Graduate employability as a professional proto-jurisdiction in higher education.

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Abstract

Much research into how universities seek to support their students' graduate employability has focused on academic strategies such as graduate attributes and work-integrated learning, or the employability benefits of part-time work, volunteering, and extracurricular activities. However, the work of the professional staff who support these strategies is seldom addressed. In this article we report findings from our documentary analysis of 376 Australian university job advertisements for professional roles directly responsible for graduate employability programs and services. We characterise employability as a proto-jurisdiction: an ecology of distinct forms of professional expertise and responsibility with ambiguous, elastic, and porous boundaries. We argue that despite the importance of graduate employability to institutions' strategic and students' individual goals, it is as yet an inchoate field of professional practice, consisting of a diverse range of work tasks, functions, and projects. We discuss implications in relation to quality, coherence, and the strategic resourcing of employability support in higher education.

Keywords: graduate employability; career development; higher education professionals; higher education student affairs

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Introduction

In the competitive higher education market of the 21st century, graduate employability has become a core element of universities' educative, social, and economic missions. Policy-makers in countries around the world have put employability at the heart of educational reforms, although frequently viewed through the narrow lens of graduate employment outcomes rather than more holistic, lifelong conceptions of careers and employability success (Divan et al. 2019; Sin and Amaral 2017). In Australia, the federal government has recently introduced several policies into their *Job Ready Graduates* higher education funding and oversight frameworks which attempt to influence students into particular pathways and incentivise universities to support student retention and success ("Job-ready Graduates Package" 2021). In addition to policy pressures, employability also drives market pressures, as universities compete to attract students with assurances about future returns on their investments into their education (Divan et al. 2019). In response to these political, economic, and market pressures, universities have adopted a variety of pedagogical and strategic approaches in their efforts to support students' careers and employability learning (Healy et al. 2020) and employability capital development (Nghia et al. 2020).

Much research in higher education has focused on academic strategies which contextualise and embed employability within the curriculum of particular disciplines, such as graduate attributes (Hammer et al. 2020) and work-integrated learning (WIL; Jackson 2017). Some have recognised career management skills, career identity, and proactive career behaviours as fundamental drivers of employability (Bridgstock et al. 2019; Healy et al. 2020). Most of this literature implicitly characterises the work of supporting students' employability as a primarily

academic responsibility, through the design and delivery of academic curricula aligned with the skills and knowledge required for professional work, although the degree to which academics accept this responsibility varies (Sin and Amaral 2017).

Although researchers often investigate the impact of employability strategies inside and outside the curriculum (Healy et al. 2020), the work of the professional staff who manage or support those strategies is seldom considered in detail. Professional staff tend to be defined first by what they are not, as "non-academic," rather than by what they are: skilled, experienced, and qualified professionals working in universities' support, administrative, or management structures (Schneijderberg and Merkator 2013; Whitchurch 2012). Some employability researchers have recognised the contribution that career development practitioners (CDPs) make to employability strategies, particularly through the integration of career development learning into the curriculum (Bridgstock et al. 2019). Careers and employability support has also been cited as an example of a strategic project that crosses institutional and professional boundaries of higher education professional staff (Schneijderberg and Merkator 2013; Whitchurch 2012). However only a few researchers, for the most part themselves CDPs, have explored the identities and experiences of careers and employability professional staff (Brown et al. 2019; Christie and Burke 2018; Hobson et al. 2018).

Consider an undergraduate student about to embark on an internship through an elective work-integrated learning course. Her interest piqued by a video promoting work-integrated learning posted to the university's social media, she visits a student life advisor to learn more. Referred to the university's work-integrated learning website, she finds an advertisement for an internship, secured by an employer liaison officer. After receiving feedback on her resume from a careers advisor, she successfully applies for the internship. She enrols in the relevant course and

submits the internship contract with the assistance of a work-integrated learning administrator, and is now completing an online pre-internship professional code of conduct module developed by an educational designer. Our student's journey through this crucial employability-building experience has been supported by the work of several professional staff, working largely independently of each other, even before she encounters the academic staff member responsible for her work-integrated learning course.

As illustrated by our vignette above, employability focused professional roles involve a diverse range of work tasks, functions, and projects. Typical responsibilities include: supporting curricular activities such as work-integrated learning or careers and employability learning, providing student advisory services such as career centres or student information hubs, and supporting students in extra-curricular activities such as leadership development programs or volunteering. Such roles may be located in a range of different organisational units or divisions, each with their own strategic priorities, operational structures, and professional cultures. As much as different groups of professionals make important contributions with their particular expertise, it should not be taken for granted that they understand or approach employability in the same way.

In this article we report findings from a documentary analysis of 376 Australian university job advertisements for professional roles directly responsible for graduate employability programs and services. We consider the work of supporting graduate employability as a professional "proto-jurisdiction": and ecology of related but loosely linked professional tasks, roles, and responsibilities (Abbott 2005; Blok et al. 2019; Liu 2018). In doing so we seek to answer the research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the professional ecology of employability in Australian higher education, and its component specialty areas?

2. How are jurisdictional boundaries expressed in the job advertisements of this professional ecology?

3. What are the implications of professional ecology's jurisdictional composition for the cohesion, quality, and sustainability of institutional strategies in support of employability?

We also contrast Australia's proto-jurisdictional professional ecology with the more cohesive North American professional model of *Higher Education Student Affairs* (HESA). We argue that although the distribution of responsibility for supporting students' employability is broadly positive, there should be some caution regarding the coherence and quality of how employability is understood professionally and resourced strategically in contemporary universities.

Professional Staff in Support of Graduate Employability

Higher education researchers have described several conceptualisations of contemporary professional staff. Common among them is an emphasis on the blurred boundaries between professional jurisdictions and consequent blurring of professional identities (Ryttberg and Geschwind 2019; Schneijderberg and Merkator 2013; Whitchurch 2012). Whitchurch (2012) described the emergence of a "third space" between academic and professional domains, where work coalesces around "bundles of activity" (p. 27) focused on particular institutional projects. She outlined four dispositions that describe how professionals might inhabit the third space: bounded, boundary crossing, unbounded, and blended. Similarly, Schneijderberg and Merkator

(2013) positioned higher education professionals in multilateral "overlap" areas between administrative and academic functions.

Third space presents both opportunities and challenges for higher education professional staff. The opening up of the binary distinction between academic and non-academic roles has enabled skilled professionals to engage more effectively in cross-institutional collaboration, respond with agility to change and opportunity, and cope with ambiguity (Whitchurch 2012). New forms of non-academic professional careers have emerged, which allow some professional staff to exercise greater adaptability, agency, and autonomy in their work, as expert professionals in their own right (Ryttberg and Geschwind 2019; Smith et al. 2021; Whitchurch 2012). However, higher education remains a professional environment in which credibility (Little and Green 2021) and influence (Kallenberg 2020) are subject to complex economies of social capital. The third space can take on different qualities, presenting different challenges for those who work within it, depending on how an institution structures, supports, and recognises boundary crossing projects (Smith et al. 2021; Whitchurch 2012).

The professional boundaries of the third space are not discrete lines to be crossed, they are multi-faceted and shifting spaces to be inhabited. In this article we extend these descriptions of professional work in higher education with the notion of proto-jurisdictions: an ecology of distinct forms of professional expertise and responsibility with ambiguous, elastic, and porous boundaries (Abbott 2005; Blok et al. 2019; Liu 2018). In Abbott's (2005) ecological approach to the sociology of professions, boundaries between professions do not simply appear where professions, as stable social entities, intersect. Rather, boundaries precede professions, in the sites of difference between ways of approaching or understanding common concerns. When a number of such sites of difference appear to coalesce, they can be "yoked" together by professional,

academic, or political agents, potentially resulting in the birth of a new profession (Abbott 2005; Liu 2018). These germinal spaces of professionalisation have been described as proto-jurisdictions: "elastic and ambiguous arenas" (Blok et al. 2019, p. 589) where various professional groups lay claim to novel professional expertise and, in doing so establish, maintain, extend, or contest jurisdictional boundaries (Liu 2018).

Both Whitchurch (2012) and Schneijderberg and Merkator (2013) have cited careers and employability support roles as examples of their respective models of professional work. Where CDPs have traditionally occupied a central position in this professional ecology, an increasing range of professional roles outside of career development are warranted to support students' employability. Although career development is a relatively distinct profession in higher education, the broader professional community clustered around employability lacks common foundations of theory and evidence and is too diverse in its professional practice to be considered a single coherent professional jurisdiction. Therefore, we propose that the work of professional staff in support of graduate employability is best understood as a proto-jurisdiction performed in often ambiguous and inchoate fields of higher education professional work (Blok et al. 2019; Liu 2018).

Career Development Professionals

Over the last two decades, CDPs around the world have worked toward the professionalisation of career development practice, largely through the establishment of professional associations, codification of standards, and recognition of credentials (Gough and Neary 2021; Yoon and Hutchinson 2018). In Australia, the peak body Career Industry Council of Australia has provided guidance over professional standards (CICA 2019) and qualifications. Graduate certificates in career development, requiring the completion of one-quarter of the units

of study required for a Masters' degree, are broadly accepted as entry-level qualifications for university CDPs (Brown et al. 2019). The National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services provides professional development, networking, and benchmarking for university careers services leadership and staff.

Contemporary higher education CDP work is shifting from its traditional focus on individual or small group career counselling and job seeking support, toward contributing to larger scale institutional strategies, such as embedding CDL into the university curricula, developing employability award programs, or connecting students with employers in mentoring programs (Bridgstock et al. 2019; Brown et al. 2019; Dey and Cruzvergara 2014; Thambar 2018). CDPs employ a range of educational technologies to enable greater reach and access and reduce the labour cost of delivering such programs (Knight et al. In Press). In their study of Australian careers service staff, Brown et al. (2019) identified five main functional roles in Australian careers services—career counselling, employer liaison, careers and employability education, leadership, and administration and project management—and noted that generalist roles are more common than specialised roles.

CDPs tend to show strong commitment to their profession and confidence in the nature and value of their expertise (Gough and Neary 2021; Thambar 2018). However, this strength of CDPs' professionalisation has caused unintended consequences which can impede their alignment with institutional employability strategies. Research focused on university CDPs has frequently noted constraints and challenges related to their professional designation, institutional influence, and bounded professional identities (Brown et al. 2019; Hobson et al. 2018; Thambar 2018). Explaining these tensions, Thambar (2018) suggested that CDPs experience tension in

reconciling their professional with their organisational identities, the former shaped by external qualifications and associations, the latter by institutional positions and strategic priorities.

Recently, there have been arguments for better orienting CDPs to the cultures and systems of higher education (Brown et al. 2019; Dey and Cruzvergara 2014; Thambar 2018), which requires, to some degree, loosening the boundaries of the profession. A common theme is that CDPs should take their place in "connected communities (Bridgstock and Tippet 2019; Dey and Cruzvergara 2014; Peck 2017), formed across institutions' jurisdictional boundaries, and share responsibility for supporting students' careers and employability development with academics, educational designers and technologists, and other partners. This diversification of tasks requires CDPs in higher education to develop additional forms of specialised expertise, such as curriculum development (Brown et al. 2019) and research and evaluation (Winter 2018), and to learn how to navigate the complex academic cultures of credibility and influence.

Employability Professionals

In contrast to the career development profession, there is no distinct employability profession in higher education. In addition to being a focus of some academic roles, employability provides the warrant for a range of professional roles in different areas: student life, engagement, and extracurricular activities; work-integrated learning; volunteering, study abroad, and leadership programs; alumni, industry, and community engagement; and learning support and skills development, among others.

In Australia, there has been some effort to coalesce employability as a professional and scholarly community of practice through dedicated networks, conferences, and journals. However, professional accreditation, cohesion, and connection is more likely to happen at the level of the specific focus area of the role than in any overarching community. Relevant

professional associations or networks include the Australia New Zealand Student Services Association; the Association for Tertiary Education Management; the Australian Collaborative Education Network; the Students, Transitions, Achievement, Retention, and Success network; and the Australian Association of Graduate Employers. Although these groups may offer professional development activities, in Australia there are no dedicated university qualifications for the employability proto-jurisdiction as there are for career development (Ludeman et al. 2020). Similarly, although some professional communities may be guided by a code of professional standards offered by their respective associations, many are not, and there is no overarching model of professional practice for the employability professional community in general.

Higher Education Student Affairs Professionals as Career Influencers

The diffuse nature of Australian employability work is in contrast to the North American professional model of HESA, an umbrella term which encompasses a range of services supporting the whole student throughout the course of their studies, including: admission, enrolment, and financial aid; counselling, health, and wellness; career development and employment; diversity and inclusion; residence and campus life; sports, recreation, and extracurricular activities; student conduct, safety, governance, and advocacy; student media; and alumni engagement (Fernandez et al. 2017; NASPA 2020). Although HESA professionals develop specialist expertise in their respective areas, they also share certain theoretical foundations and principles of practice, by way of dedicated HESA graduate qualifications and professional standards frameworks. HESA graduate programs typically combine core courses in student development, educational leadership, and higher education policy with electives and professional experience courses in the students' chosen specialty. Similarly, professional

competency frameworks in Canada (Fernandez et al. 2017) and the United States (NASPA 2020) recognise the importance of specialist expertise, while recognising certain competencies that underpin HESA as a professional practice in its own right.

Career development is a well-established specialisation within HESA, but the broader HESA community is also recognised as supporting students' career development and success (Ho 2019; Peck 2017). The term employability is not commonly used in North American higher education (Healy et al. 2020). When students seek career support, rather than turning first to their university's career services, they may be more likely to approach professionals with whom they regularly interact (Dey and Cruzvergara 2014; Ho 2019). In her study of Canadian HESA professionals, Ho (2019) recognised as "career influencers" those who, serving in their own professional capacity, fulfil seven primary functions that enhance student career development: advising, guiding, counselling, teaching, advocating, liaising, and leading. Yet, due to the informal nature of their career development support, the contribution of career influencers often goes unrecognised and they may not be fully equipped with appropriate professional skills or knowledge. This leaves much untapped potential for CDPs to support and collaborate with career influencers from the broader employability proto-jurisdiction, establishing connected communities (Dey and Cruzvergara 2014) or ecosystems of holistic student support (Peck 2017), in order to best help students enhance their employability and achieve career success.

Methods

We conducted a documentary analysis (Tight 2019) of job advertisements for Australian university positions substantively responsible for supporting student career development and employability. Job advertisements have frequently been used as data for research into professions, most often to explore the skills deemed valuable in particular fields (Harper 2012).

Documents should not be taken for granted as neutral textual records, but understood as social instruments created by actors with particular interests, for particular purposes, and for particular audiences (Tight 2019). Accordingly, job advertisements can be viewed as "boundary objects" which inscribe jurisdictional boundaries by indicating who will be recognised by the recruiting professional community, and who will not (Blok et al. 2019).

In Australia, employment in higher education is governed by collectively bargained employment agreements. Although there are some differences between each university's employment agreement, there is enough uniformity to allow us to code and analyse job advertisements across universities. Most importantly, the Higher Education Worker (HEW) level of professional roles, which range from HEW3 (student or trainee) to HEW10 (executive director), are a reliable indicator of the seniority and expected degree of independent professional expertise for roles, across universities.

Data Collection

We gathered job descriptions from the database of Burning Glass Technologies, a labour market analytics company which scrapes, parses, and archives job advertisements from approximately 40,000 job boards and company websites. We searched the Burning Glass database for advertisements from Australian universities including the keywords "employability" or "career development." The search results initially included 2,211 job advertisements, from which we excluded: academic positions; advertisements in which employability featured only in branding statements or descriptions of the broader remit of divisions and units; and senior leadership positions for which employability was only one of several high-level strategic responsibilities. We also excluded advertisements that did not contain sufficient information for a full analysis. After exclusion, our data set included 376 professional job advertisements, from

2013 to 2019 and from all universities in Australia except one, for which no relevant job advertisements were found in the Burning Glass database.

Data Analysis

We imported the job descriptions into NVivo 12 data analysis software for coding and applied a deductive template analysis to the data. In template analysis, *a priori* themes inform an initial coding template which is tested on a subset of the data, then revised and refined for further coding (Brooks et al. 2015). Our coding template, shown in Table 1, was based on common features of higher education job advertisements and a list of specialised roles based on findings from Brown et al. (2019). The first two authors tested the initial coding template and agreed on refinements, compared and discussed coding decisions throughout the process, and moderated the coding of job advertisements together. The third author assisted in further coding moderation. After coding, we exported the data for analysis and visualisation using R Studio statistical computing and graphics software.

Table 1. Coding template and specialisation definitions.

Coding template:	Specialisations:
1. Role level 1.1 Professional HEW3 to HEW10 **2. Contract terms** 2.1 Full-time 2.1.1 Full-time continuing 2.1.2 Full-time fixed 2.2 Part-time 2.2.1 Part-time continuing 2.2.2 Part-time fixed 2.3 Casual **3. Organisational location** 3.1 Careers service 3.2 Other organisational unit **4. Role type**	*Career development* roles provide a combination of careers and employability learning, counselling, and information services, as described in Brown et al. (2019). *Communications* roles promote student engagement with programs and services, employment and WIL opportunities, or information resources. *Curriculum* roles develop careers and employability learning in the curriculum, usually in collaboration with academics. *Employment and enterprise* roles directly assist students into employment or enterprise through placement services and entrepreneurship hubs.

4.1 Administrative 4.2 General 4.3 Leadership **5. Specialisation (see other column)** 5.1 Career development 5.2 Communications 5.3 Curriculum 5.4 Employment and enterprise 5.5 Industry liaison 5.6 Research and evaluation 5.7 Student development 5.8 Work-integrated learning 6. **Selection criteria** 6.1 Experience 6.1.1 General experience 6.1.2 Specific experience 6.2 Qualifications 6.2.1 General qualifications 6.2.2 Specific qualifications 6.3 Career development expertise	*Industry liaison* roles develop relationships with employers and industry bodies in order to source employment and WIL opportunities and promote employer involvement in careers and employability learning activities. *Research and evaluation* roles research the employability of students and graduates or evaluate careers and employability learning programs and services. *Student development* roles provide services that support students' employability as part of a broader mission to promote positive academic and social qualities, including student leadership, volunteering, extracurricular activities, study abroad, orientation, and student engagement. *Work-integrated learning* roles support WIL and service learning with course design and delivery, administration of systems and process, quality assurance, student advising, and employer liaison.

Some elements of job advertisements, such as HEW levels and contract terms, were unambiguous and so were coded and analysed in a quantitative fashion. Other elements, such as specialisations and selection criteria, were more ambiguous and required some inference in coding and therefore coded and analysed qualitatively. Each role was coded qualitatively to a single specialisation according to the primary focus of the role, as described in Table 1. Each role was coded qualitatively according to how specifically the required or preferred experience and qualifications were stated. Career development expertise was coded if the advertisement explicitly called for career development qualifications or experience.

Findings

Table 2 shows the organisational location, contract terms, and role type for advertised roles in each specialisation. Full-time continuing roles accounted for 40% of all roles advertised.

Roles in careers services were less likely to be continuing, at 35% of advertised roles, than those in other organisational units, at 49%. The faceted bar plot in Figure 1 shows the frequency of roles at each HEW level in each specialisation; the definition of each specialisation is provided in Table 1.

Table 2. Organisational unit, contract term, and role type of advertised roles, by specialisation.

	Career development (n = 132)	Communications (n = 14)	Curriculum (n = 14)	Employment and enterprise (n = 15)	Industry liaison (n = 37)	Research and evaluation (n = 7)	Student development (n = 92)	Work-integrated learning (n = 65)	Total (n = 376)
Organisational unit									
Careers services	93	7	6	8	20	1	21	8	164
Other units	39	7	8	7	17	6	71	57	212
Contract term									
Casual	7	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	9
Full-time continuing	49	5	5	4	20	1	43	23	150
Full-time fixed	59	7	7	10	15	2	39	26	166
Part-time continuing	3	0	0	0	1	0	1	6	11
Part-time fixed	14	1	2	1	1	3	9	10	41
Proportion of continuing roles	39%	38%	36%	33%	57%	14%	48%	45%	43%
Role type									
Admin	13	0	0	2	2	0	14	18	49

General	93	14	12	9	29	7	60	26	250
Leadership	26	0	2	4	6	0	18	21	77

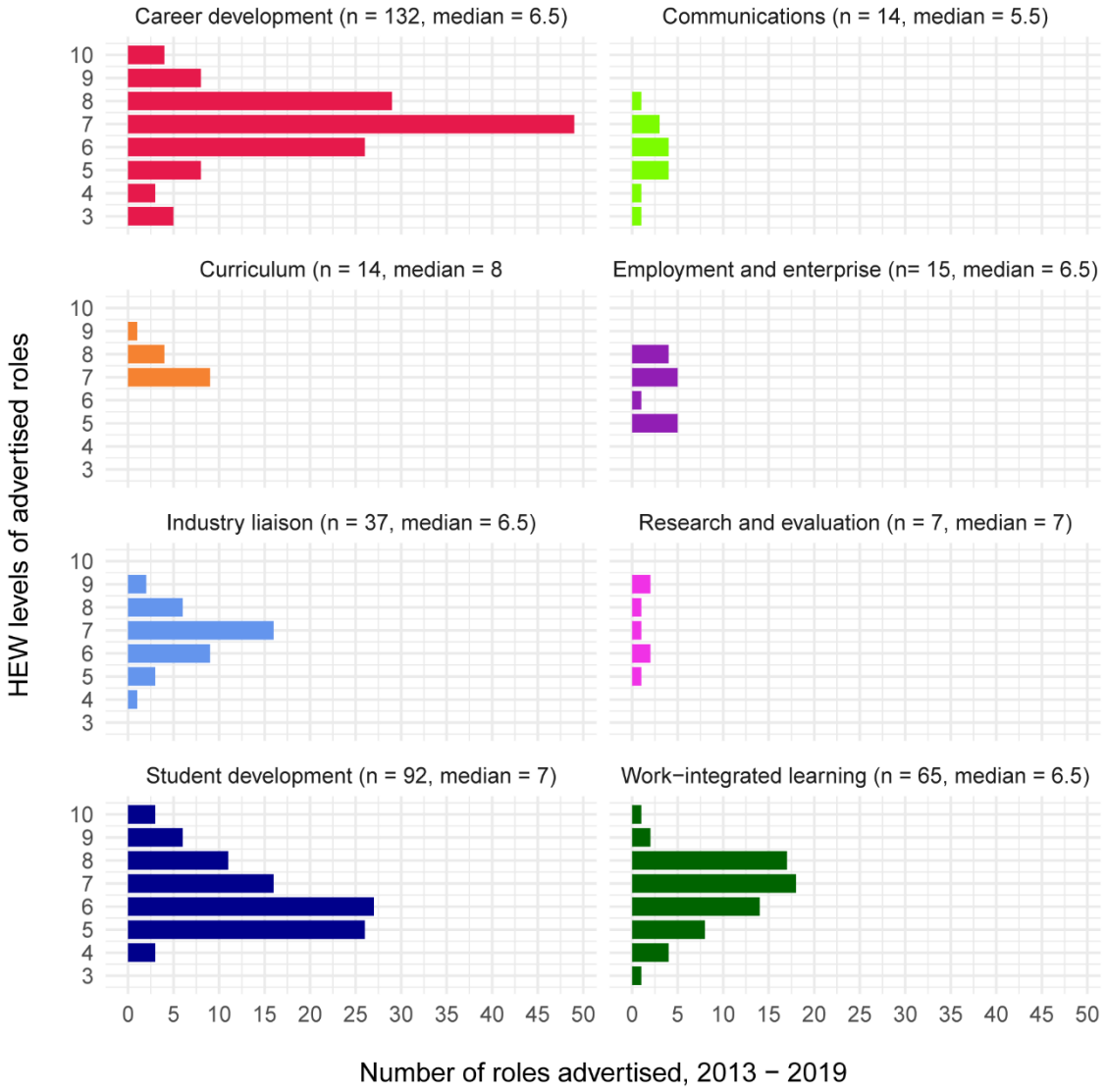

Figure 1. Frequency of advertised roles at each HEW level, by specialisation.

Figure 2 illustrates the specificity of the experience and qualifications required for roles in each specialisation and at each HEW level. We assigned numeric values of -1 to each instance of general qualifications and experience, and 1 to each instance of specific qualifications and experience, before plotting each label according to the mean values of that group of roles. The dotted line on Figure 2 indicates zero on each axis. The position of each label indicates the degree

to which qualification and experience requirements of each group of roles were stated in general or specific terms, as indicated on the axis labels. For legibility, the exact location of each box on the scatter plot is approximate, as we applied a repel function to minimise boxes being plotted over top of each other. No roles in our data set required doctoral qualifications.

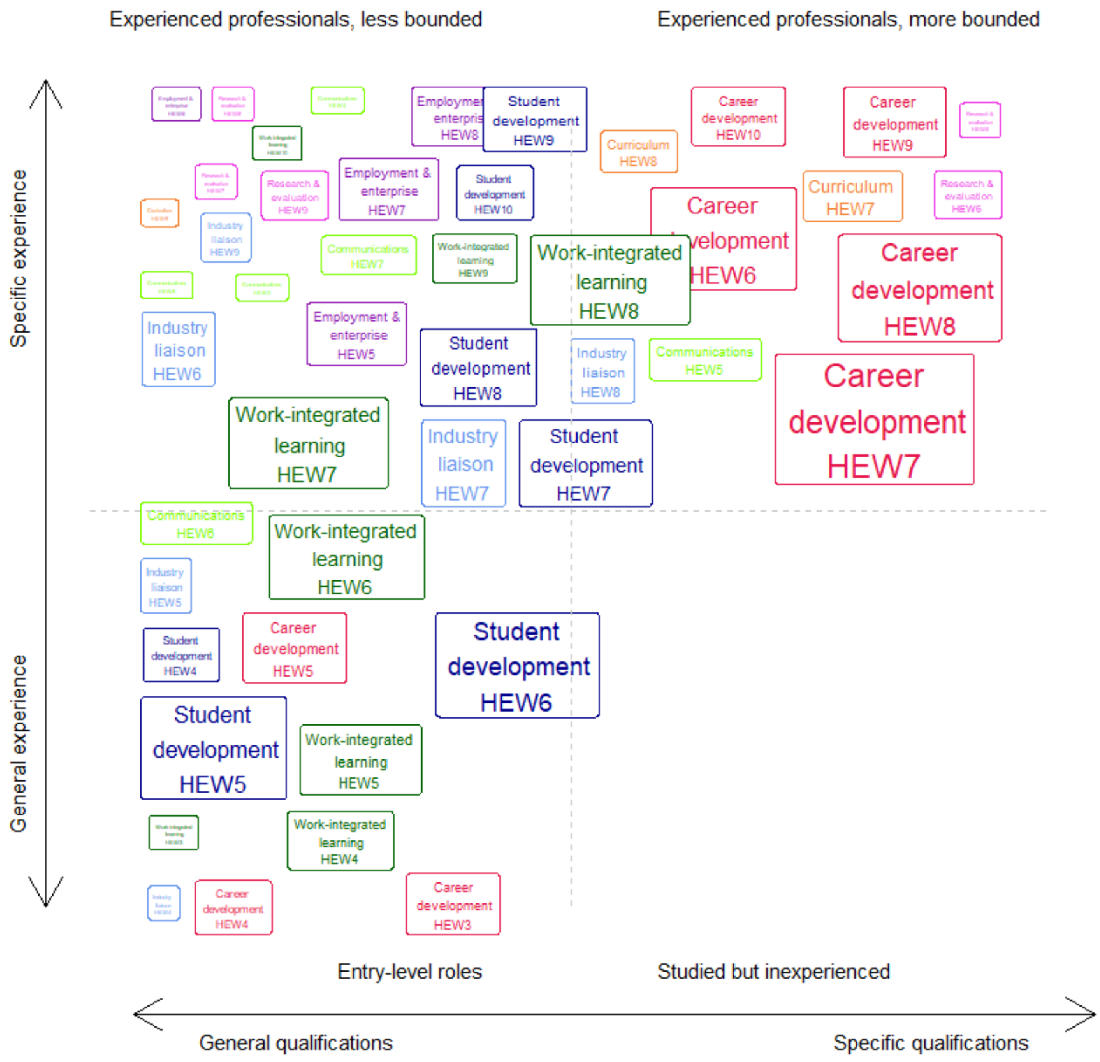

Figure 2. Specificity of required or preferred experience and qualifications.

Our analysis of experience and qualifications as jurisdictional boundary markers (Blok et al. 2019) recalls the boundedness that others have noted in the career development profession (Brown et al. 2019; Hobson et al. 2018; Thambar 2018). Conversely, our analysis shows that for specialisations other than career development and curriculum, requirements for particular credentials are less frequent and more diverse than those seen in career development and curriculum roles. Below, we describe the jurisdictional and organisational characteristics of the various specialty areas in the graduate employability proto-jurisdiction.

Career Development

Career development expertise was a requirement for appointment in the majority of career development roles at levels HEW6 and above, as illustrated in Figure 2. Although careers services hire professionals from specialty areas other than career development, those roles nonetheless operate under the leadership of and within a community of CDPs. Careers services contained a higher proportion of senior career development roles, from HEW8 to 10, than in other organisational units, at 36% and 21% respectively. Eighty one percent of career development leadership roles required career development expertise, often defined as a graduate degree in career development.

Curriculum

Curriculum roles were the only other specialty area where career development expertise was prioritised in job advertisements, with ten roles, five inside and five outside careers services, requiring career development expertise. All curriculum roles also required high levels of specific experience in university teaching or educational design.

Student Development

Student development is the most diverse specialty area, encompassing the broadest range of tasks and functions. It was also one of the most open, with most roles requiring lower levels of specific experience and qualifications, making it an accessible entry point into the professional ecology of employability. When situated in careers services, student development was a subordinate specialisation to career development, with 67% of roles at HEW6 or below, compared to 30% of career development roles.

Work-Integrated Learning

Work-integrated learning roles included two kinds of practice: administration at lower levels and general or leadership at higher levels. Work-integrated learning had the highest proportion of both leadership (32%) and administrative positions (28%) of all specialisations. It is important to note that our analysis does not include academic work-integrated learning roles and so focuses more on supporting tasks and functions than on teaching.

Employment and Enterprise, Industry Liaison, Communications, and Research and Evaluation

Employment and enterprise, industry liaison, communications, and research and evaluation professionals tended to be qualified from their broader professions rather than in higher education employability in particular. As such, these specialities allow lateral entry into the professional ecology of employability at higher levels, after jurisdictional expertise has been earned in other sectors. For the most part, industry liaison roles required experience in business development or stakeholder management; employment and enterprise roles required experience in recruitment or employment services; communications roles required experience in digital

media. Research and evaluation roles where all focused on research for operational purposes, rather than scholarship. Only roles situated in careers services required career development expertise.

It is important to note that the curriculum and research and evaluation specialities are the smallest in our study, in part because such roles are sometimes designated as academic rather than professional roles Therefore, these specialities are less representative of how the respective specialty jurisdictions are organised and resourced more broadly in higher education.

Discussion

Our analysis of job advertisements for roles supporting graduate employability in Australian higher education provides an account of the field as an ecology of professional roles and expertise. We have described eight distinct areas of specialised professional jurisdiction and described differences in how jurisdictional claims are expressed in their associated job descriptions. Our findings support the argument that graduate employability, collectively, is an inchoate proto-jurisdiction consisting of several specialised areas of professional practice, anchored around a common institutional project.

Our findings support suggestions by Whitchurch (2009) and Schneijderberg and Merkator (2013) that the careers and employability proto-jurisdiction is a third space in the higher education workplace. Our findings also reflect a professional community composition that evokes a loosely connected ecology of roles, rather than any one distinct profession. Within the broader employability proto-jurisdiction, CDPs represent a relatively distinct and bounded profession, although one which is becoming more open as it adapts to institutional and societal expectations for greater accessibility of services, integration with academic and professional disciplines, and demonstrable impact. On the other hand, other employability specialisations are more diverse and

more open professional communities. As a whole, the employability proto-jurisdiction in Australian higher education lacks a mature collective model of theoretical and professional principles, which may undermine universities' efforts to provide quality employability support to their students.

CDPs' professional cohesion affords several crucial strengths for the cultivation of career learning environments and provision of quality careers and employability learning: clarity of purpose, commitment to standards of professional practice, and currency in leading career development theory and evidence (Brown et al. 2019; Career Industry Council of Australia 2019; Healy et al. 2020). CDPs also tend to be adaptive and resilient professionals, who have gone through several evolutions of their professional practice yet remain dedicated to excellence in their service to students (Bridgstock et al. 2019; Dey & Cruzvergara 2014). However, if cohesion crystallises into boundedness, some of these same qualities can become an impediment to CDPs contributing their full potential to collaborative, cross-institutional employability strategies. Boundedness may limit their willingness to share jurisdictional claims over certain tasks, functions, and expertise (Brown et al. 2019; Hobson et al. 2018; Thambar 2018). Furthermore, career development leaders may find themselves stuck between bounded staff and less-bounded institutional mandates: struggling to exert influence among collaborators and stakeholders if they do not adapt to broader institutional priorities, but experiencing the challenge of managing the bounded identities of their teams if they do (Thambar 2018). Even if CDPs are oriented toward less bounded ways of working, they may still face challenges in navigating the complex cultures of higher education (Hobson et al. 2018; Thambar 2018).

Employability professionals from outside career development no doubt introduce a diverse range of expertise that enriches the provision of quality careers and employability

learning support to students. The less bounded professional territories that we have described may allow those working in them to more easily traverse intra-institutional third spaces and overlap areas, allowing them to occupy positions of greater influence or enter collaborative relationships more effectively (Schneijderberg and Merkator 2013; Whitchurch 2012). Being more diverse and less bounded than CDPs, they may promote a greater breadth of careers and employability learning across the institution, compared to the relatively narrow reach of the typical careers service. However, given the lack of conceptual cohesion in employability research (Healy et al. 2020), the lack of dedicated credentials and formalised professional networks, and the diversity of roles described in this study, it is difficult to argue that the employability proto-jurisdiction is supported by a mature base of evidence and theory, or by a cohesive model of professional practice. In addition to undermining the cohesion of institutional employability strategies, this gap could also undermine employability professionals' credibility when attempting to collaborate with or influence academics (Little and Green 2021).

Our analysis of employability job advertisements also suggests that, despite much rhetoric about the importance of employability to universities' missions and strategies, universities are not yet adequately resourcing the development of ambitious, integrated careers and employability strategies. We found a very small number of curriculum development and research and evaluation roles, which calls into question universities' claims of comprehensive, evidence-based employability strategies. Employability professionals with research expertise and mindsets, for evaluative and reporting purposes rather than scholarship, are essential for the provision of evidence-based practice, particularly in the age of big data and in response to increasing demands for measurable impact (Winter 2018). Also of concern is the predominance of fixed-term contracts, which calls into question the sustainability of the strategies that staff in those roles are hired to design, implement, and evaluate. Increasingly, graduate employability features as a receipt for

service to funding bodies and a billboard promise from universities to prospective students, but our study does not provide convincing evidence that employability support is resourced as enthusiastically as it is sold.

Toward Career Learning Environments

For the best chances of career success, university students need to develop a range of human, social, cultural, identity, and psychological capitals (Nghia et al. 2020). Few of these forms of capital are developed in a career development consultation or workshop, though that may be where students best learn to recognise and articulate them. Rather, employability is the product of fertile *career learning environments* (Draaisma et al. 2017; Peck 2017), seeded with abundant opportunities for careers and employability learning, work experience, and professional development, within the curriculum and alongside it. Achieving a career learning environment requires universities to empower and equip their staff—professional and academic—to contribute to an institutional mandate of elevating quality careers and employability learning support throughout a student's entire educational journey.

In cultivating career learning environments, CDPs have a role to play in leading institution-wide communities of practice engaged in the design, delivery and evaluation of careers and employability strategies, programs, and services, underpinned by contemporary theory and evidence (Healy et al. 2020). CDPs aiming to maximise their impact ought to continue articulating their value proposition to their institution's connected communities (Dey and Cruzvergara 2014; Peck 2017) and identifying opportunities to collaborate with colleagues across the broader employability proto-jurisdiction. To fully realise this role, CDPs need to consider how and to what degree they maintain the boundaries of their profession and recognise the

contribution that those from other professional specialisations can make to the broader employability project.

Similarly, each of the professional specialisations described in our analysis has its own knowledge and insight to contribute to career learning environments. In addition, many of the professionals among them will have high degrees of the kinds of institutional knowledge and influence that are so crucial for success in third space environments. Employability professionals from all specialisations have their own leadership roles to play in the employability proto-jurisdiction, but should also recognise that in higher education, influence and credibility tends to be built on foundations of evidence, theory, pedagogy and professional practice. Given the constraints on influence often experienced by higher education professionals, it is essential that university leadership provide the kinds of systems and promote the kinds of cultures that will allow the employability professional ecology to mature in this way.

We are not arguing for professionalisation or occupational closure of the employability proto-jurisdiction, with the establishment of stricter boundaries around the professional community. Nor are we suggesting that all employability professionals should be educated and enculturated as CDPs. In the ambiguous and ever changing professional ecologies of higher education third spaces, “openness provides strength” (Abbott 2005, p. 878). Graduate employability is a multifaceted psycho-social process of learning and development (Healy et al. 2020), and it requires a multifaceted ecology of professional and academic to support it.

We have pointed toward the North American HESA model as an example how a proto-jurisdictional professional ecology may be yoked together to better service a common cause. The HESA model simultaneously recognises differences between professional roles while uniting them under guiding principles that emphasise coordinated service to *the whole student*, from

application through to graduation. Consequently, roles and functions are conceived and organised to support students' growth and success throughout their higher education journey (Fernandez et al. 2017; NASPA 2020). In addition to providing specialised services, HESA professionals serve as career influencers (Ho 2019) across a broad spectrum; from student recruitment coordinators helping prospective students with program selection to align with their career goals and curiosities, to alumni engagement officers facilitating workshops on career success for graduates (Peck 2017). If the Australian higher education employability community is to evolve beyond its current inchoate and incohesive state, the HESA professional model may provide some inspiration and a blueprint for strategic efforts toward greater professional cohesion.

Conclusion

This article contributes the first detailed account of the professional practice of employability in higher education. We have provided an inclusive sketch of the ecology of the employability proto-jurisdiction in Australian higher education and described the constituent professional specialties at work among it. This study describes a replicable method of data collection and analysis which may present an opportunity for comparative studies on employability professional ecologies in other higher education systems around the world. We have also identified HESA as a potentially useful model for greater organization and cohesion for the employability proto-jurisdiction in Australia.

In addition, we have extended Whitchurch's (2012) and Schneijderberg and Merkator's (2013) influential descriptions of higher education professional work with the analogous notions of ecologies of professions (Abbott 2005) and proto-jurisdictions (Blok et al. 2019; Liu 2018). These theories may serve as appropriate models for research into other emerging third space

professions in higher education, such as those clustered around educational technology, widening participation, or community engagement, for example.

Our document analysis of job advertisements has several inherent limitations. Firstly, we have focused only on the Australian context, so further comparative research is needed to consider professional ecologies in other countries. Secondly, we have necessarily taken the advertisements at face value as expressions of jurisdictional expertise. We recognise that actual hiring decisions may not have been based entirely on stated criteria and will be influenced by the available pool of candidates, or that the actual priorities of roles may be different to those stated in the advertisements. Further phenomenographic research is necessary to investigate the actual professional identities and experiences of those who occupy the employability third space. Finally, our study is focused only on professional staff, and therefore does not account for academic staff directly responsible for employability, or indeed the role of all staff at institutions where employability is considered "everybody's business," or for the nature of collaborative relationships that cross the boundaries between professional and academic work.

There should be no doubt that the experienced and dedicated professionals at work in the employability proto-jurisdiction make enormous contributions to students' personal and professional development. As policy and market pressures continue to coalesce around employability, universities will need to devote more resources to offering cohesive, evidence-based, and impactful careers and employability strategies as part of their value proposition to future students, policy and funding bodies, and society in general. Students' employability development will be more effectively, efficiently and sustainably supported if the diverse range of professionals in the employability proto-jurisdiction can come closer together in a more

intentionally collaborative community, cultivating rich career learning environments across the university and throughout the students' educational journeys.

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