

Guest editorial: Employability for and through career transitions

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Introduction

We, William Donald, Alessandro Lo Presti and Thanh Pham, are honoured to introduce this special issue, *Employability for and Through Career Transitions*, to the esteemed readership of *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*. This collection aims to bridge the domains of higher education, work-based learning, employability, career development and career transitions (per various calls for such integration by [Akkermans et al. \(2024\)](#), [De Vos et al. \(2021\)](#), [Healy et al. \(2022\)](#)).

The special issue contributes to global agendas for positive change by addressing seven of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including “SDG3: Good health and well-being”, “SDG4: Quality education”, “SDG5: Gender equality”, “SDG8: Decent work and economic growth”, “SDG9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure”, “SDG10: Reduced inequalities” and “SDG17: Partnerships for goals”. Moreover, it aligns with Emerald Publishing’s commitment to fostering a “fairer society”, promoting “healthier lives” and ensuring “quality education for all”.

The special issue includes ten peer-reviewed articles focussing on the university-to-work transition. Eight of the articles adopt a longitudinal, two-wave or cross-sectional quantitative approach to collecting survey data from undergraduates and/or graduates. One article adopts a qualitative approach collecting data from undergraduates, while the final article adopts a theoretical perspective. The articles provide coverage of eight countries (Australia, Belgium, Chile, India, Indonesia, Italy, Taiwan and the UK) across four continents (Asia, Europe, Oceania and South America).

Overview of the special issue

Article 1: insights from undergraduates in Italy

[Farnese et al. \(2024\)](#) adopt a capital-based perspective to investigate whether and how professors may affect graduates’ employability when acknowledged as knowledgeable and trustworthy actors. The research team collected cross-sectional survey data from 616 undergraduates in Italy. Their findings reveal that trust in knowledgeable professors is associated with undergraduates’ perceived employability directly and through two mediators of academic socialisation and identification with future professionalism. The research provides empirical evidence of how higher education institutions can enhance students’ employability by developing forms of capital. Moreover, the authors observe how the duration of university study serves as a liminal space where undergraduates begin to construct a tentative professional identity, preparing them to transition from university into the labour market.

Article 2: insights from undergraduates in the UK

[Mouratidou et al. \(2024\)](#) employ a conservation of resources theory framework to scrutinise the nexus between self-perceived academic performance and individual entrepreneurial intention. Drawing on cross-sectional survey data from 405 undergraduates in the UK, the authors unveil a positive relationship between self-perceived academic performance and individual entrepreneurial intention. Additionally, their investigation identifies participation in serious leisure activities and perceived stress as moderators, with gender exhibiting no significant influence. These findings hold significance in shaping policy recommendations for universities and national governments, aiming to foster a more conducive environment for nurturing individual entrepreneurial aspirations among undergraduate populations in Western countries.



Article 3: insights from undergraduates in Taiwan

[Huang et al. \(2024\)](#) delve into the nuanced interplay between self-efficacy, interdisciplinary learning, career decisions and the determination of future goals among undergraduates in Taiwan. Through a four-wave, longitudinal survey involving 123 undergraduates, the researchers found that having a clear career path gives undergraduates a sense of direction and purpose while engaging in interdisciplinary learning. They also found that clarity in career decisions cultivates a robust understanding of self-efficacy among undergraduates, which becomes more pronounced with each subsequent year of university study. These findings underscore the pivotal role universities can assume in bolstering students' self-efficacy by offering guidance in career decision-making and facilitating opportunities to participate in interdisciplinary learning.

Article 4: insights from undergraduates in Indonesia

[Zhan et al. \(2024\)](#) use social cognitive theory to explore how self-efficacy acts as a mediating factor to enhance employability among working university students by fostering essential capabilities in digital leadership and intercultural competence. The research team collected cross-sectional survey data from 206 working undergraduates at an Indonesian university. Findings show these students possess high levels of digital leadership capability and intercultural competence, boosting their confidence in performing challenging tasks and achieving outcomes, thereby enhancing their employability. The study's contribution comes from offering a data-driven perspective on employability determinants, deepening the understanding of how intertwined competencies shape employment outcomes in the artificial intelligence (AI) age.

Article 5: insights from undergraduates in Australia

[Grantham and Iachizzi \(2024\)](#) aim to realign the work-integrated learning (WIL) curriculum at an Australian university with communication industry standards and student career goals. Using the Employability Capital Growth Model (ECGM) as a theoretical framework, they analyse feedback from 20 student experience course surveys and eight semi-structured interviews with industry partners. Findings highlight the need for WIL programs to align with evolving industry demands, incorporating practical and real-world experiences to enhance skills development and workforce readiness. Feedback from students and industry partners aligns with the ECGM framework and underscores the importance of integrating coaching and mentoring into the curriculum to support employability. Based on these insights, the authors present practical suggestions for improving WIL programmes.

Article 6: insights from undergraduates and graduates in Italy

[PetruzzIELLO et al. \(2024\)](#) utilise a dual framework, incorporating the ECGM and social cognitive model of self-career management, to examine a serial mediation model linking career identity and self-perceived employability. The researchers discern significant patterns through data analysis from a two-wave survey encompassing 227 Italian university students and graduates. Their findings elucidate that career identity predicts cultural capital, subsequently fostering job interview self-efficacy, thereby positively influencing self-perceived employability. The authors advocate for collaborative efforts among universities and other actors within the career ecosystem to provide students and graduates with enriching opportunities to cultivate and leverage diverse forms of employability capital.

Article 7: insights from graduates in Belgium

[Grosemans et al. \(2024\)](#) examine how career engagement and perceived employability interact among recent graduates. They conducted a latent change score analysis on a three-wave sample of 701 graduates in Belgium. Data collection occurred at graduation and then again after four months and ten months of experience in the labour market. Their results

indicate that perceived employability influences positive changes in career engagement over time. However, they found no evidence that career engagement leads to changes in perceived employability. The authors respond to recent calls to integrate graduate employability and career development literature while contributing to the literature on school-to-work transitions. They suggest that universities should invest in enhancing students' perceived employability and provide a comprehensive understanding of the labour market.

Article 8: insights from graduates in Chile

[Espinoza et al. \(2024\)](#) investigate the determinants of job satisfaction among graduates from 11 selective universities in Chile. Drawing upon cross-sectional survey responses from 534 graduates, the authors unveil several vital factors influencing job satisfaction. Notably, they establish significant correlations between job satisfaction and variables, including gender, field of study, gross salary and the degree of alignment between the course of study at university and job requirements. The authors advocate for a more proactive engagement from universities in addressing the disjunction between labour market opportunities and graduate expectations, emphasising the imperative of bridging this gap to enhance overall job satisfaction among graduates.

Article 9: insights from graduates in India

[Agnihotri et al. \(2024\)](#) investigate the relationship between organisational social capital, university image, perceived employability and career satisfaction among IT professionals in India. Utilising a cross-sectional survey of 412 graduates, the study reveals that university image is perceived as the most critical factor for career satisfaction, followed by perceived employability and organisational social capital. Furthermore, the research indicates that organisational social capital significantly predicts career satisfaction for middle-aged professionals, whereas younger professionals prioritise university image. These findings extend the conservation of resources theory by examining the interplay between organisational social capital, career satisfaction, university image and perceived employability as resources for graduates in the information technology (IT) industry.

Article 10: theoretical perspective

[Remedios and Sewell \(2024\)](#) close our special issue with a manuscript highlighting prominent motivational theories and key evidence for incorporating these into employability models. They review several motivation theories, mapping them against current employability models. The authors emphasise the importance of incorporating expectancy value theory into these models. They also note that the clear and consistent interactive effect between subjective task value and self-efficacy suggests self-efficacy is only useful as a predictor when subjective task value is high. The authors hope that their work will foster future research endeavours, encourage debate and ultimately promote a more symbiotic relationship between motivational and employability researchers.

Special thanks

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