 2016): the Group of Eight (Go8); the Innovative Research Universities (IRU); the Australian Technology Network (ATN); and the Regional Universities Network (RUN). These groupings are designed to forge linkages across institutions with similar objectives and demographics[5].

Despite the existence of 40 public universities, the demand for places exceeds supply: 16 per cent of applicants missed out on a university place in 2018 (Department of Education and Training, 2018). Some fields of study are even more competitive. For example, one-

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[5] The Group of Eight are Australia's older, research-intensive universities that are prominent in global rankings, including Australian National University (ANU), Melbourne, Monash, Sydney, New South Wales (UNSW), Queensland (UQ), Western Australia (UWA) and Adelaide. **Innovative Research Universities** (IRU) were established in the 1960s and 1970s and include: Murdoch, Flinders, Griffith, James Cook (JCU), Newcastle, La Trobe, and Charles Darwin University (CDU). The institutions in the **Australian Technology Network** were formed in the 1980s out of institutes of technology and include: Curtin University, University of Technology Sydney (UTS), RMIT University (RMIT), Queensland University of Technology (QUT), and University of South Australia (UniSA). The **Regional Universities Network** (RUN) is comprised of new universities with campuses in regional areas: Southern Cross, New England (UNE), Federation, Sunshine Coast (SCU), Central Queensland (CQU) and Southern Queensland (USQ). Another 14 universities are not grouped.

quarter of applicants to health courses did not receive an offer in 2018 (Department of Education and Training, 2018). While most applicants seek to attend a university in their home state or territory (85.5 per cent in 2014), some nationally competitive courses (such as medicine) attract interstate applications (Koshy et al., 2016). According to the latest statistics, the Group of Eight continues to receive the largest share of applications (22.3 per cent), closely followed by universities in the ATN (18.8 per cent) and IRU (18.1 per cent) groups (Department of Education and Training, 2018). Most frequently, universities offer places to applicants with the strongest high-school results, although entry based on previous university achievement is also common (Norton & Cherastidham, 2014). Despite having more applicants than places, universities seek to attract the 'best' students and compete for those applications.

It is suggested that, when deciding on where to study, applicants draw on the prestige of the university to inform their understanding of its quality (Koshy et al., 2016; Norton & Cherastidham, 2014). The term 'prestige' has been defined as 'a signal of standing; a prestige good or service is often seen as the best of its type…. It reflects perceptions, justified or not, about where the highest quality is to be found' (Norton & Cherastidham, 2014, p. 82). Applicants might believe that a prestigious university has superior teaching and learning due to having better teachers and resources, and that their graduates might obtain more valuable professional networks (Norton & Cherastidham, 2014). Additionally, employers might use university prestige as a way to measure the potential of a candidate (Norton & Cherastidham, 2014). Indeed, employers consider the Go8 members University of Melbourne, University of Sydney and ANU as Australia's best at preparing students for the workplace (Times Higher Education, 2018).

UK and US research (Kirby, 2016; Thomas & Zhang, 2005; Wakeling & Savage, 2015) clearly show the existence of university prestige in those markets with corresponding benefits for graduate starting salaries and lifetime earnings. A number of studies have attempted to determine if there is a similar premium for attendance at Go8 universities in Australia. Overall, studies confirm only a 'limited' (Koshy et al., 2016) or 'small' (Carroll, Heaton & Massimiliano, 2018) earnings effect. Early studies found no evidence of university prestige on **starting salaries** or earnings at a point in time. Birch, Li and Miller (2009) and Cherastidham and Norton (2014) found little difference between the starting salaries of Australian graduates who had attended Go8 universities and those who had attended other universities. Similarly, Koshy et al. (2016) found limited evidence for an earnings premium associated with university attended (with 'earnings' being the hourly rate received measured at any point from graduation to retirement). However, Carroll et al. (2018) claim that these studies did not attempt to account for selection bias. When Carroll et al. (2018) controlled for university selection of superior students, they found statistically significant evidence of unconditional Go8 premia on starting salaries, ranging from 4.3 per cent to 5.5 per cent, and considerable variation in starting salaries within the Go8 and other university groups. In addition, Cherastidtham and Norton (2014) found evidence of a university premium on **lifetime earnings**. Specifically, graduates of Go8 universities and technology universities earn about 6 per cent more than graduates of other universities over a 40-year career (Cherastidham & Norton, 2014). Also, Go8 bachelor degree graduates are more likely to get first jobs matching their qualifications. (Cherastidham & Norton, 2014).

Broadly speaking, however, researchers across the field concur that university prestige does not significantly affect the Australian labour market, but that field of study does (Carroll et al., 2018; Norton & Cherastidham, 2014). For example, a graduate at any university who chose engineering over science is likely to earn more than a graduate who chose science at a prestigious Go8 university (Cherastidham & Norton, 2014). Additionally, the field of study affects full-time job prospects, with graduates from more vocationally oriented study areas having greater success in the labour market immediately upon graduation than those with generalist degrees (Cherastidham & Norton, 2014; QILT, 2019a). Birch et al. (2009, p. 58) offer this advice to Australian applicants: 'instead of enrolling in a university with the

expectation that the institution's prestige or quality might fetch a premium in the labour market, it is better to try to enrol in "premium" disciplines like engineering, public health, and management and commerce, or to pursue a career in an industry or occupation that pays well'.

In Australia, one student population that remains constrained in choice of university due to geography and distance is those who reside in remote areas. The following section draws attention to this group of students, who, due to the unique physical and human geography of Australia, face disadvantage in both the choice of and access to university.

Regional and Remote Students

Geography is an important factor in the Australian graduate landscape, especially as national statistics show that there is a persistent relationship between location and educational outcomes (Halsey, 2017). Outcomes for primary and middle-school students decrease as remoteness ensues, and there is a marked decline in successful high-school completion, university attendance and degree attainment according to remoteness (Cardak et al., 2017; Halsey, 2017; Lamb et al., 2015). Indeed, those living in capital cities are almost twice as likely as regional inhabitants to hold a bachelor degree or higher (Maslen, 2019). A significant percentage of Australians live far from higher-educational institutions and graduate job markets, but not enough is known about their transition to employment and graduate outcomes. This section will discuss the extant research on this cohort and the particular educational and transition-to-work issues that they face.

In Australia, based on the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) classifications, communities are categorised as metropolitan, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote based on their relative access to services (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The Australian government's *Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) Annual Report* (QILT, 2019a) provides more detail on the outcomes of specific groups of Australian graduates, including those from regional and remote locations. For their analysis, students are categorised as being from 'metropolitan' or 'regional/remote' areas based on their permanent home address at the commencement of study (QILT, 2019a). According to the latest figures for 2018 graduates, approximately 80 per cent were from metropolitan areas and 20 per cent from regional/remote areas (with the home location of another 20 per cent unknown) (QILT, 2019a). With at least 38,621 students (and possibly another 38,000 more) hailing from regional and remote areas, understanding the nuances of their experience is critical for understanding the Australian graduate landscape. It should be noted, however, that categories such as 'regional' and 'remote' and aggregated results hide the full picture of this cohort and the differences that exist between individuals, schools and locations (Halsey, 2017; Pollard, 2018). Indeed, research has shown that students from remote and regional areas are distinct from one another, and understanding individual differences is important for ensuring effective student support services and policy directions (Pollard, 2018). However, the research reviewed here largely perceives the group as homogenous and does not allow for a more nuanced account of this cohort.

Youth in remote areas face high levels of unemployment, which shape their post-school opportunities and aspirations. A joint report by Youth Action, Uniting and Mission Australia (2018) reports that the transition from education to work is becoming increasingly difficult and lengthy, with young people taking an average of 4.7 years to find full-time work after leaving school and an average of 2.3 years to find any work at all. The unemployment rates in some remote areas are much worse than the national average of 12.2 per cent. Indeed, in five regional areas, unemployment (as at January 2018) among 15- to 24-year-olds exceeded 20 per cent, and in outback Queensland unemployment was at 67.1 per cent (Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2018). However, many young people value their close-knit and supportive communities and the attractiveness of their locality (Webb, Black, Morton, Plowright & Roy, 2015). The decision whether to stay or relocate therefore creates tension

for many students. Corbett (2016) regards the current situation as being 'precarious times for young people in rural communities' (p. 277) manifested through a 'tension' within those communities that may have limited employment or educational opportunities but do have 'a greater sense of connectedness, place attachment and community' (p. 278). Young people are choosing to remain in the local place despite state and national initiatives to promote mobility (Webb et al., 2015). Young men in particular adapt their aspirations to replicate family and local traditions, whilst young women are more likely to relocate to take up opportunities (Webb et al., 2015).

Youth in regional and remote areas must decide whether to relocate to undertake higher education, with flow-on effects for their movements after graduation; for example, whether they seek work in their communities, near their campuses or in other metropolitan areas. Boyd (2017) studied regional and remote students and identified three broad classifications of approach on completion of high school. 'Early leavers' move from their communities to undertake further study with confidence and self-efficacy; 'stayers with aspirations' are talented individuals but, as they lack direct knowledge about higher education, perceive university as daunting and leaving home as frightening; and 'stayers with no or low educational or career aspirations' are reluctant to change lifestyles when university and other pathways are unknown entities. In addition to students grouped in these categories, Pollard (2018) adds another: online students, who stay in their communities but access further education via distance modes. These groups require different resources and informed advice regarding admissions processes and options post-school, but access to these resources is inequitably distributed (Boyd, 2017; Pollard, 2018). To what extent they receive resources and informed advice regarding their post-graduation options is unclear, and offers an area for investigation.

Students who relocate to take up further study face logistical, financial and emotional challenges such as managing transport logistics, finding suitable accommodation, accessing allowances and financial support and seeking part-time work (Burke, Bennett, Bunn, Stevenson & Clegg, 2017; Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell et al., 2015; Halsey, 2017). Furthermore, the high cost of university, relocation costs and ongoing living costs are a burden for students who commonly need to take up part-time work to alleviate financial pressure (Burke et al., 2017; Cardak et al., 2017; NCSEHE, 2017). During semesters, relocators have a range of concerns including the potential loss of income and the cost of travelling home to visit family (Nelson, Picton, McMillan, Edwards & Devlin, 2017). The challenge of financial hardship causes stress, affects wellbeing and contributes to attrition (Nelson et al., 2017). Furthermore, these work and family commitments leave less time for co-curricular and social activities (Pollard, 2018), which compounds emotional and social disadvantage. Remote students not only may have limited access to the cultural or social capitals valued in higher education, but also may face additional challenges associated with academic preparation, including lacking the resources and confidence to access available support (Nelson et al., 2017; Pollard, 2018). Relocators may experience conflicting goals, homesickness and culture shock (Byun, Meece, Irvin & Hutchins, 2012; Nelson et al., 2017; Pollard, 2018). The 'distance' that these students must navigate between their home and university lives is physical, psychological and sociocultural, and can result in psychological distress and impaired mental health (NCSEHE, 2017; Pollard, 2018).

Those who do choose to stay in their home communities and study via distance face their own challenges. Online/distance/external students have poorer outcomes than internal students, and part-time students fare worse than full-time students (Nelson et al., 2017; Stone, 2017), but regional students are taking up these approaches to study in greater numbers than metropolitan students (Pollard, 2018). Choosing not to relocate is also a challenging approach for regional and remote students, and one which requires further understanding.

In Section 2, this review highlighted the national statistics collected through the Graduate Outcomes Survey (QILT, 2019a). Although those statistics show that regional and remote students were more likely to be working than other graduates, further analysis by Richardson et al. (2016) suggests that they experience qualitative differences in their transition to work. However, there is little additional research addressing this topic. It is clear that not enough is known about how students from regional and remote areas transition to employment and experience the outcomes of university study, and many questions remain unanswered. For example, do students who have left their communities to attend university return afterwards? What types of positions do students obtain in their regional and remote communities? Are these positions appropriate for their skills and qualifications? Are the students reaping the same economic and social benefits of higher education as their urban counterparts? Research that considers these questions can ensure that the most appropriate and targeted support for regional and remote students is implemented.

This section has mapped the graduate employment landscape by highlighting key issues internationally and those specific to Australia. In summary, across the world, increased university participation has created a situation of graduate oversupply and underemployment. At the same time, the discourse of employability has changed the responsibilities of graduates and universities, who both now bear increased burdens for the improvement of employment prospects. Work experience is now a critical aspect of graduate employability. In Australia, equitable access to education continues to be an issue and highlights the need to understand the fairness of the outcomes of higher education. The following section examines the particular challenges of disadvantaged students as reported in the literature, with a particular emphasis on sociological perspectives.

Applying an Equity Lens to Post-graduation Outcomes

Building upon the broader graduate and educational landscape detailed in the last section, we now move to consider the experiences of specific equity groups as raised by various scholars in the field. Particularly, the following sections will focus on the inequities prevalent in career advice and career preparation, work experience and internships, including recruitment and employment processes, with specific reference to equity student cohorts. This discussion provides the context for exploring how FiF learners, many of whom experience multiple disadvantages, navigate the graduate employment field.

Considering the Employment Landscape for Equity Students

How obtaining a degree actually translates into employability within an increasingly competitive labour market is complex. Labour markets are largely stratified, and success within these contexts can be defined by existing social status and economic power (Reay, 2013). The increasing cost of attaining a degree coupled with the limited guarantee of employment post-graduation (Ingham, Abrahams & Bathmaker, 2018) suggests that whether higher education is delivering employment objectives for diverse student populations requires careful examination.

Adopting a sociological perspective on this topic enables data and findings to be critically interpreted with specific reference to issues related to power and domination. Sociological perspectives favour critical interpretations concerning taken-for-granted behaviours or accepted perspectives. The sociological literature on the graduate employment field focuses on how students from more diverse backgrounds navigate this field and critically explores the hidden disadvantages or limitations that individuals may encounter. The following section explores this literature in relation to three broad themes:

- equity students and university participation
- considering the guaranteed returns of university
- playing the game by 'different' rules.

Each section will provide details of supporting literature or research, with the final conclusions provided as a summary at the end.

Equity Students and University Participation

As discussed previously, graduate employability remains a government imperative across most developed nations, as higher education is expected to sustain economic growth and productivity by generating future educated workers (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006b). However, despite higher education being an imperative, the ways in which the broad education field is experienced by different populations remains differentiated according to social and economic factors (as shown in Section 3.2). Building upon this understanding, this discussion will contextualise the interrelationships between equity markers and graduates' experiences of higher education and graduate employment.

Whilst this literature review is specifically focused on the post-graduate employment outcomes of those who are the first in their family to attend university, this needs to be situated within a broader understanding of this cohort's higher-education participation to contextually frame this population. Undoubtedly, the movement into and through university is regarded as being a fraught process for many students, but this is particularly the case for those from diverse or equity backgrounds (Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Polesel et al., 2017; Reay, 1998a, 2003, 2016, 2017). Many different issues hinder the academic success and progression of students who may not hold the cultural and economic capitals valued within the higher-education environment. For equity students there are obvious material and

educational factors that influence this higher-education experience, including financial constraints (Oldfield, 2012; O'Shea & Delahunty, 2018); academic under-preparedness (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004); and the emotional work of managing existing identities or relationships (Waller, Bovill & Pitt, 2011; Brine & Waller, 2004), which includes the emotional work involved in handling caring responsibilities (Gouthro, 2006; Giles, 1990; Hinton-Smith, 2012; Pascall & Cox, 1993). These are all factors that may lead to higher levels of attrition or early departure for these equity cohorts (Coates & Ransom, 2011; McMillan, 2005; Rubio, Mireles, Jones & Mayse, 2017, Spiegler, 2018; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013).

When students feel that they do not 'belong' in an institution, thoughts of departure inevitably follow. Stebleton, Soria and Huesman (2014) explain, 'The greater sense of belonging to the academic and social community for the student, the more likely it is that the student will persist toward graduation' (p. 8).

We know that a lower sense of belonging and entitlement to attend university is particularly pronounced for those students who are the first in the family to attend university (Stebleton et al., 2014). This feeling of being 'outside' the university culture may relate to having little *a priori* contact with the higher-education sector. Ball, Davies, David and Reay (2002) describe this in terms of having little 'educational memory' within the family, arguing that without such 'transgenerational family scripts or "inheritance codes"' (p. 57), understandings and expectations of higher education are somewhat differentiated and alien. Equally, it is important to acknowledge that these FiF learners are generally the 'educational pioneers' (May et al., 2016) of their family and community, frequently undertaking difficult and complex negotiations to achieve degree completion. There may be many others watching on the sidelines to see how this FiF cohort fare (O'Shea, 2016b); thus they are frequently operating under an additional burden to succeed. As Thomas and Quinn (2007) explain, these learners need to

> …perfect themselves as educated and employable; reassure the family that they have 'invested wisely'; open up the aspirations and horizons of the family and its community; represent a triumph of social egalitarianism and 'prove that everyone can make it' (p. 59).

How such issues translate into competing in an already saturated job market is difficult to quantify, but undoubtedly this is a challenging endeavour. The next section explores how this market has changed since the inception of widening participation and the resulting impacts on diverse student cohorts, many of whom are intersected by multiple equity categorisations.

Considering the Guaranteed Returns of University

As previously described, the global graduate job market is both dynamic and volatile, with the forces of demand and supply dictating patterns of employment. This review has shown that having a degree no longer guarantees employment that is either secure or financially beneficial; indeed, university graduates are not necessarily better off financially when compared to their peers who did not pursue tertiary qualifications (Daly, Lewis, Corliss & Heaslip, 2015). Daly et al.'s (2015) Australian study reports that graduates in certain fields earn less than those who entered full-time employment after school; the guaranteed economic return of university studies is not necessarily the reality for all graduates.

While financial success is no longer a guaranteed outcome from university studies, this expectation, perhaps unsurprisingly, remains an enduring goal for many students from disadvantaged or equity backgrounds (O'Shea, Stone, Delahunty & May, 2018). Tomlinson (2008, p. 52) found that equity students in particular have internalised the wider discourse of the 'graduate as higher earner'; they pursue educational credentials because of their perceived positional value and advantages in providing access to employment. Indeed, it

has been argued that the future viability of the higher-education sector in the UK is contingent on young people continuing to believe in the value of higher education as a means of occupational and social mobility (Morrison, 2014). This situation leads Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth and Rose (2013) to conclude:

> While increasing numbers of young people are investing in [higher education], its rewards are becoming more unevenly distributed as the relationship between education, jobs and entitlements is being reconfigured (p. 432)

We know that as the volume of degree holders increases, a type of 'congestion' in the market has emerged that leaves very little 'room at the top' (Abrahams, 2017, p. 626). These increasing numbers can also result in an oversupply in the market, leading to disparity between graduate skill level and the types of jobs being occupied (Tomlinson, 2008; Richardson et al., 2016). Tomlinson (2008) argues that this situation inevitably leads to graduates occupying roles that were previously the domain of non-graduates; this, in turn, can result in a 'mismatch between their level of qualification and its market utility' (p. 50). Arguably, this mismatch is demonstrated by the statistics reported in Section 2 that highlight how graduates may not be using the skills and knowledge acquired in their degrees within the employment that they find. This situation is particularly detrimental for those students who may have invested heavily in their degree, taking on relational and material debt under the assumption that financial and employment rewards were guaranteed upon graduation.

Attaining qualifications is intrinsically bound up with the concept of being 'mobile'; accordingly, participants—and young people in particular— regard universities as sites that maximise the opportunity for 'occupational and social mobility' (Morrison, 2014, p. 180). In this framing, higher education is largely perceived as an 'individual investment', with the student 'responsible for his or her own labour-market position and success, as skills and abilities are the main factors of value in the labour market' (Tholen, 2015, p. 768). Such a perspective divorces the personal or the relational from this domain, creating a misalignment in relation to the social aspects of the employment field. A focus on individual actions and attributes in this space ultimately leaves largely hidden the 'power relations' and 'social contexts' that are operating (Tholen, 2015, p. 772).

This individualisation of the higher-education landscape permeates and affects a number of levels. For learners, particularly those from recognised equity groups, there is an assumption that change is inherently positive, the means to gain an upward trajectory and attain a new class status, an attempt at bettering their conditions or becoming more 'middle class' (Abrahams, 2017). Underpinning this assumption is the 'myth of meritocracy', which 'normalises inequalities, converting them into individual rather than collective responsibilities' (Reay, 1998b, p. 1). In this system, failure is individualised rather than recognised as being located within larger structures that may stratify certain members of society (Abrahams, 2017). As Bathmaker et al. (2013) assert, this is a 'new' game with different rules that require students to be astute and mindful of the market's intricacies.

Playing the 'Game' by Different 'Rules'

This review has outlined how the employment field is no longer strictly demarcated by graduate and non-graduate work; instead, it is a highly segmented environment. This segmentation responds to broader social trends including the emergence of unsecured and entrepreneurial economies, such as the 'Gig Economy' (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrzesniewski 2018). Discourses around employment also arguably reflect deeper social trends. For example, even discussions about 'employment skills' contain deeper connotations that may go unidentified. Moreau and Leathwood (2006b) point out that 'skills' are not value-free, but instead are largely 'gendered', 'classed' and 'racialised' (p. 308). As discussed, people no longer solely speak about 'employment'; instead, the literature and policy refer to 'employability'. This is more than just a shift in nomenclature: it implicitly defines the individual as responsible for gaining employment.

One area where the 'new' rules of the game are most apparent is in terms of access to, and participation in, internships or employment opportunities. Section 3 established that having appropriate access to quality undergraduate internships is key to obtaining the best career or employment options (Montacute, 2018). Internships are prevalent in many countries; for example, the most recent statistics indicate that there were 70,000 interns in the UK in 2010 (Montacute, 2018). However, the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds offered internships remains low (Ashley et al., 2015), which again undermines the assumption of equality in higher education.

One key inhibitor for equity students in taking advantage of these opportunities is the high economic cost of undertaking an internship. Many internships are unpaid (Montacute, 2018), with the most recent estimates indicating that these unpaid internships make up 87 per cent of the total number in Australia (Interns Australia, 2018). In creative fields in Australia, larger employers were more likely than sole-employers and small to medium enterprises to pay students or cover expenses (Allen et al., 2013); however, most positions do not receive remuneration of any kind. An Australian media report suggests that young people can be out of pocket approximately $6,000 (AUD) from doing an unpaid internship (Sinclair, 2019). The costs associated with unpaid work experience include: reduction in paid hours of employment; insurance; expenses associated with travel or living away from home; and fees to brokers or agents or to the organisations themselves (Oliver et al., 2016). According to Interns Australia (2018), internship brokers can charge a fee of up to $10,000 to place students in an internship.

The literature shows the barrier that these financial costs produce in disadvantaged students' access to quality internships. Students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to be able to take up opportunities for unpaid work, with potential consequences for their future employment (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006a). Given that employers favour experience, those who are unable to work for free to gain experience are clearly disadvantaged (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility, 2017). UK students with economic capital can afford to work in different geographical locations even when the internship is unpaid, and may not need to earn money to cover their living costs (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Macmillan et al., 2014). These more affluent or financially stable students enjoy a greater choice of placements because they have greater resources to fall back on (Allen et al., 2013). Financial costs make internships largely inaccessible to students with financial commitments. Currently, while scholarships are awarded to attend private schools and prestigious universities, very few are available to enable students to undertake internships (Kirby, 2016).

Inequitable access also restricts students from disadvantaged backgrounds from taking up the most sought-after internships (Montacute, 2018). These internships are disproportionately available to those from more-privileged backgrounds (Kirby, 2016); often they are unadvertised, and thus are awarded to those with existing social connections (Montacute, 2018), or they are targeted at more-selective universities where students are more likely to come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Ashley et al., 2015). Indeed, middle-class students in UK institutions have been shown to be more successful than their working-class counterparts in gaining access to internships, particularly in high-status areas such as law or banking, even though many working-class students had clear internship goals and were achieving top grades on their courses (Bathmaker et al., 2013).

Having insufficient knowledge about whether an unpaid internship is a worthwhile investment for one's future career might also explain the low numbers of disadvantaged students who participate in these opportunities (The Bridge Group, 2016). Well-structured internships offer invaluable learning opportunities in addition to networking opportunities (Oliver et al., 2016), and the potential value of these might not be clear to students who are first in their family to attend university. Indeed, O'Conner and Bodicoat (2016) found that students fell into two groups in their attitude towards internships. One group appeared to understand the potential

value of internships in terms of enhancing future labour-market prospects, while the other group held more negative views of internships and rejected opportunities to participate in them. The latter showed little understanding of the different types of internship schemes on offer and had been highly influenced by the popular focus on the exploitative nature of internships, and thus did not apply for them (O'Connor & Bodicoat, 2016). Drawing on internships as an example has indicated how these opportunities are important for post-graduation success, yet are not equally accessible across diverse student populations, nor is their importance universally recognised.

The following section explores the significance of such enduring differences for the current study as well as drawing overarching conclusions for the field.

Summary Conclusions

As stated earlier, this Fellowship is guided by three overarching questions:

- How does obtaining a degree actually translate into employability within an increasingly competitive labour market?
- How do learners from intersecting equity categories enter the employment market and how is this 'entry to employment' experienced at an individual, qualitative level?
- How do learners negotiate existing and new forms of capital to achieve competitiveness in shrinking employment fields?

Each of these questions has been posed based on a perceived gap in understanding within the Australian graduate employment context. Primarily, the intent is to focus on the students themselves to provide a more nuanced understanding of how students from equity backgrounds navigate and engage with the employment market post-graduation. The implications of this Fellowship extend beyond Australia and can usefully inform higher-education sectors internationally. As Loveday identifies in the UK context, more work is needed in this field, as '…the subjective experience of movement across classed fields for those who do choose to engage in [higher education] is far from straightforward' (Loveday, 2015, p. 578). Specifically, by combining survey data with the qualitative analysis of students' experiences of navigating this graduate employment field, the intent is to offer a 'close-up' understanding of how individual learners manage the various demands and objectives within this landscape.

Bathmaker et al. (2013) argue that successfully '"playing the game" is not simply about making strategic choices about university and course, but being able to mobilise additional resources as well.' (p. 731) Their findings indicate that the more advantaged students deliberately implement strategies designed to 'accumulate and mobilise capitals' (p. 732). This strategic approach positioned these learners more favourably within the employment field, providing a 'middle class social capital advantage' (p. 737). However, how do graduates from less-advantaged backgrounds manage this mobilisation in this competitive environment? Do these individuals activate additional, and perhaps hidden, capitals in this endeavour, or do they have access to key functionings that enable success?

The final section draws together the literature and research to provide the context for the proposed Fellowship study.

Discussion and Conclusions

What Are the Key Issues?

The final section of this literature review draws together the key themes and highlights areas of emerging interest and possible foci for the next steps of the Fellowship. Each of these areas is discussed with particular reference to the FiF cohort and grouped under the following headings:

- career influences
- employment outcomes and the discourse of 'employability'
- considering capitals within the post-graduation field
- career planning and advice.

While the literature that focuses on FiF graduates is quite limited, the research so far shows that this group is highly intersected by a range of equity markers, such as being from a low socioeconomic background, being located in remote locations and being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student. The following sections draw upon relevant literature and scholarship across the equity field to consider how this FiF cohort may encounter and engage with the employment market. The discussion ends with some final thoughts about this area and an overview of the next steps for the proposed study.

Career Influences

The post-graduation landscape is clearly not a level playing field in which graduates' skills and personal qualities would be the key to their success in the labour market. As Moreau and Leathwood (2006b) have explained, social class, gender, ethnicity, age, disability and university attended all affect the opportunities available. This section examines how a range of factors common within the FiF cohort can impede individuals in their pursuit of suitable post-graduate employment.

Commonly, FiF students face financial barriers in their preparation for and transition into post-graduate employment. Material and financial circumstances can dictate the opportunities available to graduates and may significantly influence their early career paths. These conditions include whether they can afford to spend time in unpaid work experience, feel able to wait for an appropriate vacancy, feel forced to take whatever job they can or have no option but to be unemployed (Purcell et al., 2013). Morrison (2014) highlights how some working-class graduates are forced, by financial need, to accept employment that does not correspond with their qualifications, while other, more privileged, graduates are able to consider a more leisurely and multiple set of career moves. This is supported by evidence from Purcell et al. (2013), who found that graduates with no debts were more likely to be in the job they wanted. This suggests that levels of debt and, more widely, financial situation influence the job choices of graduates. Interestingly, financial considerations influence the vocational outcomes of students from low-SES backgrounds from an early age. Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell et al. (2015) found that children from low-SES backgrounds aspired to certain careers for reasons of money, while their counterparts from high-SES backgrounds cited personal interest and passion as the motivations behind their career aspirations.

Identities and dispositions shape graduates' action frames, including their career planning and decision-making (Tomlinson, 2012). There is evidence that disadvantaged university students do not apply for the top career opportunities on offer (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility, 2017). These students cite confidence issues (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility, 2017), feeling like they will not fit in with the organisational culture (Ashley et al., 2015) or being inferior (Southgate et al., 2018). The FiF students in one Australian study referred to medicine as an unattainable dream, of not feeling that they were

good enough or the right class of person to become a doctor (Southgate et al., 2018). As Southgate et al. (2018) highlight:

> Students used language about themselves that reflected a sense of diminishment and deficit. For instance, students referred to themselves as 'a bit of a scummo', 'a bit rough around the edges' and 'not very polished'. They contrasted these negative qualities to those of other medical students who were viewed as 'a different breed' or different 'calibre of people', 'pretty clean cut', 'a lot more polished', 'bright' and 'highly intelligent' (Southgate et al., 2018, p. 9).

This finding is supported by the research of Gore, Holmes, Smith, Lyell et al. (2015), who found that Australian children from high-SES backgrounds were more likely to aspire to become a doctor. It can be seen that the patterns of inequity in graduate employment may start early in educational careers. Equally, these decisions may be attributed to the possession of certain personal or embodied capitals such as aspirations, confidence and strong self-identity, which can work against students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Kirby, 2016).

Both quantitative and qualitative research has indicated that undertaking paid work in the final year of study appears to be the single most important factor in predicting whether a graduate is working shortly after graduation (Pitman et al., 2019). On average, being employed in the final year of study increased a graduate's likelihood of being employed post-graduation almost tenfold (Pitman et al., 2019). An important area of research (Pitman et al., 2019; QILT, 2018a; Richardson et al., 2016) seeks to understand whether employment after graduation that has continued from the final year of study is actually related to graduates' field of study and qualification. Analysis has found that fewer than a quarter of graduates who were still working for the same employer were in a role for which their qualification was a formal requirement and, for just under half of graduates, their qualification was only somewhat important or not important for the role they were in (Richardson et al., 2016). The recently released GOS data echo this. As indicated in Section 2.1, three years after completing their undergraduate qualification, 27.2 per cent of all employed graduates in 2018 reported that their skills and education were not fully utilised (QILT, 2018a). These findings suggest that while disadvantaged students are likely to work during their studies, many of them might not hold graduate-level positions after completing their studies (Richardson et al., 2016). These findings are echoed beyond Australia as well (e.g. Zajac, Jasinski & Bozykowski, 2018).

Exploring the types and range of post-graduate jobs that FiF students pursue after completing university will be a focus of this Fellowship research. This exploration will use both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitatively, the GOS data will provide some understanding of the differences in destinations between various student cohorts; additionally, interviews and surveys conducted with recent FiF graduates will provide a more-nuanced representation of this field.

Employment Outcomes and the Discourse of 'Employability'

As outlined previously in this review, employment outcomes for graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds are often inferior to those for graduates from non-equity backgrounds (Richardson et al., 2016). However, while this difference is an issue across countries, there is a lack of detailed data to explain these patterns. In the UK, Abrahams (2017) has highlighted how the graduate employment market is segregated, arguing that 'social origins' are 'increasingly prominent in shaping graduate outcomes' (2017, p. 626). This is further evidenced by Purcell et al.'s (2013) Futuretrack, study which indicated that UK graduates from the universities with the highest entry tariffs were most likely to enter 'expert' occupations or graduate occupations as a whole. In contrast, graduates from the medium- and low-tariff university demonstrated similar propensities to be in non-graduate jobs or unemployed (Purcell et al., 2013).

Clearly, the movements in the higher-education sector and the resulting changes in the graduate job sector mean that students need to be more agile and creative in their pursuit of employment. Bathmaker et al. (2013) argue that simply obtaining a degree is no longer enough, explaining that 'students are urged to mobilise different forms of "capital" during their undergraduate study to enhance their future economic and social positioning' (p. 724). The individualisation of employment fields (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006b; Roulin & Bangerter, 2013; Tomlinson, 2012) has created considerable pressure for each individual to develop their own employability relative to others in the graduate jobs market (O'Connor & Bodicoat, 2016; Roulin & Bangerter, 2013). Many students in the UK are aware that a degree is no longer enough to be highly employable (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Purcell et al., 2013); this becomes more apparent to the students as they move from university into the labour market (Purcell et al., 2013). This employability discourse is also pervasive in university curriculum documents and in how students talk about their progress and learning in higher education (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006b). Most students accept that that they must mobilise additional capitals that might be gained through a variety of activities beyond their formal qualification to gain positional advantage in the graduate recruitment arena (Allen et al., 2013; Bathmaker et al., 2013). Indeed, perceived future employability has been found to increase study effort and commitment to university (Gunawan et al., 2018). Through this discourse, students are trained to self-manage their future employment outcomes and take up an ethic of personal culpability for future labour-market success and failure (Allen et al., 2013; Fejes, 2010). In this way employability is used as an explanation for, and to some extent a legitimisation of, unemployment (Fejes, 2010).

However, the capitals that are valued within the employment market are quite limited in scope. Often these skills are largely defined as 'rational, technical and utilitarian', with university students often referring to their learning in terms of the acquisition of 'skills' and 'attributes'; such discourses are equally reflected in policy and curriculum documents (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006b, p. 310). Abrahams (2017) calls for a more inclusive understanding of the skills and attributes that can benefit future employability, including recognising the particular life and work experiences that students from more diverse backgrounds 'bring to' the workplace. This learning may have been acquired externally to the university but arguably contributes to developing the employment potential of a prospective employee. These life experiences include 'balancing paid work alongside their degrees' (p. 637) as well as the tenacity and motivation needed to pursue university study; as Abrahams (2017) argues, '…employers must be encouraged to recognise the value in working-class students struggles, resilience and paid forms of part-time employment' (p. 637). Focusing on how students themselves narrate their employment journey will provide deeper insight into how they have mobilised new and existing capitals to gain employment.

The next section revisits the concept of capitals within the graduate employment market, with particular reference to those learners who may not have access to the cultural or social capitals often expected in this domain.

Considering Capitals within the Post-graduation Field

Social capital is key within employability, providing access to hidden opportunities in terms of employment and work experiences. Kayleigh, who is a FiF graduate with a first-class degree, sums up the enduring currency of social capital within the employment field:

> [I]t is truly not what you know but who you know that gets you ahead. Even securing voluntary work or experience is difficult. Nearly everyone I knew who was able to do it knew someone from inside and was able to pull some strings. I feel that to an extent with my background I am at a disadvantage to many other students as my family do not have connections (cited in O'Connor & Bodicoat, 2016, p. 41).

The increasing need for graduates to 'distinguish themselves from their peers' (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013, p. 22) in the employment market has been identified as even more of an imperative in this era of mass participation, where gaining a degree is more common across sections of the community (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013). In short, and to borrow from sporting metaphors, what is now apparent is the ways certain cohorts of graduates are simply not positioned at the same 'starting line' as others who have the requisite cultural, social and economic capitals to stay ahead in the race. Kayleigh's experience is not unique: many professions trade upon social networks rather than just ability, and in this competitive market is it often 'who you know' rather than 'what you know' that may lead to employment.

To combat this differential, universities may offer internship opportunities as a means to both enable workplace experience and create necessary social networks. However, Brown (2013) argues that in the case of disadvantaged learners, this approach underscores 'a deficit model of what working-class students and families lack—credentials, incentives, internships or employability skills' (Brown, 2013, p. 682). Such opportunities also fail to recognise the social stratification within which these learners may operate, and which often limits or prevents the uptake of these schemes. In O'Connor and Bodicoat's (2016) study of how low-SES students perceive internship opportunities, in which Kayleigh (above) participated, it was concluded that while internships are 'increasingly vital to young people entering the labour market' (p. 438), many students do not avail themselves of these opportunities. These 'disengagers' (p. 435) are often unable to participate due to financial constraints, and in some cases may not recognise the value of this participation, even seeing it as a form of exploitation (O'Connor & Bodicoat, 2016). Equally, the lack of involvement may reflect a limited focus on the degree itself, demonstrating a lack of awareness of the need to develop a portfolio of capitals rather than simply achieving high grades (Watson, 2013). As Bathmaker et al. (2013) explain, a simple reliance on meritocratic achievement no longer guarantees success after graduation; this need for additional capitals is echoed by Tomlinson (2013), who argues that 'the routes to "professional" employment are largely characterised by more abstract knowledge that is rich in symbolic meaning…' (p. 98).

Bathmaker et al. (2013) draw upon Bourdieu's concept of 'having a feel for the game', relating it to post-graduate employability. To 'play the game' effectively within the employment field, individuals increasingly need to acquire additional skills and activities beyond degree content. Such 'soft skills' are generally acquired through a range of volunteer opportunities including internships and work placements. However, these authors indicate that working-class or low-SES students continue to assume that success in the employment field is ultimately decided by the quality of the degree held. This perspective overlooks the volatility and expansion of the market, suggesting a fundamental mismatch between these learners' expectations and the realities of the graduate job market. Bathmaker et al. (2013) propose that they may be playing with 'the "old" rules of the game' (p. 736), where the grades achieved on a degree were regarded as guaranteeing a positive and successful outcome. This perspective does not recognise the inherent need for the softer skills, the hidden capitals within the employment market, and an understanding of how to 'package' these capitals as 'valuable' (p. 726).

Undoubtedly there are many hidden injustices within this graduate landscape. For many of the students who are targeted by widening-participation or outreach initiatives, the objective seems to be to get them 'into' university and, in varying ways, support their journey through the institution. However, once graduated, these learners face an employment market that is neither fair nor equitable, but instead favours certain dispositions over others. As Morrison (2014) explains, 'graduates with relatively low levels of cultural and material inheritance tend to operate with more limited spatial horizons than their more privileged counterparts in their job searching' (p. 182).

These inconsistencies or misalignments are not the sole responsibility of the individual learner; nor can they be attributed only to the institution or sector. Instead, they reflect on

students' different perspectives and worldviews. This is not to suggest that one perspective is 'better' than another; rather, it highlights how obtaining graduate employment is a multi-faceted and negotiated undertaking. The complexities of this landscape need to be distinctly analysed for all learners, but particularly those who have been invited into the institution under the remit of a widening-participation agenda. The sector cannot fail on the promises that a degree is assumed to bestow. A continuing focus only on the individual learner attributes success or failure within the market solely to the individual, rather than being recognised as a product of a stratified market. The next section explores how career planning occurs for those students from more diverse backgrounds and the repercussions of these tendencies for the FiF student.

Career Planning and Advice

The transition from higher education to work is potentially hazardous for most graduates and needs to be negotiated with astute planning, preparation and foresight (Tomlinson, 2012). Parents and peers are particularly influential factors in young people's educational choices (Nguyen & Blomberg, 2014). However, FiF students often do not have access to family members or peers with the requisite knowledge and experience to assist in this transition to the workforce (Purcell et al., 2013). Indeed, while all graduates identify friends and family along with department teaching staff as the most common sources for advice (Purcell et al., 2013), students from low-SES backgrounds and Indigenous students regard university teaching staff to be by far their most important source of information on careers and professional characteristics (Richardson et al., 2016). This reliance on academic staff is worrying in a higher-education system where increasingly staff are casualised and often very time-poor (O'Shea, Lysaght, Roberts & Harwood, 2015). Given the larger number of students attending university, the time required to provide quality careers advice in addition to teaching may not be feasible for many staff members.

Careers services do not appear to be a strong source of advice for students, despite the importance of career planning for at-risk students (Nguyen & Blomberg, 2014). For example, research from the UK indicates that 44 per cent of all graduates had not visited their university's career service (Purcell et al., 2013); equity cohorts are even less likely to access them than the larger population (Richardson et al., 2016). Within the UK, careers services have been described as being under-resourced, and there has been limited focus on supporting successful outcomes amongst students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Tomlinson, 2012). Yet importantly, careers services are key to improving the graduate outcomes for disadvantaged groups of students, particularly those who have limited access to an informed 'other' who can provide advice or strategies for gaining employment after completing the qualification.

The research in this field has shown how gaining employment after graduation is a strategic endeavour that involves packaging the 'self' rather than solely on the grades obtained during a degree. As Tholen (2015) explains, graduate employability extends beyond the individual and their attributes or knowledge; instead, employability is essentially social, intrinsically related to 'power relations' and 'social contexts' (p. 772). Navigating the complexities of this employment market appears to require access to both 'hot' and 'cold' knowledge sources. Ball and Vincent (1998) explain that 'hot' knowledge is more socially situated—usually derived from family members, peers and colleagues—whereas 'cold knowledge' is formal in nature, usually obtained from institutional sources of knowledge. The research in this field indicates that being successful in gaining employment requires not only the 'official' skills and knowledge, but also an understanding of the more social and relational aspects of the field. For FiF students, the access to this type of 'hot' knowledge may be relatively constrained; thus offering deliberate and targeted career planning that addresses this need is clearly required.

Final Thoughts

While there are various perceptions of the term 'employability', Tholen (2015) argues that these can be broadly divided into two main camps: the mainstream and the alternative. The mainstream perspective has been adapted by the media and policy areas relating to the 'individual content that makes a person successful in the labour market' (p. 767). In this framing, education is perceived as an 'individual investment', an understanding that positions the student as being 'responsible for his or her own labour-market position and success, as skills and abilities are the main factors of value in the labour market' (p. 768). The alternative view shifts way from this individualistic view of employment and graduate opportunity to present a perspective that positions employability as 'relational', 'contextual' and 'conflictual'. This perspective then acknowledges how employability is not simply governed by an 'individual's human capital', but also reflects 'opportunity and inequalities' (Tholen, 2015, p. 770). However, what is not yet clearly understood is how students themselves perceive the employment market and the ways they choose (or not) to buy into these dominant discourses.

In adopting a mixed-method approach, this Fellowship will consider this field from both a global statistical perspective and a more local, individual stance. Of particular interest will be whether employed graduates have gained professional work as a result of their studies or remain in the same non-professional role they held while studying. Similarly, drawing on narrative biographical interviews with graduated students, the study will emphasise the more personal and embodied understandings of employability. For example, exploring how students from a range of backgrounds consider extracurricular activities, internships and work placements will provide more-nuanced insights into this area. Finally, considering the actual capitals and capabilities that students apply in their pursuit of employment will better situate the strategies and interventions needed to 'level' this employment 'playing field'. Ultimately, a deeper understanding of these areas in combination will ensure that for all students, successful participation in higher education extends to the post-graduation landscape rather than being unduly focused, albeit unintentionally, only on initial entry rates or equity numbers.

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