

Australian National Graduate Employability Research Implications for Higher Education Assessment

Problem

High university graduate unemployment

Question

How can universities support students to improve employability?

Definition

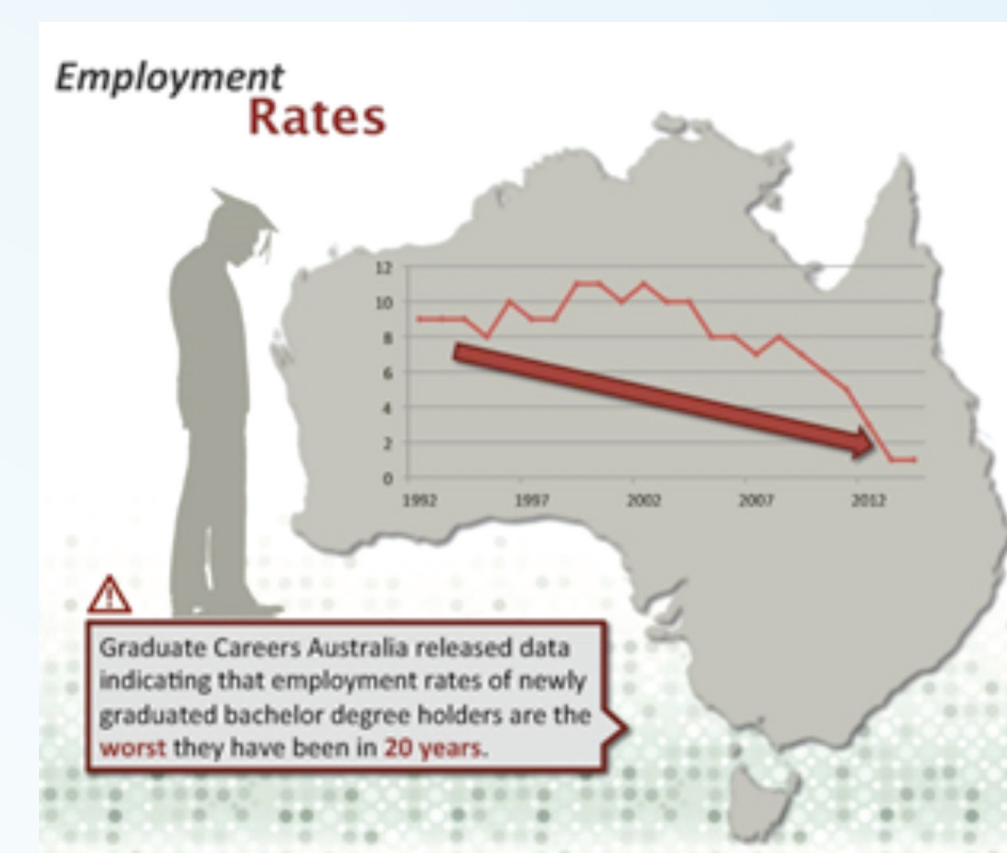
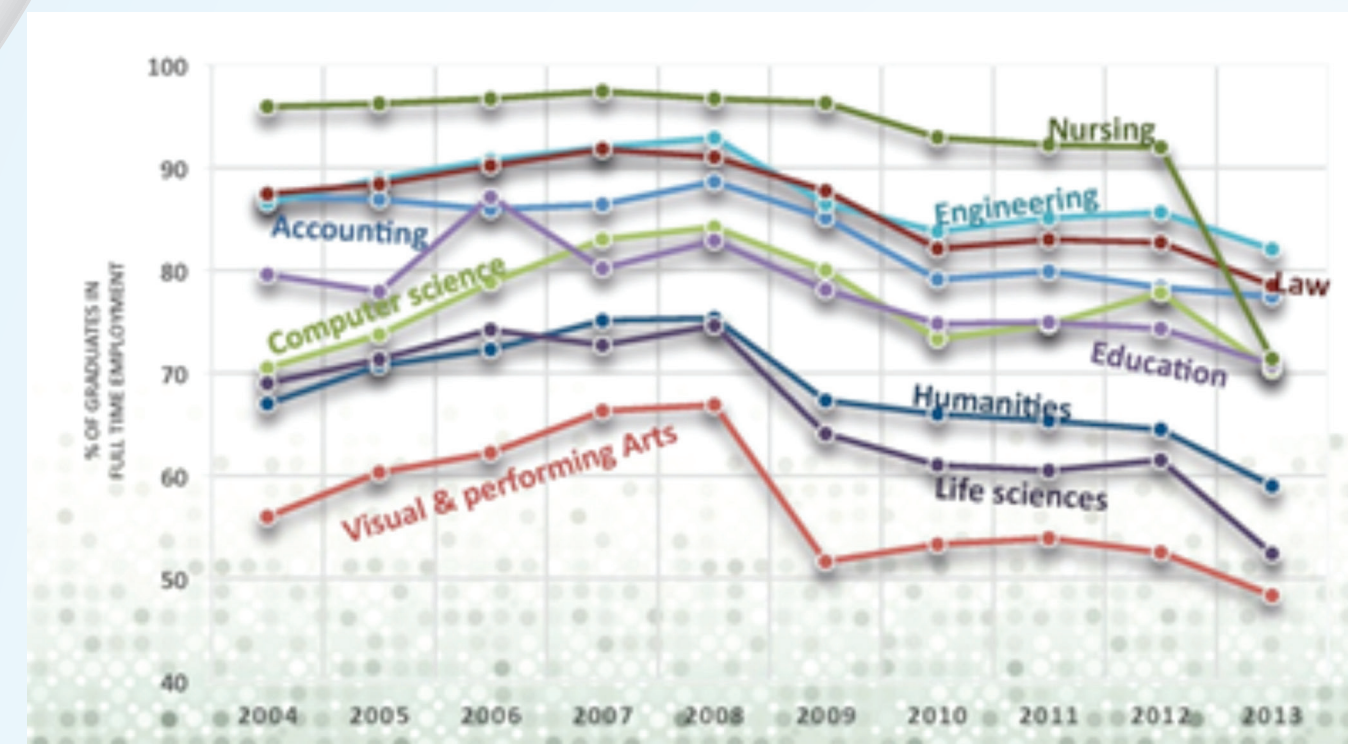
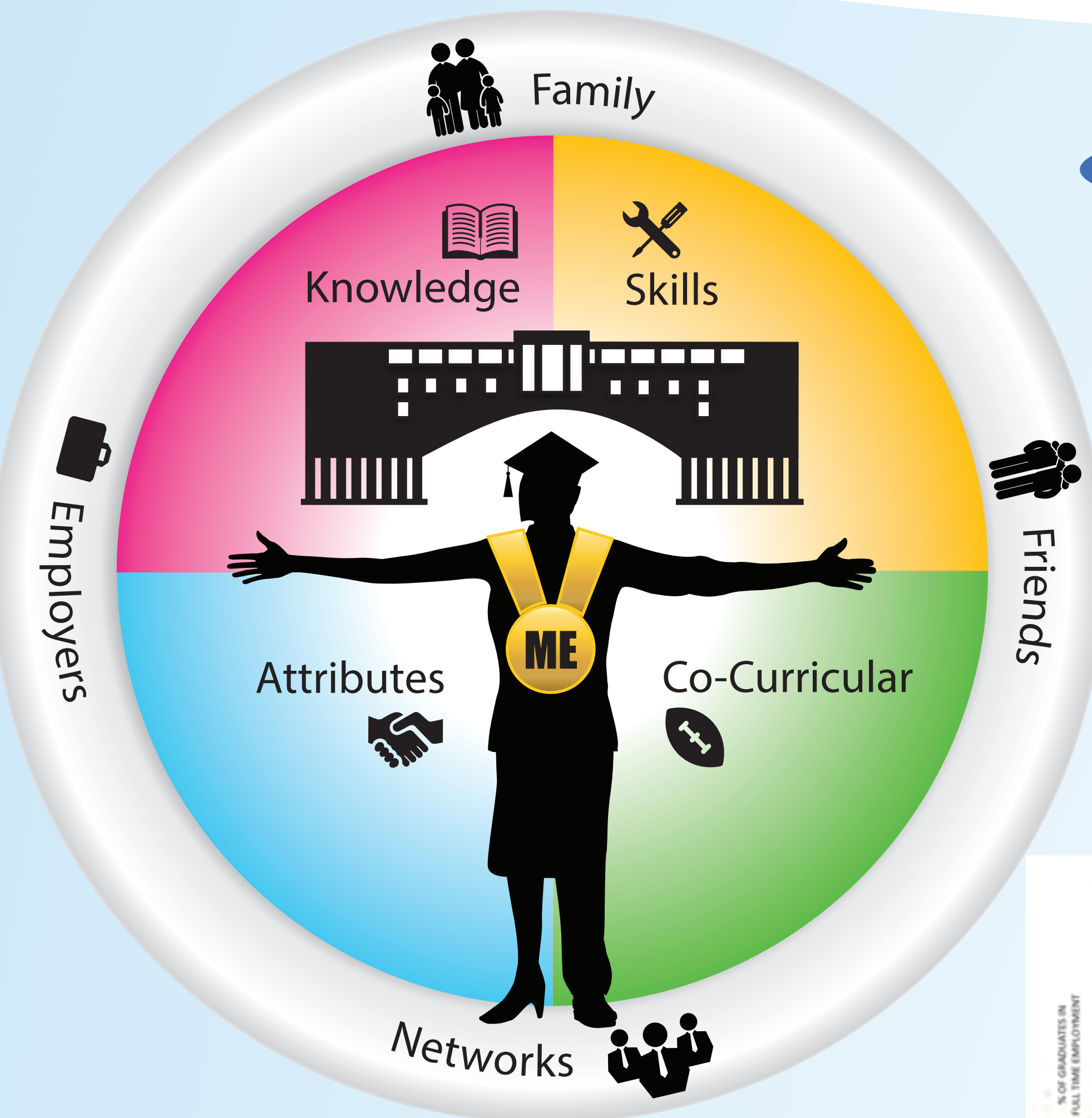
Graduate Employability - means that higher education alumni have developed the capacity to obtain and/or create work. Furthermore, employability means that institutions and employers have supported the student knowledge, skills, attributes, reflective disposition and identity that graduates need to succeed in the workforce.

Research Methods

Survey Research - 4 Stakeholders (Students, Graduates, Employers, Educators) - 705 valid responses
In-depth Interviews & Focus Groups with 147 people

Research Findings

- Universities play an important role in improving graduate employability.
- Students must do more than attend classes and study in order to develop employability; extra and co-curricular activities are important.
- Graduates require support to develop and present an employability identity
- A key strategy set are internships, placements and work experience.
- There are discrepancies between what students, graduates, employers and educators think works in improving employability.



Supported Employability Strategies

| Strategies | Students | Graduates | Higher Education | Employers |
|-----------------|----------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
| Careers Advice | 59% | 47% | 64% | 28% |
| Extracurricular | 48% | 47% | 65% | 60% |
| Networking | 49% | 52% | 51% | 40% |
| PT Work | 53% | 53% | 36% | 38% |
| Prof Assocs | 29% | 37% | 54% | 34% |
| Volunteering | 47% | 50% | 48% | 53% |
| Work Experience | 74% | 74% | 40% | 87% |

Stakeholder Perspectives on Employability Strategies

| Strategies | Students | Graduates | Higher Education | Employers |
|-----------------|----------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
| Capstone | 9% | 15% | 45% | 13% |
| Careers Advice | 59% | 47% | 64% | 28% |
| Extracurricular | 48% | 47% | 65% | 60% |
| Int Exchange | 16% | 10% | 30% | 23% |
| Mentoring | 28% | 24% | 48% | 34% |
| Networking | 49% | 52% | 51% | 40% |
| PT Work | 53% | 53% | 36% | 38% |
| Portfolios | 40% | 40% | 41% | 25% |
| Prof Assocs | 29% | 37% | 54% | 34% |
| Social Media | 33% | 37% | 40% | 15% |
| Volunteering | 47% | 50% | 48% | 53% |
| Work Experience | 74% | 74% | 40% | 87% |

Graduate Employability Research

Based on 2013 survey data, Graduate Careers Australia reported that graduate employability rates are the lowest they have been in twenty years. Specifically, four months post-graduation, the number of employed undergrads has fallen. This result was across degrees/disciplinary areas. In recognition of the crisis of graduate employability, the Australian Government, Office for Learning and Teaching commissioned three national projects (awarded in December 2013). One of these projects was awarded to Bond University as the lead institution, with partners – James Cook University, University of Southern Queensland and the Australian Council for Private Education and Training. Associate Professors Shelley Kinash and Linda Crane co-led the project. Madelaine-Marie Judd was the Project Manager. The team analysed 705 returned surveys and conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with 147 people (students, graduates, employers & educators). One of our key findings is that there is something that can be done about graduate employability. It is incumbent upon universities to take a strategic, well-informed and committed approach to supporting student employability so that graduates secure and sustain rewarding careers. The key strategy-set is providing quality internships, placements and work experience. Notably, in our research, students, graduates and EMPLOYERS overwhelmingly identified this strategy set as the most important and relevant. University personnel also recognised the importance, but said that they did not have enough financial and/or human resources in order to make a meaningful difference in this area.

Another key research finding is of a discrepancy between what students, graduates, employers and educators think works in improving employability. For example, students and graduates think that part-time work during university will improve their employability; overall, employers and educators disagree. Conversely, employers and educators believe that participation in extra-curricular activities helps students develop employability soft-skills that make a big difference; this message has not been clearly communicated to students and graduates.

Implications for Assessment

Universities need to help students see that employers are looking for graduates who are metaphorically like the horizontal rather than the vertical part of the letter T. Rather than students who have done nothing but study in a tight disciplinary area, employers are looking for graduates with broad, outwardly focussed interests and skill-sets.

Universities can help by not designing courses in a silo, and by engaging students in co-curricular activity (which means student experience and reflection beyond the formal curriculum, and that extension activities are aligned and supported to complement study). The contexts of employability and assessment are interwoven in that:

- Authentic assessment develops students' employability skills;
- Alignment is necessary between learning outcomes, activity, assessment and employability; and
- Explicit articulation of assessment aims can support employability identity development

Shelley Kinash

Linda Crane

Madelaine-Marie Judd

Cecily Knight

David Dowling

Kirsty Mitchell

Matthew McLean



Shelley Kinash

Associate Professor
skinash@bond.edu.au

Linda Crane

Associate Professor
lcrane@bond.edu.au

Madelaine-Marie Judd

Project Manager
mjudd@bond.edu.au

Lori O'Sullivan

Poster Design
losullivan@bond.edu.au

Project support was provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed on this poster do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.