RESEARCH PAPER

Understanding the study-to-work transition of Australian university graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds: A scoping study

Kelly Whitney* and Gayl Purchase
Western Sydney University, Australia

Higher education is in a state of transformation with increasing funding cuts leading to an even greater emphasis on 'value for money' and graduate outcomes. Despite a proliferation of literature about access to university for under-represented groups in Australia, there is less attention devoted to students' experiences after graduation, and particularly the study-to-work transition of university graduates from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Qualitative work is rare and heavily localised. Quantitative work is more common and discusses broad trends but this type of data is limited in helping us to understand the student experience, including barriers and enablers. This paper reviews the literature surrounding graduate transitions, synthesises findings and common themes and provides insights for developing more informed approaches and improving the transitional experiences of graduating students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Ten Australian studies were identified, pointing to an over-reliance on national surveys informing perceptions of graduate labour market transitions and a policy focus on access and participation, not employment outcomes, for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Keywords: higher education; low socioeconomic students; graduate outcomes; study-to-work transition; student equity

Introduction and background

The Australian higher education sector has experienced a dramatic shift in the recent past. The number of domestic students has more than doubled since 1989, reaching over 1.3million in 2015, with 91% enrolled in Australian universities (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2017). As numbers have grown, students have come from more diverse social, economic and educational backgrounds. Twenty new public universities have emerged since the late 1980s along with significant numbers of non-university education providers. As a result of these shifts, the proportion of Australia's working population with a bachelor degree or higher qualification has tripled since 1989 to just over 31 per cent in 2017 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). However, not all graduates find employment easily or in their degree area and there is some data to suggest that socioeconomic background plays a role (Harvey, Andrewartha, Edwards, Clarke & Reyes, 2017; Richardson, Bennett & Roberts, 2016).

The Australian Graduate Survey (AGS) was a long-running national survey of newly qualified

*Corresponding author. Email: K.Whitney@westernsydney.edu.au

education graduates. Conducted annually between 1972 and 2015 by Graduate Careers Australia (GCA) it captured data about new graduates from all Australian universities, approximately four months after they completed their degrees. The AGS comprised a Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), to determine graduate perceptions of course quality and satisfaction ratings, and a Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) which collected information around graduate employment and salary, labour market status, job search behaviour and previous education history. In 2016, the AGS was replaced by the Quality in Learning and Teaching (QILT) suite of surveys, which includes the Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS), administered four months after completion. The Beyond Graduation Survey, a follow up with AGS survey respondents three years after graduation, was also replaced in 2016 with the GOS Longitudinal Survey (GOS-L). Other than through these mechanisms, relatively little is known about the experiences of students from disadvantaged backgrounds transitioning post-degree (Bennett et al., 2015; Li, Mahuteau, Dockery, Junakar & Mavromaras, 2016). In this paper, we provide a discussion of literature about this important late phase in the student lifecycle. We outline our methodology and approach, then provide an analysis of the main themes followed by important insights gleaned from the review which have implications for shaping institutional and government policy in Australia.

Numerous studies have reported that students from low socioeconomic groups are less likely to enter and complete higher education (see for example, Belley & Lochner, 2007; Lee, 2014; Titus, 2006). In addition, those students who complete have been referred to as 'exceptions' (Pitman, 2013, p. 30) and in possession of personal characteristics that assist them to prevail in the face of adversity (Li et al., 2016). Drawing on our study, we argue that this perception needs to be problematised and more research conducted utilising different approaches, in order to generate better understanding of the experiences of disadvantaged students, especially when transitioning to employment. The transition to work experiences of disadvantaged graduates, who, unlike their middle class peers, do not have access to the same types of networks and cultural capital required to make fluid professional transitions (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005), requires more focussed exploration.

The following equity groups were considered in our scoping study, based on the Equity and General Performance Indicator framework (Martin, 1994):

- People who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander;
- People who are from low SES backgrounds;
- People with a disability;
- People from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB);
- People from regional and remote areas; and,
- Women in non-traditional areas (WINTA).

This review is primarily concerned with the transition outcomes of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and we acknowledge that multiple layers of disadvantage often exist (Richardson et al., 2016). For the purpose of this paper, socioeconomic backgrounds are defined by the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) as determined by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). ICSEA is a scale of measurement of schools through represented levels of educational advantage of a student, as measured by parents' occupation, level of education completed and other educational achievement (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

Methodology: A scoping study

With origins in health research, scoping studies (sometimes referred to as 'scoping reviews') are considered useful in mapping literature in a field or exploring the breadth of research activity surrounding a particular theme or topic (Levac, Colquhoun & O'Brien, 2010). The aim of a scoping study is to draw together information to provide a narrative account of the landscape of the literature pertaining to a particular topic, rather than to appraise the quality or engage in a critique of the research itself (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Scoping studies have proved particularly useful in relation to new or emerging fields of research (Levac et al., 2010).

Arksey and O'Malley (2005) introduced the first methodological framework for conducting a scoping study in response to a growing desire to provide a more detailed and rigorous account of the methods associated with this type of literature review. They identified four reasons why a scoping study might be conducted, including: to canvas the range of literature in a field; to determine the value of undertaking a more comprehensive systematic review; to summarise a range of research findings and distribute synthesised results; and to highlight potential gaps and opportunities for further research. One of the central tenets of a scoping review is the explicit and detailed documentation of the process employed; that is, it should be transparent and replicable (Mays, Roberts & Popay, 2001). Arksey and O'Malley (2005, p. 22) identify the following five stages for conducting a scoping study:

> Stage 1: identifying the research question
> Stage 2: identifying relevant studies
> Stage 3: study selection
> Stage 4: charting the data
> Stage 5: collating, summarising and reporting the results

In this study, we have applied Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) methodological framework to scope the research activity surrounding the university to work transition experience of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds in Australia. The utility of this type of review in relation to transition experiences is evidenced in the work of Kennedy, Kenny and O'Meara (2015), a scoping review of the literature surrounding paramedicine students' experiences of transitioning to the workplace. Whilst there is a range of international literature on post-university outcomes of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds, in this scoping study we are interested only in the Australian context. The review period selected, 1989 to 2017, reflects key Australian Government policy initiatives, noted above, aimed at increasing access to higher education for people from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds.
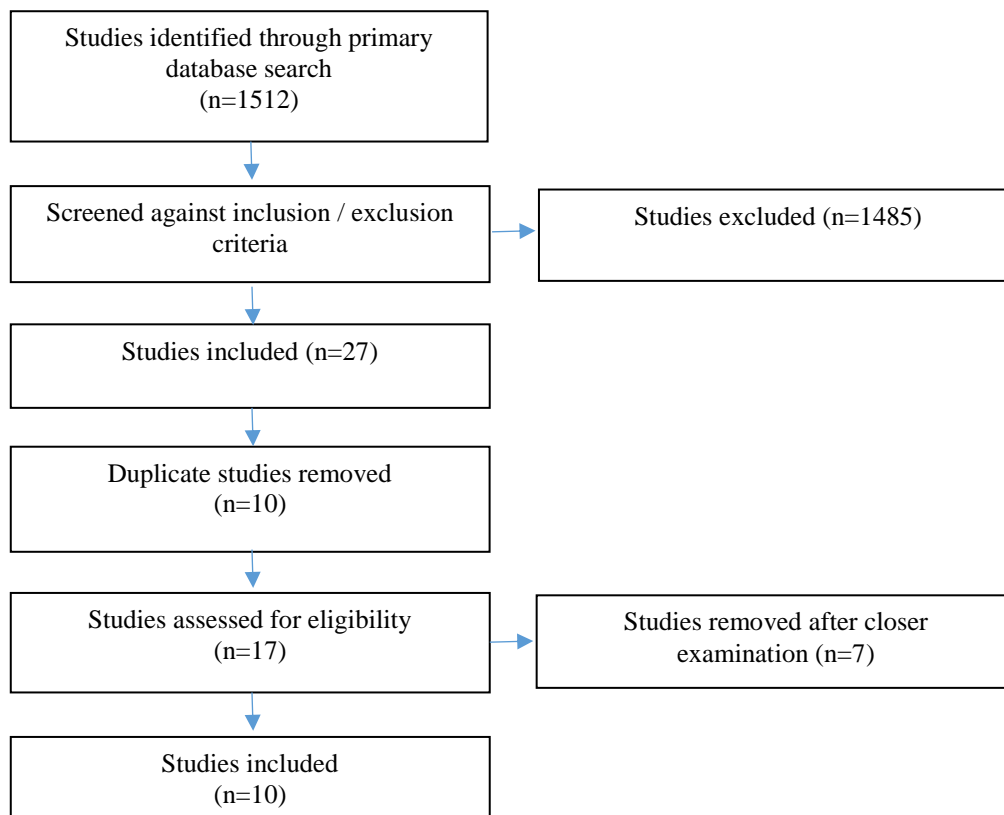
The database search was conducted in June 2017 (study criteria is shown in Table 1). To identify relevant studies, we used six scholarly databases, including: EBSCO, Worldcat, ProQuest Central, Informit, Taylor & Francis and Scobus. A search of each database was conducted using the following key words: university graduate, graduate employability, workplace transition, workplace integration, university to work, in combination with background, social class, inequality, equity, disadvantage, barriers, social status, working class and struggling.

Table 1: Study criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Country	Australian studies	Non-Australian studies
Key search terms in	Majority present	Less than majority present

title/abstract		
Date	1989-2017	Prior 1989

The primary database search delivered 1512 results, subsequently screened against the inclusion and exclusion criteria and duplicate studies removed. Seventeen studies were examined in detail and a further seven studies removed. Figure 1 shows the search results. Ten studies were included in the scoping study. Of the ten studies, six are journal articles (Edwards & Coates, 2011; Lee, 2014; Li, 2014; Pitman, 2013; Pitman, Roberts, Bennett & Richardson, 2017; Young, 2004) and four are reports (Coates & Edwards, 2009; Harvey et al., 2017; Li et al., 2016; Richardson et al., 2017). A summary of these articles is provided in Table 2.

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┌──────────────────────────────┐
│ Studies identified through    │
│ primary database search       │
│ (n=1512)                      │
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│ Screened against inclusion /  │ ─────▶ │ Studies excluded (n=1485)     │
│ exclusion criteria            │        └──────────────────────────────┘
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│ Studies included (n=27)       │
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│ Duplicate studies removed     │
│ (n=10)                        │
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│ Studies assessed for          │ ─────▶ │ Studies removed after closer  │
│ eligibility (n=17)            │        │ examination (n=7)             │
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│ Studies included (n=10)       │
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Figure 1: Search results

Table 2: Data charting

Author(s)	Year	Title	Type	Intervention	Study design / method / sample size	Findings
Janette Young	2004	"Becoming Different": Accessing University from a Low Socioeconomic Community - barriers and motivators	Journal article	A study of barriers and enablers regarding access and completion of a university degree from members of a low SES community	Participatory Action Research /unstructured in-depth interviews/28 graduates	Barriers relating to lack information about university or its value, distance, geographical discrimination, isolation and finances. Motivators-nature of work, interest, role/models/comparisons, competition/proving and encouragement.
Hamish Coates and Daniel Edwards Australian Council Education Research (ACER)	2009	The 2008 Graduate Pathways Survey: Graduates' education and employment outcomes five years after completion of a bachelor degree at an Australian university	Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)	Cross-institutional study of the destinations and transitions of Australian university graduates one, three and five years after graduation.	Based on the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE)/validated questionnaire/39 institutions/ separate analysis was conducted of students from LSES backgrounds (represented 12% of survey respondents)/ 9238 useable responses	Graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds had relatively similar outcomes to general population. Perception of relevance of degree increases over time.
Daniel Edwards and Hamish Coates	2011	Monitoring the pathways and outcomes of people from disadvantaged	Journal article	Analysis of education and employment outcomes of disadvantaged groups	Based on the AUSSE/validated questionnaire/39 institutions/	Social and cultural barriers to success removed after five years for low SES, Indigenous and regional/remote graduates. Women experience lower salaries and labour

		backgrounds and graduate groups		using Graduate Pathways Survey (GPS)	separate analysis was conducted of students from LSES backgrounds (represented 12% of survey respondents)/ 9238 useable responses	force participation rates.
Tim Pitman	2013	Miraculous exceptions - what can autobiography tell us about why some disadvantaged students succeed in higher education	Journal article	Study considers three university graduates from low SES backgrounds, adopting Bourdieuian notions of economic, cultural and social capital to examine factors contributing to educational success/ Methodological critique of use of autobiography	Autobiographical research method/ information gathered from participant's unstructured construction of narrative/3 graduates	Utility of autobiography as a research tool offer more explicit understandings/greater potential for ongoing outreach activities to build aspiration to HE
Jung-Sook Lee	2014	The attainability of university degrees and their labour market benefits for young Australians	Journal article	Study investigating factors associated with the attainment of university degrees, labour market benefits and the role of HE in intergenerational transmission of SES status.	Analysed data from 1999-2006 Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), /1300 students in Y9 from 300 schools surveyed in 1995 annually until 2006.	Differential resources and structural barriers impact degree attainment among young Australians of different SES backgrounds. Lack of opportunity to obtain a degree leads to income and occupational disadvantage.
Ian W. Li	2014	Labour Market Performance of Indigenous University Graduates in Australia: An ORU Perspective	Journal article	Study of labour market performance of Indigenous university graduates	Overeducation, Required and Undereducation Framework (ORU)/GDS data 1999-2011/711,198 (completed a degree and were employed)	Indigenous Australians perform positively in labour market and are less likely to be overeducated. Comparable earnings with non-indigenous graduates.
Ian W. Li, Stephane Mahuteau, Alfred M. Dockery, P.N. (Raja) Junankar and Kostas Mavromaras	2016	Labour Market Outcomes of Australian University Graduates from Equity Groups	Report funded by National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education	Examination of the labour market outcomes of Australian graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds from four universities	Quantitative probit models/ linking a dataset from university student records to the GDS/10,718 graduates (completed bachelor degree between 2010 and 2014)	LSES graduates consistently had comparable employment/earning outcomes to graduates from more privileged backgrounds. Gender wage gap of exists for graduates one year after graduation and widens at three and five years. Positive labour market outcomes indicate that increased higher education participation rates from LSES and remote graduates have contributed to sustained success in labour market.
Sarah Richardson, Dawn Bennett and Lynne Roberts	2016	Investigating the Relationship Between Equity and Graduate Outcomes in Australia	Research Report funded by National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education	A review of graduate outcomes by equity group	Mixed method/quantitative data 2014 Australian Graduate Survey, qualitative data OLT commissioned project graduate employability/142,647 (graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds completed studies in 2013 & 2014- potential overlap in cohorts)	Disadvantage persists in relation to employment status and salary (low SES, Indigenous, disability, NESB, female graduates, and institution attended). Work in final year of study increased likelihood of post-graduation employment. University teaching staff and career educators critical role scaffolding learning of disadvantaged students.
Tim Pitman, Lynne Roberts, Dawn Bennett and Sarah Richardson	2017	An Australian study of graduate outcomes for disadvantaged students	Journal article	Study investigates relationship between disadvantage and post-graduation outcomes equity groups	Quantitative/2014 Australian Graduate Survey / 142,647- completed studies in 2013 and 2014	Outcomes not equal for all students and disadvantage persists beyond graduation. Paid work in final year of study single most important factor in predicting employment post-graduation. Students studied full-time and/or on-campus less likely to be employed.
Andrew Harvey, Lisa Andrewartha, Daniel Edwards, Julia Clarke, Kimberly Reyes	2017	Student Equity and Employability in Higher Education	Report for the Australian Government Department of Education and Training	Review of employability policy in higher education across UK, US and Australia with focus on equity	Mixed method/policy analysis, desktop review websites, survey of career managers & student union leaders within Australian public universities/29 career managers, 54 student union representatives	Employability increasingly prioritised (over a broad education) Student equity not systematic part employability strategies- no systematic monitoring equity student graduate outcomes (beyond national graduate destination surveys) Inequitable access to employability experiences partly explains poorer graduate outcomes

Discussion: Thematic analysis

Central to any scoping study is the activity of synthesising information and drawing out themes that provide insight into the research question. In this scoping study our main aim was to investigate understandings of the university-to-work transition outcomes of students from low SES backgrounds. In accordance with the recommendations of Levac et al. (2010), we utilised a qualitative content analysis approach, described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p. 1278).

Each member of the research team independently reviewed the ten studies, developed coding categories directly from the texts and reported their results before coming together to discuss

and agree on themes. Thematic coding was an iterative process, with themes negotiated throughout the joint analysis. Five themes were identified, including:

1) Difficulty in defining disadvantage
2) A dominant type of research regarding university to work transition
3) Critique of how graduate outcomes are measured
4) Contestation about whether patterns of disadvantage continue beyond university
5) Equity policy focus on access and participation

Each of these themes is discussed in more detail below.

Difficulty in defining disadvantage

Of the ten studies included, some discussed difficulty in defining disadvantage, pointing to a growing criticism of residential postcode as a proxy for socioeconomic status (Pitman et al., 2017; Young, 2004). The implications of this are broad but particularly important in relation to discussions surrounding educational access, participation and labour market outcomes of traditionally disadvantaged groups. Pitman et al. (2017) highlight a complexity in the collection of postcode at two different intervals in the student lifecycle. Postcode is recorded upon initial enrolment at university, informing access and participation data, and again four months after completion, relating to labour market outcomes. Pitman and colleagues argue that this has the potential to skew post-graduation data, particularly in relation to geo-defined student equity groups, for example low SES or regional and remote, who may relocate for work upon completion of their studies.

Young (2004) identifies alternate models as potentially providing a more nuanced picture of socioeconomic status (especially that of Western, McMillan & Durrington, 1998), based on individual parental educational attainment and employment. This view is supported by Coates and Edwards (2009) who adopt this broader definition of low SES, however, more recent studies included in our review do not point to a universal adoption of this type of modelling. Understandings of disadvantage based on broad equity classifications also require further scrutiny to appropriately inform and direct policy (Pitman et al., 2017).

A dominant type of research regarding university to work transition

The results of this scoping study point to a scarcity in published research on labour market outcomes and transition experiences of Australian graduates from equity groups, a finding supported by Li et al. (2016). The ten studies analysed point to a particular type of research in this space, namely quantitative; an insight supported by Pitman (2013), one of the included studies, who discussed the dominance of 'a few' methodological approaches in educational research (Tight, 2011 cited in Pitman, 2013, p. 30). The survey being the most common data collection tool and the main one used in the studies included in this review.

The scoping study also highlighted a reliance on established national data sets in research focused on graduate transitions, with the AGS Graduate Destinations Survey (GDS), particularly dominant. Of the ten studies analysed, four utilised data from the AGS/GDS administered by Graduate Careers Australia approximately four months after annual completion dates. Richardson et al (2016) also relied on AGS data, however, they included qualitative insights from an OLT project. Two studies (Coates & Edwards, 2009) and (Edwards & Coates, 2011) reported on data from the 2008 Graduate Pathways Survey (GPS), the first national study conducted five years after graduation, managed by the Australian Council for Educational

Research (ACER). Lee (2014) used data from the 1995 cohort of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), an annual survey following youth over a ten-year period, managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. Only two studies presented original research, both informed by qualitative methodological approaches: Young (2004), using Participatory Action Research informed by Grounded Theory, and Pitman (2013) with an autobiographical study of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. While the two qualitative studies draw insights from reflections by graduates of their post-study experiences, there the primary focus is on their experiences whilst at university and the 'phenomena' of completion, which is important for gleaning understandings outside of the parameters of large quantitative datasets; however, none explore the lived experience of transition.

The use of graduate surveys as an effective measure of the efficacy of higher education is well documented in Edwards and Coates (2011), as is the importance of "evidence-based insights to inform planning and practice" (p. 151). Studies such as Pitman's (2013) and Young's (2004) point to an important attempt to broaden the 'evidence-base' to include qualitative understandings of diverse and more complex aspects of student experiences that the quantitative data is not able to capture, a slow but emerging trend in educational research (Pitman, 2013). Both Pitman (2013) and Young (2004) present a case for more qualitative research, citing the utility of individual perspectives and personal voice as a means of enabling more implicit understandings of the impact of equity initiatives and policy.

Critique of how graduate outcomes are measured

Labour market outcomes are an increasingly dominant, although not uncontested, measure of the effectiveness of higher education. The majority of studies included in this review point to a reliance on national surveys, with a dominance of the now historical Australian Graduate Survey (replaced by the Graduate Outcomes Survey in 2016). We will briefly detail points of critique of the AGS relating to survey timing, the measurement of graduate level work as opposed to other forms of employment and definitions of graduate 'success', then discuss some of the implications of the introduction of the GOS.

Survey timing is discussed in a number of the included studies, with a consensus that the first few months after completion is too early to yield meaningful results about labour market transitions, particularly for graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds who may take longer to establish their careers (Coates & Edwards, 2009; Edwards & Coates, 2011; Pitman et al., 2017; Richardson et al., 2016). The studies also suggested that the relevance of an undergraduate degree to employment percolate over time, undermining the ability of an early post-graduation survey to effectively evaluate the perceived labour market benefit of a tertiary qualification (Coates & Edwards, 2008; Pitman et al., 2017). The Beyond Graduation Survey (replaced by GOS-L), administered three years after graduation, and the Graduate Pathways Survey, administered five years after graduation, are put forward as providing deeper insight into the perceived relevance of a degree (Edwards & Coates, 2011).

The AGS question relating to relevance of degree to employment is also examined in some of the studies. Both Richardson et al. (2016) and Pitman et al. (2017) critique the inability of the AGS to adequately differentiate between work that requires a degree and other forms of work. Graduates are asked indirectly about the perceived value an employer places on their degree and the survey does not distinguish between work that was undertaken during study and has continued post-graduation (Richardson et al., 2016). The framing of graduate 'success' as defined as full-time employment in a degree-related role is also contested. Richardson et al. (2016) suggest that this is an 'out of date' notion, and argue that existing AGS categories do not

reflect the diversity of employment opportunities graduates engage in, including working multiple part-time roles, consulting and entrepreneurial/start-up activities.

Although outside of the thematic analysis of this review, it is worth considering how changes in the administration of the GOS respond to some of this critique. More inclusive labour force estimates and calculations of median salary along with the use of the Scale of Perceived Over-Qualification (SPOQ) speak to some of the issues identified (QILT, 2016). Although the GOS is still administered approximately four months after completion, labour force statistics now conform to the Australian Bureau of Statistics conceptual framework, broadening definitions to include more diverse forms of labour market participation, including the growth in female participation and part-time employment (QILT, 2016). As a result of this change, graduates in full-time further study are now also included in labour force estimates (further study and full-time employment were exclusive categories in the AGS). Calculations of median starting salary have also been expanded to include all graduates, not just those 25 years or younger in their first full-time graduate position (QILT, 2016). The continuation of an employment relationship developed during study is also made explicit. The inclusion of the Scale of Perceived Over-Qualification (SPOQ) seeks to address "the issue of whether graduates fully utilise their skills in their employment" (QILT, 2016, p. 83) as perceived by graduates themselves. This is a departure from the AGS question relating to the perceived value an employer places on a graduate's qualification.

Contestation about whether patterns of disadvantage continue beyond university (and how different equity groups are impacted)

From the ten studies, a complexity identified in this review is the diversity of findings relating to graduate outcomes. Studies relying on AGS data (Pitman et al., 2017; Richardson et al., 2016; Li et al., 2016; Li, 2014) consider different graduating cohorts, making it difficult to identify entrenched patterns. Pitman et al. (2017) suggest that disadvantage does persist beyond graduation and that graduate outcomes are not equal for all groups. A view supported by Harvey et al. (2017), with the consideration of differential levels of access to extra-curricular employability initiatives whilst at university offered as a possible explanation for the gap in graduate outcomes. Harvey et al. (2017) argue "many students are starting from unequal positions and facing unequal outcomes" (p.7).

In the studies reviewed, whilst graduates from low SES backgrounds experience similar employment and salary outcomes to their peers (Harvey et al., 2017, Edwards & Coates, 2009 and Li et al., 2016), they tend to be concentrated in more vocationally focussed, less prestigious discipline areas (Richardson et al., 2016). Findings are similar for regional and remote graduates (Harvey et al., 2017). Notably, Li et al. (2016) also found that graduates from low SES backgrounds fared slightly better than their peers in relation to education-job match. This may be due to positive labour market attributes achieved through completing a degree amidst challenging circumstances, e.g. resilience and determination.

Indigenous graduates experienced similar if not marginally better outcomes while graduates from NESB and women-overall, not just those in non-traditional areas, experienced below average graduate outcomes in relation to level of employment, tenure and qualification job-match (Li, 2014; Pitman et al., 2017). Richardson et al. (2016) discussed findings in relation to graduates with multiple layers of disadvantage, with outcomes negatively impacted, however, they argued patterns were nuanced and further questions need to be explored.

The Graduate Pathways Survey provides some insight into longer term outcomes, however, this

is the first study of its kind and the authors acknowledge a response bias from those who have completed or engaged in further study (Coates & Edwards, 2009). In the GPS report, graduates from low SES backgrounds had comparable employment levels and median salary but were slightly more likely to be in part-time work five years after graduation (Coates & Edwards, 2009).

Overall, it can be argued that while patterns of disadvantage appear to persist in early years after graduation, with some groups more adversely impacted than others, there is some evidence to suggest that graduate outcomes level out after five years, particularly in relation to level of employment, salary and qualification-job match. However, given the limited number of studies these findings require further scrutiny.

Equity policy focus on access and participation

A number of the studies included in this review call for a shift in higher education equity policy to include *employment outcomes* in addition to the current focus on access and participation, challenging the assumption that completing a degree is a guaranteed social equaliser (Li et al., 2016; Richardson et al., 2016; Pitman et al., 2017). Questions of 'return on investment' are filtering through the sector, and privileged attention on equity enrolment targets (over graduate outcomes) is likely to shift (Pitman et al., 2017; Harvey et al., 2017). However, this focus on economic outcomes should not be limited to short-term timelines, nor overshadow other wider valuable outcomes such as individual psychosocial, family and community benefits from undertaking a higher education.

The two qualitative studies included for analysis, Pitman (2013) and Young (2004), hint at the reasons why higher education equity policy surrounding graduate employment outcomes is slow to evolve. Both support the notion that retention of students from equity groups is an issue for universities in Australia, and those students who do persist and complete their studies are considered anomalies, or as Pitman (2013) describes 'miraculous exceptions'. This view engenders a kind of 'completion phenomena' when equity students 'beat the odds' and actually graduate. This 'only the strong survive' mentality is problematic on a number of fronts: one, it perpetuates the very inequality that access to higher education is attempting to ameliorate, and two, it supposes a strength and resilience in students that individualises responsibility for completion, thereby relaxing the need for support or intervention. If the transformative goal of social mobility is to be fully realised, increased access to higher education comes with increased responsibility to ensure equity of outcomes.

Conclusions: Implications for future research, practice and policy

The purpose of this scoping review was to scan the relevant Australian literature and synthesise findings relating to university to work transition of low socioeconomic students. In conducting this review, we acknowledge similar limitations outlined in other scoping studies (for example Kennedy et al., 2015) in that time and resourcing constrained the breadth of the search to the Australian context. There is a range of literature in the United Kingdom and the United States concerning education to labour market transitions of low socioeconomic students. Additional mapping of these international insights will add richness to future reviews.

Notwithstanding, our findings clearly demonstrate that this is an under-researched area in Australia, with few studies and a concentration of methodological approaches. Extant studies are primarily quantitative, and reliant on established datasets including the now historical Australian Graduate Survey. The evidence base around equity student labour market transitions

is largely informed by broad trends drawn from sporadic cohorts. A longitudinal study of graduate outcomes of students from disadvantaged backgrounds would help to gather data and identify entrenched patterns. A more diverse methodological umbrella, including more qualitative accounts of the lived experience of graduates, particularly in the early years after completion, would add richness to current knowledge and deepen our understandings of the barriers and enablers around labour market transitions.

Not discounting the complexities of student retention at university, if we take a numbers-based approach, increased access to higher education by those traditionally excluded means more students from equity groups *will* graduate. Those graduates will become statistically unremarkable in the labour market, and perhaps (optimistically) the rule, not the exception. Further research including more qualitative accounts of graduate transition experiences, coupled with labour market outcome data, would create a more nuanced picture and better inform equity policy and transition support for disadvantaged students before they graduate.

Acknowledgements

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