Graduate Job Search and Employability – a lesson in JIT management or just plain Luck?

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ABSTRACT   This paper examines the expectations students have of their employment opportunities after graduation. The perceptions of graduates and university career centres are examined to reveal that the initial overly inflated expectations of graduates become a more realistic and structured job search as they have to deal with employer rejection.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades the workplace, the nature and relationships of work have been subjected to dramatic changes from social, environmental and technological factors. The structure of organisations has changed dramatically from the tall hierarchies of the past to the flatter structures of today where individuals are recognised as essential to the competitiveness and success of an enterprise. While employers require skilled employees, they take time and training to develop and can involve significant investment. Rather than employers developing skills in their own employees, universities provide an attractive source of trained workers and, while employers have always had high expectation of graduates, these expectations appear to be simultaneously changing and increasing. Organisations today depend on universities to produce graduates who are workers with more than the just the traditional requirements for reading, writing, and arithmetic and instead, can use their judgement to make decisions rather than simply following given guidelines and directions (Celuch and Slama, 1999:135). Employer demand is increasing for important transferable skills such as the ability to think critically, to learn independently and to communicate effectively. These demands are reflected in the changing focus of university offerings where increasing pressure is being applied on universities to prepare graduates for the rapidly changing, highly competitive labour market. Practical issues such as lifelong learning and potential periods of unemployment have become issues university policy makers and course advisors identify as important challenges (Murphy, 1997; Fallows and Steven, 2000).

It is not simply a challenge of aligning universities deliverables with employer expectations (Raybould & Sheedy, 2005). The university graduate is also in this relationship, albeit as an often forgotten

partner. Graduate expectations about the value of their university education and what this should provide in terms of work opportunities are also important yet, as this paper argues, the graduate perspective is often dealt with in a very cursory manner in the debate on graduate employability. This paper presents the results of interviews with forty five new graduates and five university careers centres (UCCs) to provide their perspectives on the expectations and actual job seeking strategies of graduates. The results reveal both graduates and UCCs are aware of the misalignment in expectations but currently do little to proactively redress it. Gaining a university degree after so many years of study as created high expectations in regards to employment for graduates. A general awareness of changing employer expectations was also found but neither graduates and, to a lesser extent UCCs, demonstrated much awareness of how to track these changes. The study also found major inconsistencies between the viewpoints of graduates and UCCs as, not only did most graduates not use these services, they were often completely unaware of them. These last two areas in particular suggest that many graduates find employment based more on sheer luck rather than good career management, opportunistically developing job search skills in a 'just in time' (JIT) manner. These findings provide the basis for recommendations at the conclusion of this paper.

THE GRADUATE CONTEXT

Fallows and Steven (2000) suggest a key change in the graduate labour market is the development of a mass higher education system providing an increasingly larger supply of graduates while at the same time, traditional sources or routes into graduate employment decrease. Placing this scenario within the larger organisational context of downsizing and delayering for efficiency and structural changes in the graduate job market reveals changing career paths and expectations. AG Nielson (2000) suggest a tangible indication of the new unpredictability is the way traditional sources of occupational requirements, such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics, have become increasingly unreliable due to fluctuations in global economic, social and political circumstances. A key theme of the literature is the demise of the traditional 'milk round of graduate employment where conventional sources no longer absorb the same large number of new graduates and graduates also have to increasingly compete with cheaper, non-graduates in a rapidly fragmenting labour market. Jameson and Holden (2000) caution

focussing on major graduate employers produces a distorted view of what has become an increasingly diverse labour market for graduates.

Linking this change to the literature on careers, it is clear "that in the new world of work, careers are very different (Stewart and Knowles, 1999:375). Gone is the job for life with its planned career structure and company training scheme, the functional identities and the progressive rises in income and job security. Instead, there is a world of customers and clients, adding value, lifelong learning, portfolio careers, self-development and an over-whelming need to stay employable (Hawkins and Winter, 1996:3: Stewart & Knowles, 1999: 375). These changes impact on graduates notions of employability and touch on major debates as to the skills employers require of graduates today and the role of higher education in facilitating the transition to employment (Koder, 1999; McColl, 2003; Nicholson & Cushman, 2000; Stewart & Knowles, 1999). Bink (1996) adds the increasing emphases on the 'self managed' career where writers such as Handy (1989) and Arthur and Rousseau (1996:97) emphasise core qualities rather than specific knowledge. Against this backdrop, it is of grave concern that researchers such as Jameson and Holden (2000:264) find graduates failing to adopt a practical, proactive approach to their careers in the final year of their degrees. While this may well be result of pressures from exams and coursework deadlines, it does not bode well for an environment where rising education costs are forcing students to work while studying.

The balance between increasing graduate supply and lowering employer demand allows employers to increase their expectations of graduates but the expectations of graduates also change. They are more likely to have multiple careers and, potentially, this may suit them well as each job may act as a stepping stone where top graduates progression is via changing companies consistently (Marshall, 2001:3). Just as any other employee, graduates need to focus on maintaining employability and continuing training and development to remain marketable (Rousseau, 1996). However, the challenge specific to graduates is their lack of awareness about the changing labour market. Perron and Vickers (2003:70) summarise life after graduation as "a very uncomfortable kind of world", fraught with difficulties and adjustments that graduates are not familiar with. The graduate dilemma revolves

around a combination of being uncertain and overwhelmed, feeling unprepared for the significant life impacting decisions and options that face them while having high expectations of employment. For instance, they believe a degree will guarantee not just a job but a very good job (Stewart & Knowles, 2000:69). However, as already discussed, a university degree alone no longer guarantees a job and graduates today needs to be aware of the realities for future employment prospects. Clearly, the graduate labour market is highly competitive and recruiters have high expectation from graduates. Despite this, university graduates seem to be unaware of the challenges they will face after the completion of their degree. This leads to the question as to how graduates go about the process of finding employment.

Ellis and Taylor (1983) believe that job search can have significant psychological impact on individuals as work roles are an important part of an individual's self-concept and the inability to find employment can create severe psychological consequences. It is inevitable in today's graduate labour market that even those individuals who are highly qualified are likely to face some degree of rejection by employers (Marshall, 2001:3). Perrone and Vickers (2003:70) found that even those successful in job search experienced anxiety and stress related to the doubts and uncertainties inherent in the search process. Lau and Pangs' (2000:135) research suggests that an important determinant of success in identifying and capturing opportunities is an accurate assessment of their own strength and career interests as this allows graduates to make a more accurate analysis of the person/job fit. This is an area where university career services could be expected to play a key role as they are a starting point for information, resources, programs and employment opportunities. Most career services are staffed by qualified career counsellors who have access to information about which employers recruit graduates, employers programs on campus, job seeking skills, resources and programs to help you establish your career direction, career opportunities, and service's own website, your starting point (Smith, 2004:2). The literature portrays graduate job search as a planned and logical activity based on student awareness of an array of options and possibilities. Lau and Pang (2000:135) add that career goals and plans can be less specific at the early career stage. Further, while long term planning may be unrealistic, flexible goals, tentative time frame and action plans are still seen as providing direction for fulfilling career aspirations and measurement criteria for career success. The literature provides evidence of the

potential mismatch between the expectations of employers and university graduates. The pressures of increasing student numbers and the costs of a university education are reinforced by decreasing career opportunities in traditional graduate jobs. It seems a fine balance is needed between a pragmatic focus on individual employability while achieving academic success and raises the question as to when and how graduates achieve the best transition. The perspective of changing graduate opportunities and the actual processes utilised in job search are the focus of the rest of this paper.

THE STUDY

This study draws on data from two sets of interviews: the first with forty five graduate students and the second set from five university career centres (UCCs) based in Melbourne, Australia. The two sets of interviews were conducted over 2004/2005 and gathered information around three research questions:

1. *University graduates* – what are their expectations of employment after graduation and how do they pursue this employment?

2. *Employers –* what are their expectations of graduates?

3. *University career centres (UCCs)* – what job search assistance do they offer graduates and which are the most helpful to graduates in the job seeking process?

This study draws on the actual experiences of individual graduate students which is then compared and contrasted with a larger picture view from UCCs. The interview schedule used for both graduates and UCC interviews is available from the author on request and uses items from the 2002 and 2003 Australian GDS which has been widely used and validated. The GDS seeks information from graduates as to actions following completion of their degree. It is distributed annually by all Australian higher education institutions to all students qualifying for the award of a degree in that year. It purposely requests information on student activity some time after completion in explicit acknowledgement of the challenges faced in making transition from study to work. Briefly the major features of the two interview groups were:

a) **Graduates –** from different faculties, degree types and universities were individually sampled to provide a general overview of the job seeking activities they were involved in. The interviews addressed two distinct areas: 1- details about the individual themselves to

investigate the methods, activities, steps and services used when they first sought work and their opinions on what they thought employers wanted from them. Most items came from the GDS 2002 and 2003 but were supplemented by questions from other surveys such as Hawkin and Winter (1995), Stewart and Knowles (1999), Gow (1999) and Miles and Snow (1996); 2 - the services provided by the university career service to assist graduate with the focus of items as per 1 above.

b) UCCs - sampled the five main universities urban UCCs in Victoria to examine the services, processes, steps or activities suggested for successful job seeking and what they saw as the expectations employers have of graduates. Most items were replicated from graduate interview schedule as well as items derived from the larger literature on graduate recruitment.

The student group comprised of graduates who had recently completed their degree and were actively seeking work and participation was sought via student contact points in Melbourne's five main universities. The main campus career centres (UCCs) of five universities provided the second interview group.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the two sets of interviews. The first are with graduate students from a variety of universities and the second from the directors of five University Career Centres. Forty five recent university graduates with completed degrees in the last two years were interviewed; nine from the five main Melbourne universities from a range of faculties and degrees shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: Graduates Details

University	University Faculty	Degree Course/s
Monash *Graduates 1-9*	3 Business Studies /2 Arts 2 Sciences/Engineering/2 Law	5 female mean age 24.4 4 male mean age 23.9
Melbourne *Graduates 10-18*	3 Business Studies/ 2 Arts 2 Sciences/2 Law	5 Males mean age 24 4 females mean age 25
Deakin *Graduates 19-27*	3 Business/3 Arts 2 Nursing /1 Sciences	5 females mean age 21.7 4 males mean age 22
LaTrobe *Graduates 28-36*	3 Business/ 3 Arts 3 Sciences/	5 male mean age 22 4 females mean age 22
RMIT *Graduates 37-45*	3 Business Studies/3 Arts 3 Sciences	5 males mean age 21.2 4 females mean age 21

The results show the recent graduates consisted of twenty three females and twenty two males, aged from 21 to 41years old, who had studied for three or more years. There are some important details not captured. Firstly, all but five of the forty five students were in some form of employment, the majority employed on a casual basis in the retail and services sectors while seeking permanent employment in their chosen profession. Further, eight of the students had completed a first degree and were in the final stages of a second degree with three completing another undergraduate degree while five had moved on to honours or even masters level.

Table 2 summarises the key characteristics of the UCCs and provides a view of diversity in the size of the student populations at each university as well as some indication of the size of the university itself.

Table 2: Background Context to Career Centres

University Career Centre (UCC)	Student Nos	No. of campuses	Location of UCC Interview	No. UCC Staff
1. **Monash**	51,926 (Clayton 22,998)	8 in Victoria 2 internationally	Clayton	5
2. **Melbourne**	38,674	13 campuses	Parkville	6
3. **La Trobe**	26,201	7 in Australia 6 international	Bundoora	4
4. **Deakin**	31,641	5 in Victoria	Burwood	3
5. **RMIT**	57,243	3 campuses	City	4

Data from the interviews was organised and analysed according to the major themes of expectation; employer, UCC and graduate expectation forming the sub-themes within this. The first major finding was the changing expectations experienced from when graduates first began job search compared to the realities of the job they ended up with. Typified by high expectations at the beginning of the job seeking process, Graduate 2 suggested:

They have false consciousness because the reality is that they still have to work again from scratch and keep working themselves up. Many graduates think that they have a degree; they have qualification and therefore they can get a job. However, it is not the case; many graduates who have completed university are going for the same jobs so it is very hard and competitive.

UCC views were similar, all agreeing that graduates have very high and perhaps unrealistic expectations after graduation. Graduates commonly mentioned the initial belief that, now they have the qualification, they will get a job and tended to completely underestimate the competitiveness of the labour market and the realities of just how few 'good jobs' there are. As a result of this, graduates high

expectations took a beating as rejections necessitated they change their optimistic views. Both graduates and UCCs noted the downward spiral of expectations found in the studies of Jameson and Holden (2000) and Perron and Vickers (2003) where failure to even gain an interview becomes the most common response and the initial high optimism is hard to sustain. As Graduate 25 said:

> *I was even ready to do a low paid job just to get the experience. The expectations do change. When you graduate you do expect to get a good pay and all that but the money side goes out of the window once you see there are not many things and opportunities around, so you start looking for even a low paid job.*

The graduates interviews revealed they learn not to expect too much as they realise that entering the workforce is not as easy as they had thought. Many were working in retail or service jobs such as waitressing because 'good' jobs are limited and competition is high. Graduate 33s' experience sums up the process many described, beginning with the early expectations of;

> *a big job, big money, good location in the city, but as I applied and as I got rejected more and more, I lost that expectation and I got to a stage where I was applying for any job any sort of wages as long as it was a job - just to get a bit of experience on the field or just to get started somewhere.*

Central to the early high hopes was a focus in on salary while job content was a secondary concern. But, with the realisation that they might actually have to start near the bottom, many expressed the anger and frustration voiced by Graduate 6:

> *graduates think that their education means something and it doesn't. My education cost me so much money it is outrages I think I have got a HECS debt of about $30,000 or more and I thought that it meant something. I thought, go out and get a job …… What I am so pissed off about is that everybody agrees it means nothing.*

While frustrated, most graduates generally failed to mention or place importance on work experience in order get the job they want. This is quite different to the UCC perspective which placed considerable importance on a part-time, casual or temporary job while studying. UCC3 suggested though, "aim high, you never know but think about the foot at the door principle." The focus of the UCCs from the beginning of the job search process was one that graduates came to accept sometime

later - that they should except a much lesser job than they first aspire to because, even though it might not be what they wanted, it provides experience and may allow them to work their way up in the organisation. Table 3 summarises the interview results to reveal an alignment with the general findings from the literature discussed in the introduction to this paper.

Table 3: Summary of Graduate Employment Expectations

PREVIOUS STUDIES FOUND GRADUATES	CURRENT STUDY RESULTS	
	Graduates	University career counsellors
Expect: • Variety • Multiple carers • Autonomy • Worthwhile work • Balanced and comfortable lifestyle • To enter a traditional graduate job *But Find:* • There is no job for life Need to maintain employability • Decline in loyalty	*Expect:* • Good salary • Permanent job • High position *But Find:* • Disappointment • Not easy to get a job • Competitive and hard • Expectations were too high • Education is expensive • Have to accept a low paid job just to experience in industry	*Expect:* • It to be easy to get a job • Get into a high position without experience *But Find:* • They have underestimated competitiveness of job market • Had an unrealistic view and learn not to expect a lot • Negative or no responses from employers • Have to accept any job in order to get into that industry

Synthesis of study results with 2002 & 2003 GDS; Bink, 1996; Celuch & Slama, 1999; Jameson & Holden, 20000; Nicolson & Cushman, 2000; Stewart & Knowles, 1999.

The common thread emerging from both sets of interviews was the fact that possession of a university degree initially creates over-inflated expectations but the decline in expectations parallels the continued search for a job, which starts off as the job of their choice and often ends as the job they can get. As with Lau and pangs' (2003) study, as their expectations change, graduates tend move beyond the early restrictions they applied to themselves and look at areas they once would never have considered.

The next major finding relates to the expectations of employers from graduates and finds that graduates had disparate views from those of the five UCC directors. As Table 4 reveals, graduates initially believed employer recruitment focussed on good academic performance and then, someone who can get along with others, work in the team, and have leadership skills, someone who is experienced and knowledgeable about the industry. UCCs also focussed on academic skills but these tended to emphasise how they demonstrated the qualities of high level communication, written, and verbal skills. Overall, the results presented in Table 4 show a greater alignment between UCC director and employer views than between graduate and any other group. The common themes from the wider literature and UCC interviews are that employers want graduates with the ability to apply knowledge

and understanding into real world (Celuch & Slama, 1999; Kelly, 2003:34: Stewart & Knowles, 2000:68).

Table 4: Summary of Employer Expectations

PREVIOUS STUDIES: SKILLS REQUIRED	CURRENT STUDY: SKILLS REQUIRED ACCORDING TO:	
	Graduates	University career counsellors
• Motivation • Initiative • Creativity • Organisational ability • Communication ability • Teamwork • Interpersonal/social skills • Problem Solving • Leadership	• Intelligence (good academic results) • Confidence • Creativity • Dedication • Enthusiasm • Flexibility • Leadership • Professionalism • Qualification • Communication skills	• Excellent communication, written, and verbal skills • Commitment • Competence • Enthusiasm • Flexibility • Intelligence • Maturity • Reliability • Motivation • Team player • Organisation • Initiative

Synthesis of study results with 2002 & 2003 GDS; Bink, 1996; Celuch & Slama, 1999; Kelly,2003; Nicolson & Cushman, 2000; Stewart & Knowles, 1999

This translation of academic knowledge into practical applied skills which can be utilised by employers with a minimum of training is largely unrecognised by graduates early in the job search process and only develops after a significant period of rejection. As Graduate14 eloquently stated:

> *… a lot of our teachers implied that if you got a better mark, that it was going to help you get a job. This was absolute bullshit. They don't even look at your mark. You could have just scraped through but, if you are the 'right' person and fit into team, if you can present yourself well and get along with people and make a good impression in the interview, they look and say "oh she passed" but they already like your personality*

A key theme of the results was the fact that graduates gradually realise that numbers of jobs have to be applied for in the job search process. This number of jobs varied from 5 to some 200 plus jobs for the 45 graduates in this study and this wide experience is confirmed in the GDS surveys from 2002 through to 2006, suggesting it is quite a 'normal' range of experiences. Graduates 17, 25, 27 and 41 all applied for jobs on the internet every day with some losing count because they have applied for so many. Only twelve graduates had made it to interviews with three then successful in obtaining a job.

The maturation of attitude noted in Perrone and Vickers' (2003) study was demonstrated universally by the graduates and the UCCs, most particularly in discussions on the job search processes and services available to graduates. Here, the responses of the UCCs and the graduates showed serious

misalignment. All five UCC directors saw their services and programs as providing graduates with a high quality service which assists them in areas such as professional resume writing, producing cover letters, preparing for interviews and such. They also cited the career fairs each ran as being a valuable aid to students. UCC3 stated that "we attempt to prepare students at various states of their courses. We look at first year students and try to encourage them to think about their career and the future and get involve in activities part time work and things like that. We focus on placements or corporative work experience programs". However, graduates presented a very different perspective as, not only did most of the graduates interviewed not use it; they were not even aware of the centres services. As Table 5 illustrates, UCCs may play a modest role in the job search strategies of some graduates.

Table 5: Job Seeking Methods Used by Graduates & 'Usefulness' Ranking

Job Seeking Methods	No. of Students	%	Usefulness Ranking
Online job search	45	100	1
Newspapers	32	71	2
Sending CV to employers	29	64	3
Recruitment Agency	8	18	4
University career centre	4	2	5
Average No. Methods	*2.6*		

Further, the data presented above suggests graduates are not utilising a wide number of sources, with the average being 2 to 3 options. Given this very low range of options, the question is which are the most useful to them? Here, the responses of the two groups also provided only a few areas of agreement. The UCCs thought graduates should be extremely well organised with a job search strategy even commencing from their first day as a student. Key UCC recommendations focussed on well developed personal awareness skills as well as key areas such as how to write an effective application, involvement in extra curriculum activities and a broader job search approach which does not limit them to one field. Taking a more critical perspective on this large range of 'things for graduates to do', UCCs did not indicate any specific services to help graduates develop this 'career savvy' awareness. While the graduates were unanimous in their very broad and unspecific approach, most of them were in fact limiting themselves to two to three sources of job search and clearly, were not seeking out available support services (generally for free), within their own university. This result is clearly one that requires further investigation.

Table 5 also shows that graduates thought online job searches more helpful than any other services as this method provided them with quick and easy access to detailed information about a specific organisation and yet, also allowed them to look up a range of employers at any one time. All of the graduates used internet (online) job search and fifteen in fact only used this method. Others added that some companies maintain contact with graduates by keeping them on the mailing list and sending them messages on their mobile phone which gives them both feedback and a response. Even though they may not get that particular job, they keep in contact and may "score" a job in the future. Accessing the website and finding out about the employer helped prepare them for the second stage of the interview, if their application was successful. A variety of other methods were also used, but to a much lesser extent. Again, the majority of graduates did not use the UCCs and were unsure about the services provided ands clearly identifies the need for UCCs to market themselves to students. Further comments by four graduates, that they had actually gone onto the centres but left again very shortly after as they did not think they would be effective or helpful, should also be of concern to UCCs. The results above also raise the question for UCCs as to how they measure their success. While one had a quantitative method in place where outcomes were just one of a number of measures included in an annual university wide survey on administration support, most relied on qualitative data in terms of students comments and feedback. All five were confident that students were happy with their services and reported that positive feedback from students, with the only negatives being about the time it takes to see career counsellors. Even this was explained in terms of a positive, suggesting that the delay is the results of the high demand for their services. Cleary, the UCCs perceptions do not accord with those of graduates who remain either largely unaware of them.

The last section of findings examines the way UCCS mediate the potential conflict between graduates expectation and employer requirement. All five UCCs concentrated on informing graduates about employer expectations through programs and information such as disseminating the results of the GDS each year. While not a very sophisticated approach, the UCCs believe they allow graduates to become more realistic in their expectations and provide directions as to what employers want. They suggested that this mediation of expectations better allows graduates to deal with negative responses from

employers. However, the wider context of the results above have revealed graduates lack awareness about the UCCs and the services they offer so it appears highly unlikely that the role of UCCs as conflict mediators has much impact on the ordinary job search processes of most graduates.

SUMMARY

This findings and discussion of the interview data from the forty five recent graduates and five UCCs in Melbourne reveal that both recognise graduates high expectations about job prospects after graduation and unrealistic expectations of the job market. As with prior studies such as Lau and pang (2000) and Perrone and Vickers (2003), both interview groups agreed that graduates tend to have over inflated expectations of themselves and their work ability, believing that there will be many jobs for them to choose from as well as overestimating where their degree would take them. However, graduates quickly become aware of the mismatch and, as Marshall (2001) also reported, end up accepting any job just to gain a foothold into the labour market. These results have important implications for UCCs and the need to more effectively promote themselves and their services to students. As UCC1 noted, this public relations type of advertising needs to begin with the new student and be built into the curriculum offered by the university as a whole and, adapted to faculty offerings in particular.

Drawing this discussion together to provide a number of conclusions highlight the inherent limitations of this study as well as establishing how these modest results fit into the larger context of the extant literature on graduate recruitment. Firstly, the small sample size is a major limitation and has implications as to the generalisability, validity and representativeness of results. In particular, the forty five graduates selected for interview ranged across faculties and departments and made no attempt to cover all. Five university career centres universities provided a larger scale view but these centres were all based at the main campus and may not represent the services supplied at the multi-campus locations of the universities. A larger sample size would allow for more meaningful analysis across and between groups of respondents, great representativeness from specific degrees and a wider range of views. However, due to the exploratory nature of this study, a small sample was used. The major

findings in this study nonetheless yielded meaningful and consistent results that could be interpreted within the context of prior studies.

This study generally confirms the results the studies discussed in the introduction to this paper which identified the overestimation graduates make of their abilities in terms of the labour market and their underestimation of how difficult it will to obtain a job after graduation. This overestimation of skills is sharply at odds with the often very different sets of requirement and skills employers expect from recent graduates. A key strength of this current study is that it specifically targets the expectations of graduates. This perspective is not common in the literature on graduate employment where employer, university and government perspectives dominate. The results of this study suggest further investigation of the university careers centre is needed, especially in terms of increasing their profile as a support source for the job seeking graduate. Linked to this is the notion of investigating the extent to which universities are prepared to reorient their curriculum to help prepare graduates for increasingly unpredictable workplace requirements. As the study made clear from the start, graduates have high expectations of the job they will have after graduation while employers also have high expectation about the skills of the recent graduate. These findings reveal that graduates initially expect that possession of a university degree after so many years of study will guarantee them a good job and one that they will find relatively quickly. They tend to have over inflated expectations of themselves and their work ability, believing that there will be many jobs for them to choose from as well as overestimating where their degree will take them. However, graduates quickly become aware of the mismatch with employer expectations and often end up accepting any job, just to gain a foothold into the labour market.

Furthermore, university careers centres, graduates and previous studies such as Celuch and Slama (1999), McColl (2003) and Jameson and Holden (200) all concur that employers expect and require much from the graduate job seeker. When selecting new graduates, employers place more importance on a larger range of high-level generic skills rather than the traditional narrow set of discipline specific skills traditionally a feature of a university education. In terms of university support services for the

job seeking graduate, UCCs aim to provide high quality employment services in a wide range of areas but this study has revealed a major inconsistency between the viewpoints of graduates and UCCs. Not only did most graduates not use the services provided by the career centre, they were completely unaware of them. The implications of such findings suggest UCCs should focus more effort on public relations and promotion as there is clearly a need to create a greater awareness about the services they provide to students. This includes not only assisting new graduates but informing students who are in earlier stages of their degree of the requirements and expectations of the employers from graduates. They could also take more responsibility in proactively training and developing the student and preparing them for interviews and workplace realities. There are a number of initiatives identified at a number of the universities that would appear to be promising for wider scale application and more active promotion to students. Faculty based initiatives may be one such example. In conclusion, this study reveals the mismatch between graduate and employer expectations has important consequences for graduates. Graduate expectations after completion of their degree are very often unrealistically high and the rejection process many go through is clearly distressing for them. UCCs could play an important role in mediating this process both from the graduate and employer perspective. The notion of graduates accepting much lesser jobs than they expected, or in fact, any job just to break into the labour market is clearly an issue which requires further research. There is also room to investigate whether the failure to meet graduate job expectations plays some explanatory role in the increasing numbers of graduates returning to university studies to undertake further degree courses.

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