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INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES

# navigating the host and home labour markets

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Across the globe, enhancing graduate employability has become crucial to improving human capital by nation states and universities. Within this broader context, international students' employability and employment outcomes have become increasingly important to universities' internationalisation agendas, especially in major destination countries such as Australia, Canada, the US, UK and New Zealand.

Recent reviews provide strong evidence to support the growing emphasis accorded to employment prospect and career goals in international students' decisions about their overseas study (Berquist et al., 2019; Choudaha, 2017; Gribble, 2014). Host universities and countries that can provide sustaining support for international graduate employability, and demonstrate positive employment outcomes for this cohort, will be better positioned on the current competitive education export market. International graduate employability and employment outcomes are regarded not only as a key indicator of destination attractiveness and institutional capacity to achieve both immediate and long-term enrolment goals, but also as institutional commitment to fulfilling their ethical responsibility to international students.

Providing career and employability support for international students beyond graduation is critical but challenging in the current context, where there is an imbalance between institutional resources and the demand for ongoing and extended support beyond graduation for a fast growing number of international students (Tran, Rahimi & Tan, 2019).

The extent to which international returnees' acquisition of foreignness and retention of native-ness is judged as relevant to their chosen occupation and professional adaptation to the home workplaces is crucial to their career development back home.

There has been rising unemployment among not only international graduates in Australia (Blackmore et al., 2014; Chew, 2019; Tran et al., 2019), but also among local graduates and international returnees to their home country (Sharma, 2012). Such increased unemployment among returnees – especially to their home country in Asia – happens in a context characterised by growing graduate unemployment across various Asian countries, leading to UNESCO's (2012) consideration of Asian graduate employability as a pressing issue. Graduate transition to employment is becoming complex and challenging because the structures and demands of labour markets within/between occupations as well as within/between economies are highly differentiated and changing (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2012). International returnees' employability and employment outcomes are subject to how their foreign credentials are valued in their home labour market and how their skills and knowledge fine-tuned during their overseas study are seen as relevant by local employers. This is in addition to factors such as disciplinary knowledge, soft skills, attributes, work experience, foreign language proficiency and professional networks. The extent to which international returnees' acquisition of foreignness and retention of native-ness is judged as relevant to their chosen occupation and professional adaptation to the home workplaces is crucial to their career development back home.

This research digest focuses on international graduates' navigation of the home and host labour markets, including the key factors that facilitate or inhibit their participation in the workforce across these different contexts and the strategies used to gain employment. It proposes key recommendations for practice and further research, and charts a way forward to support international graduate employability and employment outcomes.

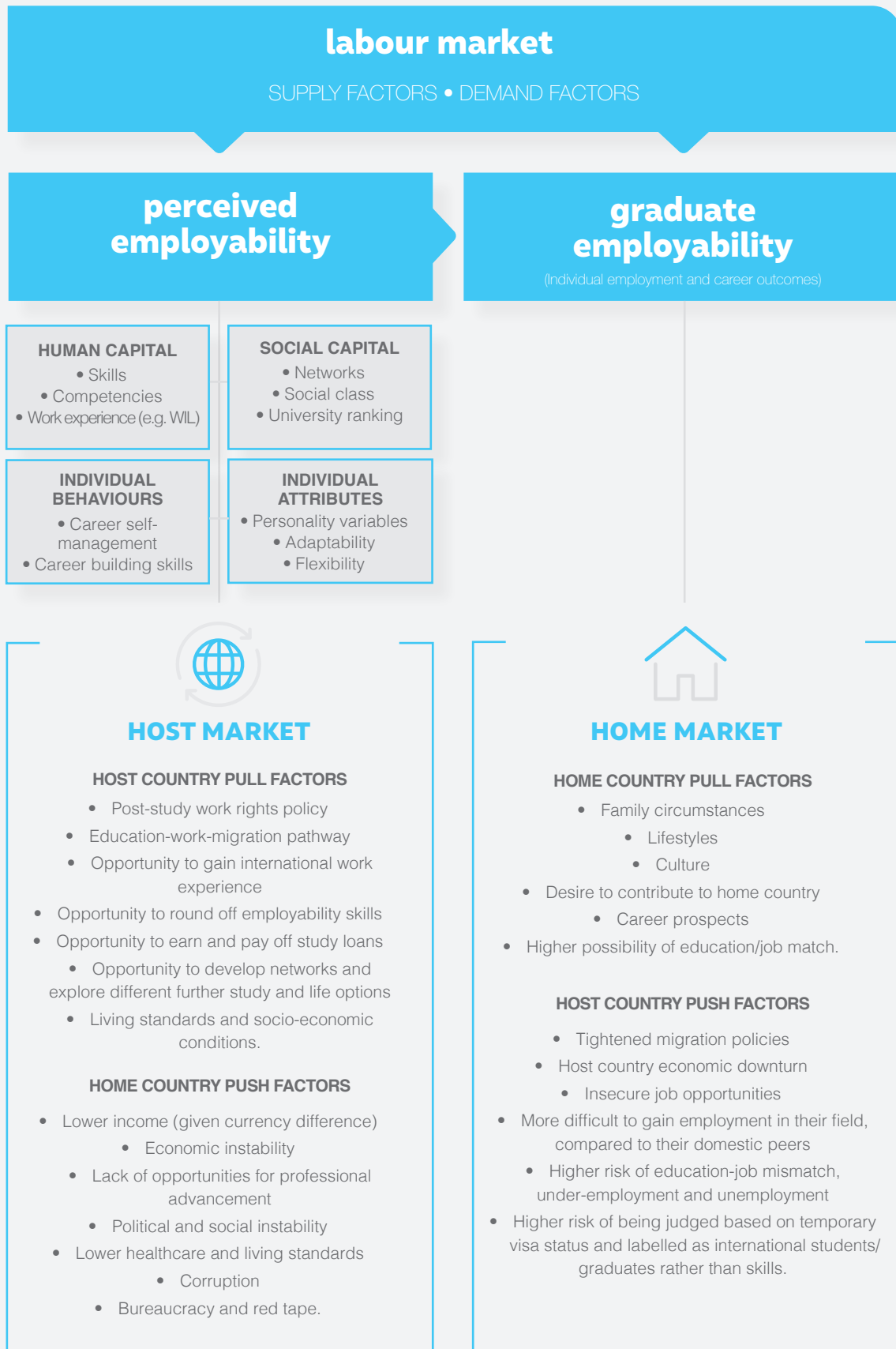
The discussion is underpinned by a framework for international graduate employability and home/host market navigation (Figure 1, p.5). This framework is based on an adaptation of Clarke's (2018) model, with the addition of the push and pull factors influencing international graduates' decision to remain in the host country or return home. Clarke's model outlines four main components of graduate employability:

- human capital
- social capital
- individual behaviours, and
- individual attributes.

It also takes into account how graduate employability is subject to the supply and demand of the labour market. The adapted framework extends these components and identifies the political, socio-economic and policy factors that govern the broader context in which international graduates decide to stay on or return and how they negotiate the labour market.



**Figure 1:** Framework for international graduate employability and home/host market navigation\*



\* Adapted and extended from Clarke, 2018 (p. 9)



# Navigating the host labour market

## Post-study work rights policy and host labour markets

The fast growth of international graduates who stay in the host country as temporary migrants has been associated with the introduction of post-study work rights policies. These policies have been implemented as a primary tool to attract international students across major destination countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and European countries such as Germany, Ireland, Sweden and the Netherlands. The UK has recently announced the return of its two-year post-study work visa policy, expected to apply for international students who commence their study in the UK in the academic year 2020–21 (UKCISA, 2019). The UK policy was originally introduced in 2004 and eliminated by then Home Secretary Theresa May in 2012. The re-introduction of the visa is regarded as a crucial step to allow UK universities to potentially regain their competitive advantage on the education export market.

In Australia, the re-introduction of the temporary graduate visa – often referred to as subclass 485 – by the Gillard government in 2013, was the result of a key recommendation from the Knight Review in 2011. This recommendation stresses that an expanded post-graduation work visa was critical to boost Australia's destination attractiveness. Indeed, our recent study shows that the rate of importance given to the opportunity to acquire work experience in the host country was 74 per cent when deciding on a study destination (Tran et al., 2019).

In a recent report, Berquist et al. (2019) point to a gap between international students' intent to stay and join the market of the host country after graduation and the actual uptake of PSWR. International student surveys often show around 60–80 per cent of them plan to remain and seek employment in the host country, but OECD data indicates a long-term stay rate of only around 25 per cent (Berquist et al., 2019; OECD, 2011). An analysis of compiled visa grants statistics by Ziguras and Joshi shows a take-up rate of approximately 40 per cent of the temporary graduate visa in Australia (cited in Chew, 2019). The actual uptake rate of post-study work rights tends to be higher for international students from countries with a lower GDP per capita, for example the sub-continent countries such as Pakistan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka (ibid).

There are several paradoxes in the way temporary international graduates are positioned in the international education sector, in the host labour market and the wider community. First, they have made significant ongoing contributions to the host country's net income while being international students, and then temporary international graduates. In particular, this cohort accounts for around 0.7 per cent of Australia's labour force and contributes taxes to the Australian economy, but is not entitled to subsidised government services due to their non-citizenship status. In addition, across major destination countries, international graduates are often positioned by the government, education providers and the international education sector as valuable assets to the host economy.

Their extended stay in the host country enabled by PSWR is deemed to provide local businesses and employers with an opportunity to access talented graduates from around the world, who are educated in host institutions (in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and UK, for example) with multilingual and intercultural capabilities, international experiences and transnational knowledge and connections. In Australia, international graduate employability and employment outcomes are accorded growing emphasis and state and territory governments are exploring innovative programs to support international student employability and employment opportunities (Austrade, 2019). However, despite their substantial contributions and being positively positioned by key stakeholders, international students and graduates seem to be perceived in the host labour market as a marginalised, insecure or too complex segment of the workforce (as opposed to valuable resources) – one that many employers do not fully understand or hesitate to recruit.

Second, while this temporary workforce is welcome by a segment of the host society, others in the community see them as posing competition for the local workforce even though research indicates there is little evidence of the negative impact of temporary graduates on the local workforce (Tran et al., 2019).

Despite their substantial contributions and being positively positioned by key stakeholders, international students and graduates seem to be perceived in the host labour market as a marginalised, insecure or too complex segment of the workforce – one that many employers do not fully understand or hesitate to recruit.

International students and graduates might be stereotyped as 'mere PR hunters' who are only interested in gaining permanent residency rather than learning, leading to unfair treatment and marginalisation (Tran & Vu, 2016).

Third, there is a dissonance in international graduates' self-positioning and the way they are positioned by the labour market. Many graduates initially position themselves as having the capacity to acquire their career goals, the potential to gain employment in their respective field and bring benefits to themselves as well as to local businesses. However, they often face considerable barriers (related to both subjective and structural factors) in their endeavour to seek relevant employment and achieve their career goals in the host labour market.

Fourth, international students and graduates are often positioned as a cosmopolitan mobile group who can enjoy 'flexible citizenship' due to their transnational mobility and opportunity to access international education. Yet, the condition of temporality and the sometimes 'forgotten' status while being on temporary visas can lead to the state of being 'inflexible' or 'passive' citizens who desire for 'more flexible citizenship' rather than being 'flexible citizens' (Ong, 1999) themselves.

Finally and importantly, by means of becoming international students and engaging in international education, they are often positioned as having a potential to be adaptable to the new environment. Ironically, the common recruitment practice of drawing on 'best fit' or good 'cultural fit' in the host labour market (Blackmore & Rahimi, 2019) tends to exclude international graduates. The recruitment practice that is based on this principle could position this temporary international segment of the workforce as lacking the 'desirable' characteristics to fit in or adapt to 'our' local workplace.

These paradoxical situations need to be tackled through a coordinated and holistic approach involving different related stakeholders to create a more equal footing for international graduates and allow them to gain a foothold in the host labour market. Conversely, recent research consistently suggests that Australia has yet to tap into this young and highly-educated workforce to deliver benefits to its economy and to related stakeholders, such as local businesses, international trading partners, education providers, local communities and international graduates themselves (Chew, 2019; Tran et al., 2019).

Recent research consistently suggests that Australia has yet to tap into this young and highly-educated workforce to deliver benefits to its economy and to related stakeholders.

Hawthorne indeed refers to the potential contribution of the international student workforce to the host economy as 'productivity premium': "They are far younger than mature migrants selected offshore (typically aged 24 years) and... they face no regulatory barriers, with careers likely to span decades" (Hawthorne, 2018, p.199). How to capitalise on this 'productivity premium' is an urgent and critical question for key stakeholders?





## Challenges facing international graduates in the host labour market

The challenges facing international students and graduates in the host labour market can be related to both subjective factors and structural conditions. However, it is important to situate the issues of international graduate employability, career exploration and employment outcomes in the destination labour market within the broader social, cultural, economic and policy environment of the host country. Existing literature suggests that, for a proportion of international students and graduates, a lack of professional networks, local work experience and language proficiency – as well as the inadequacies in soft skills – can be important factors that can restrict their ability to find a foothold in the labour market (Blackmore et al., 2014, Berquist et al., 2019, Nunes & Arthur, 2013; Tran et al., 2019). These deficiencies can be attributed to subjective or/and structural conditions. These can result from a lack of effort and agency on the part of international students and graduates themselves to hone soft skills and develop work readiness. Alternatively, these issues can stem from a lack of work integrated learning (WIL) opportunities and career development support provided by host institutions.

A study into 16 international students' transition into the workforce in Canada six months after their graduation (Nunes & Arthur, 2013) found that graduates were disadvantaged due to their international status, their lack of professional networks as a form of social capital and work experience as a human capital in Claire's (2018) terms (see figure 1). Extending this finding, our own research on international students in Australia pointed out that being marginalised or excluded with regards to employment opportunities and being treated with less equity in the workplace could be forms of subordination associated with the non-citizenship status of international students/graduates (Tran, 2017).

Being subordinated and judged on their non-citizenship or temporary residency status, rather than their skills and capabilities, in the host labour market can undermine international students' and graduates' confidence in themselves and their aspiration to make a contribution to the host society. Such treatment also shows that international graduates' employment prospects are subject to the culture of the host labour market and the conventional way in which this cohort is positioned, rather than their possession of forms of capital and capabilities.

The structure of the labour market and employers' perceptions or misperceptions are also identified as key barriers to international students' and graduates' access to the host labour market. Across a number of major economies that are also the key destinations of international students, the demand for graduate jobs likely exceeds the supply, making international graduates less likely to be judged on a more equal footing as their domestic peers in the host labour market. Our recent research shows that the temporary status of the international graduate visa can be a source of concern, ambiguity or insecurity for employers (Tran et al., 2019). In the Australian context, many employers might unconsciously marginalise international graduates through their 'best fit' or 'cultural fit' recruitment practices and lack of awareness of the temporary visa, which almost 92,000 international graduates have held. They may prefer those with permanent residency or citizenship, or be pushed back by the misperception that the paperwork involved in recruiting this cohort is complex or sponsorship is needed (Blackmore et al., 2014; Tran et al., 2019).

Research into international students' employment exploration and job application shows that the lack of information and resources from career support services is one of the key factors hampering their success in acquiring work experience in the US labour market (Sangganjanavanich, Lenz & Cavazos, 2011). The situation is more challenging for international students beyond graduation because not all education providers are able or committed to providing extended employment support.

Evidence from our research shows there is a mismatch between international graduates' demand for accessing continuing career support beyond graduation, the desire for institutional staff to provide such extended support and the availability of resources (Tran et al., 2019). We therefore call for more urgent investment from related stakeholders and education providers on their institutional career and employability support services so that these are sufficiently resourced to respond to the needs of international students following graduation, especially those who temporarily stay in the host country on a non-citizenship status. Such continuing support is critical to ensuring not only delivery on promise, long-term international recruitment goals but importantly the positive experience of international students beyond graduation.

## Strategies to gain a foothold in the host labour market

International graduates who stay in the destination country on a temporary visa are often determined to find their feet in the host labour market. They exercise various forms of agency to overcome the structural barriers and achieve their career goals. As Robertson and Runganaikaloo (2014) argue, despite the positions of vulnerability, temporary migrants "find ways to strategize and cope as their desires for mobility, flexibility and capital interact with the desires of the state" (p.223).

A Canadian study that followed international students six months post-graduation found that four out of their 16 international student participants secured a foothold in the host labour market with two in part-time and two in full-time employment (Nunes & Arthur, 2013). The key strategies used by these four international graduates to find work in their field are reviewing job advertisement websites and seeking advice from their locally formed professional networks, including mentors or members in their occupational field (ibid).

Another related study exploring the transitional experiences of 10 Chinese international students in New Zealand echoed the value of local professional connections in facilitating their access to the host local market (Dyer & Lu, 2010). The study also reinforces Tran et al's (2019) finding that securing permanent residency gives international graduates more of a chance to land a job in their chosen profession in the host labour market.

Our recent study shows the following common strategies international graduates draw on to get a 'foot in the door' in the host labour market (Tran et al, 2019, p. 7):

- explicitly explaining their work rights to prospective employers
- being persistent and demonstrating to employers their willingness to work and their interest in the job
- targeting small businesses and their own universities
- using diversified and alternative job search channels such as Gumtree, Indeed or Glassdoor instead of seek.com.au or career.com.au
- vigorously applying for jobs and being willing to accept entry level jobs/lower pay
- reskilling
- being resilient by taking smaller steps and constantly striving to develop employability capabilities
- self-sourcing or seeking internships by undertaking a Professional Year
- networking and strategically using networks
- developing local professional and social connections and increasing local cultural and social understandings
- creating jobs for themselves and their international peers.



# Navigating the home labour market

## Home labour market and employment opportunities

The substantial trend of international graduates returning home, coupled with an increase in high quality local graduates, has resulted in a growing competition in the home labour market (*ICEF Monitor*, 2018). In the early days, international graduates were often positioned as a high-skilled workforce and their possession of an internationally recognised degree was sufficient to secure relevant employment in their home country (Hao and Welch, 2012). This is because an overseas degree, as a form of cultural capital has high exchange value and is expected to provide international graduates with a symbolic capital that helps them stand out when navigating the home labour market (Blackmore et al., 2017). However, possessing a foreign degree is no longer seen as a guarantee for employment in their home countries for international student returnees (Cannon, 2000, Hao et al., 2016, Hao and Welch, 2012). The value of such cultural capital is accumulated based on its scarcity (Bourdieu, 1986), and in this increasingly competitive labour market it is no longer scarce.

The competitive gap between domestic and international graduates in the home country was even found the reserve, meaning that local graduates are more competitive than returning international graduates. Some research identifies a competitive advantage for local graduates compared to returning international graduates (Redden, 2019). The author reported, on average, job applicants among Chinese international graduates from the US are 18 per cent less likely to receive call-back than domestic graduates. However, this phenomenon does not mean that international graduates aren't as capable as their local counterparts. Rather, it shows that employers often assume that US-trained graduates often require a higher salary, enjoy more employment options and will be more challenging to hire and retain (Chen, 2019). Despite the increased challenges international graduates encounter when looking for a job back home, there are still positive employment opportunities for them as the demand for overseas graduates remains high. This is especially applicable to those who seek to accumulate multiple skills, competencies, and work experience as human capital as well as develop their professional and social networks as social capital (see Figure 1). These candidates create their own competitive advantage, as added value to their internationally recognised degree (Xinying and Zhou, 2016), that may help increase their employment prospects.

## Challenges associated with navigating the home labour market

There are various motivations for international graduates – who are often referred to as ‘sea turtles’ – heading home. Pull factors for highly qualified returnees include: professional opportunities, family circumstances, lifestyle and culture (Harvey, 2009); the home country’s booming economy and low cost of living (Bathke, 2018); and graduates’ desire to contribute to their home country (Ghimire and Maharjan, 2015). In addition, shortened economic gaps between host and home nations, economic downturn and insecure job opportunities in host countries have been observed as push factors for the returning home trend (Zakaria and Gabriela, 2014). Changes in migration policies which tighten or break the education-migration nexus, which refers to a direct pathway from study to migration, in destination countries like Australia is also a critical push factor influencing international graduates’ decision to return home (see Figure 1). Zweig and Ge (2018) posited that whether returnees achieve a high income and are happy with their life after relocation depends on their study major, overseas work experience and their motivations for returning home. For example, those returning home primarily because of family ties are often found to struggle with low salaries, job and life dissatisfaction, and spend prolonged time searching for a job. On the contrary, returnees motivated by opportunity enhancement and cultural and emotional reasons are found to be satisfied with their life back home (Zweig & Ge, 2018).

Trice and Yoo (2007) revealed that while 77 per cent of their survey participants had an intention to return home after graduation, only 32 per cent actually prepare for an immediate re-entry to China following their study completion. Although the majority of Chinese international students are aware that the recruitment season takes place one year in advance of their graduation, many of them are not able to start their job search on time due to their demanding study schedule or their intention to find employment in the host country (GUCCU, 2018).

In addition, being away from the domestic labour market is another barrier preventing international students from applying for local jobs from abroad. For example, the majority of Chinese international students only intensively commence their job search after graduation, as there might be requirements for face-to-face interviews or internship placements with prospective employers as part of the recruitment process that they cannot attend remotely (Xinying & Zhou, 2016).

Career counselling for international students should be tailored to meet their different needs and career orientations, depending on whether they stay in the host country, return home or relocate to a third country.

Upon their negotiation of access to the home labour market, international graduates are often reported to lack job seeking skills including writing a CV that is locally contextualised, and have limited interview experience (GUCCU, 2018). To address these challenges, some host universities provide international students with career counselling services as an intervention measure that helps guide the students in their career planning and future career options (Shih and Brown, 2000). However, international students often reportedly hesitate to seek professional help due to language barriers, discrepancy in cultural values and norm, and less experience in looking for counselling services (Crockett and Hays, 2011). In addition, there is a mismatch between services provided and the needs of international students. Research in the US context found that students’ negative perception about career counselling and limited service provision are among the causes of their underuse of these services (Shen and Herr, 2004). Thus, career counselling for international students should be tailored to meet their different needs and career orientations, depending on whether they stay in the host country, return home or relocate to a third country.

In today's ever changing and increasingly complex work environment, career development and career counselling have become an ongoing task rather than a one-off event. Career counselling should assist students with developing a career mind-set that is resilient and that can cope with the ever-accelerating changes in the world of work (Hite and McDonald, 2012).

A lack of information about their home country is another challenge for student returnees. Many of them only know top leading employers and industries that offer the greatest pay, but are uncertain about what they want to do and what they are suitable for (GUCCU, 2019). Likewise, in evaluating employment alternatives, they are reported to have low self-awareness and unrealistic expectations about salary and promotion as they still consider their overseas qualifications to be distinctive, and therefore struggle to balance between their investment in an overseas qualification and return on investment when they are back home (Hao and Welch, 2012). This is because the conversion from cultural capital to economic capital is a process involving the individual's investment of time and effort and in some cases it appears to be less profitable than expected (Bourdieu, 1986). International graduates have also been reported to have little understanding of the home recruitment process (GUCCU, 2018). That is, in the US as an individualist culture, job hunters often rely on individual search behaviours to gather information. On the other than, the Chinese job market can be driven by collective culture, people are inclined to rely on family and friend networks to secure employment (Song & Werbel, 2007).

Losing the connections with their home labour market is another disadvantage for international returnees. While domestic graduates often enjoy access to prospective employers facilitated by their local institutions' strong links with local employers, the connection between host institutions and employers in international graduate returnees' home country is often weaker (Chen, 2019), which contributes to international graduates' low social capital when navigating the home labour market.

Although there are a growing number of Chinese enterprises accessing overseas university campuses for overseas talent recruitment (GUCCU, 2018), home employers find recruiting international graduates in the US expensive and difficult as they have little experience of recruiting graduates from abroad as well as limited knowledge about US education (Chen, 2019). They may select job applicants primarily based on university world ranking, which may lead to overlooking candidates from universities that might be relevant to job vacancies (GUCCU, 2019).

Students returning home not only experience the transition from education to employment, but also from host to home environment. They have to culturally adjust to fit in their home country environment as part of their navigation of the home labour market. Returning students are often reported to experience reverse culture shock back home after a certain period of studying abroad (Presbitero, 2016). One of the causes of reverse culture shock is their unpreparedness for the journey back and unreadiness to readjust to their home country (Thompson and Christofi, 2006). In addition to personal life adjustments, adjusting work expectations and work life is another challenge associated with students' home relocation (Gill, 2010): they are often reported to struggle with re-entry, difficulties with work relationships and with the development of professional networks (Cannon, 2000). In a study of Singaporean returnees, Robertson et al. (2011) revealed that those who are not able to immediately secure a job when first returning to Singapore experience a period of readjustment of their career expectations. This includes changing career pathways within their broad field or taking a part-time or casual job while waiting for their preferred one.

In addition, our own research on international Chinese and Indian graduate returnees reveal that while they are often reported to possess good communication and presentation skills and a 'big picture' perspective, employers see them often lacking the willingness to work under pressure and the "competitive spirit" needed to engage in some home markets (Blackmore, Tran & Rahimi, 2018).

Different working culture and systems often hinder returnees from employing the knowledge they gained abroad in their daily work. For example, returnees to Vietnam found that rigid working systems in their home country often prevent them from making changes or improvements at work (Pham and Saito, 2019). Similarly, Pham (2017) posited that Western cultural acquisition during students' overseas time is not always a key to success for Asian returnees when home and host cultures are so distinctive.

For example, new ideas or innovations are not always welcome by experienced managers at home, who are often reluctant about change because they are afraid of losing their current power due to changes in the system (Pham, 2017).

In short, international graduates' navigation of their home labour market is an interactive process between returnees as individuals and the home labour market as an environment, and is a process of capital accumulation and conversion.

In short, international graduates' navigation of their home labour market is an interactive process between returnees as individuals and the home labour market as an environment, and is a process of capital accumulation and conversion. While international graduates enjoy the multiple advantages of being trained in an international education system and being exposed to transnational experiences, there are challenges associated with moving back home that need to be tackled for a successful return.



## Strategies to navigate the home labour market

In preparation for a transition from education to employment, international students and education providers have employed different strategies to improve the students' cultural and social capital. These include embedding a capstone subject in training curricula (Lee and Loton, 2019), soft skills training including communication, adaptability of change, teamwork and result orientation (Succi and Canovi, 2019), internships, placements, part-time employment, extracurricular activities, professional association memberships and community engagement (Kinash et al., 2016). In addition, institutional career services also prepare students with job-seeking skills including writing application letters and CVs, and job interview training and practice, as well as organising networking and industry events to improve graduates' employability prospect (Kinash et al., 2016).

Our own research and others (e.g. Blackmore, Tran & Rahimi, 2018, GUCCU, 2018, GUCCU, 2019, Butcher, 2002, Pham and Saito, 2019, MBA Crystal Ball, 2018) have also documented the following strategies international graduates often employ in navigating their home market:

- Planning ahead. For example, 60 per cent of Chinese overseas students start planning for job navigation six months ahead of their graduation (GUCCU, 2019)
- Attending returning preparation programs at host universities
- Maintaining contacts with friends and family back home
- Expanding their contacts using social media and reaching out to human resources departments and managers of targeted employers
- Reading news, searching information and updating themselves with demands and characteristics of their professional field and labour market in their home country
- Reaching out to alumni chapters and using their alumni support services
- Actively searching for employment opportunities in their home country using different job search channels including overseas-oriented recruitment sites, campus career support centres, on campus recruitment fairs, social media and friend referral
- Culturally and psychologically adjusting to their home country after their return
- Managing their employment expectations including salary and career promotion
- In countries where international qualifications are perceived to be 'different' and preventing international graduates from integrating, they often hide their international education background to facilitate their belonging to local communities
- Gradually changing themselves to fit the local environment by behaving in appropriate ways to the home context.

# Conclusions and recommendations

This research digest responds to a critical need to have nuanced understandings about the key constraints and opportunities for international graduates to participate in the workforce across the home and host contexts, as well as strategies used to gain employment. Although navigating the labour market for international graduates often involves similar steps – including job

search, alternative evaluation and employment outcomes, which are influenced by the interaction between them as an individual and the labour market as an environment – their capital accumulation and conversion between home and host markets is different. These differences are summarised in the table below.

**Table 1: Comparison of international graduates' navigation of host and home labour markets**

HOST MARKET	HOME MARKET
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host country qualifications do not provide a distinctive advantage for international graduates when navigating host labour market.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overseas qualifications are still regarded distinctive across a number of home labour markets, which helps returnees stand out when navigating their home market.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International graduates' English proficiency is seen as a competitive disadvantage as they possess lower levels of this cultural capital compared to local students. Multilingual capability should be seen as a valuable asset to local businesses but is currently not fully recognised and sought after by many employers in the host labour market.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal levels of English proficiency to those of international graduates who stay in the host country are seen as cultural capital, which provides international graduates with a marker of distinction.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-cultural adjustment starts when international students first arrive in the host country and is an ongoing process during the students' overseas study. If international graduates exercise agency, by the time they graduate they have accumulated a certain amount of cultural and social capital. Therefore, their cross-cultural adjustment is often a continuous and on-going process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International graduates experience a re-acculturation process which may involve culture shock and require time and effort to adjust to the home environment. This re-adjustment when re-entering the home labour market significantly affects returnees' labour market navigation.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment practices in the host labour market might filter international graduates' eligibility for the job initially based on their visa status and the temporality of their post-study work visa might be a disadvantage for this cohort.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Returnees are unlikely to have such problems.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The employment expectations of international graduates are often more modest (e.g. acquiring any form of work experience, gaining a foothold in their field of study, have some income and settling in the host country).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International returnees are often seen to have high expectations including high salary and promotion as an immediate conversion from cultural (credentials) to economic capital.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher risk of qualification-job mismatch, under-employment and under-payment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More likely to achieve education-job match.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International graduates may possess social capital accumulated during their stay in the host country which could be beneficial when they navigate the labour market.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Losing home connections and networks due to their overseas stay can translate into low social capital when returnees navigate the home labour market.</li> </ul>



# Recommendations for practice

Stakeholders involved with international students and employability including education providers, communities and practitioners should provide international students and graduates with a holistic and sustaining support mechanism to assist with the development of employability. Support programs to enhance international graduate employability can include a range of activities from the outset of a student's course and vary across different contexts, but the following key issues should be considered:

## 1. Curriculum design to enhance graduate employability

- A coherent and structured approach to integrating the development of graduate employability into the curriculum is needed.
- Graduate employability activities should be embedded into the curriculum, starting from the first year rather than being ad-hoc or fragmented additions towards the end of a student's course.
- In particular, generic/soft skills development should be integrated into course design, development, delivery and outcomes (Tran, Ngo & Nguyen, 2018).
- The curriculum, pedagogy and assessment should be designed with greater emphasis on the development of students' ability to learn how to learn, to be flexible and adaptable and to apply knowledge and theories into real life and work situations. (Tran et al., 2014)
- Embedding a capstone subject, with strong focus on building work readiness and connections with the professional field, is encouraged.
- Developing and strengthening work-integrated learning programs to assist international students in integrating academic and work-related activities, contributing to the students' successful transition from education to work.



## 2. Career counselling services provision

- It is crucial to organise workshops about preparation of CVs, application letters and job interviews and to create a community of sustainable support. This should involve institutional career support services, as well as support from peers (local and international), alumni, local communities and relevant professional bodies.
- It is important for career counselling to assist students to develop capabilities to learn how to openly engage in continuous learning (Tran, et al, 2014). Students should also be encouraged to develop a career mind-set that is resilient and that can cope with the ever-accelerating changes in the world of work (Hite and McDonald, 2012).
- Customising career support services including providing international students with an ongoing update on host and home labour market trends, employer expectations, and opportunities and challenges so they will be able to successfully navigate the labour market and manage their employment expectations.
- It is important to not only provide extra-curriculum activities and volunteer activities, but to assist students to articulate and translate what they have learnt through these activities into employability skills.
- It is crucial to educate international students to develop their professional portfolio from the first year and throughout their program of study where they pay attention to not only building up but also evidencing different forms of capital, skills, attributes and experiences (Tran et al., 2018).



### 3. Network development opportunities

- Providing opportunities for international students to develop professional networks in host and home markets through different projects and programs such as industry link projects and workshops.
- Connecting international students with university alumni networks is of paramount importance, especially for those returning home after graduation
- Creating mentoring programs to provide opportunities for international students to gain advice about their career planning and connect with and learn from mentors about how to enhance employability and be successful in the workplace.



### 4. A coordinated approach to enhancing employability



- Good practice in building partnerships with employers to provide professional experience and enhance employment outcomes for graduates across various institutions, states and countries need to be shared and learnt in a more holistic and coherent manner
- Ensure better promotion of initiatives by the institutional, sectoral, community and state agencies (for example, initiatives by Study Melbourne and Study Queensland)
- Encourage coordinated and concerted efforts among related stakeholders in the international graduate employability space: universities, local businesses government at different levels, federal, state to local councils, industry and community organisations and third-party organisations providing career and graduate employability support.

# Recommendations for further research

There has been a paucity of studies that explore the effect of the institutional and economic contexts in individuals' career exploration (Jiang et al., 2019). In addition, research on how international graduates navigate their host and home labour markets mainly focuses on Chinese graduates. Therefore, the following important areas are recommended for future research:

1. Incorporating macro factors including national and cultural patterns in investigating how international graduates navigate the labour market. It is useful for researchers to draw on an interdisciplinary conceptual framework to situate the research problem in a wider context of the policy discourse, labour market and the culture where graduates navigate employment.
2. Exploring intervention measures that support international graduates as they navigate the host and home labour markets
3. Conducting comparative studies on international graduates' labour market navigation among different student cohorts such as undergraduates and postgraduates, international graduates of different countries of origin, and home and host market navigation
4. Exploring the interaction between government policies such as migration, talent acquisition, post-study work rights and international graduate employment outcomes
5. Analysing different support structures at the institutional, community, sectoral and governmental levels for enhancing international graduate employability.

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