Curtin Uni research finds first-in-family graduates need job market support

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Higher Education Reporter
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First in family graduates can struggle to find jobs and would benefit from support from their university.

Students who are the first in their families to attend university would be helped by contact with the institution even after they graduate, a new study has found.

More first-in-family graduates reported difficulty finding jobs than those who were second or third-generation graduates and were more likely to be underemployed or to be working jobs outside their area of study.

“University equity and outreach providers should ensure that the ‘transition out’ phase of the student life cycle is as supported and scaffolded as the ‘transition in’,” said study author Sarah O’Shea, from Curtin University’s National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education.

“This support could be provided across diverse mediums, including social media, and timed to critical stages in the post-graduation journey.”

The report, Mind the Gap! Exploring the Post-Graduation Outcomes and Employment Mobility of Individuals Who are First in Their Family to Complete a University Degree, was a collaboration with La Trobe University’s Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research.
“Many of the alumni and recent graduates experienced limited employment prospects which they often attributed to differences in social and academic identity or a perceived inability to ‘fit in’ with organisational cultures,” Professor O’Shea said.

More work could be done with students while they were still at university to ensure they had realistic post-graduation expectations and to help them compare the different prospective study and career pathways.

A better understanding of graduate trajectories and labour market conditions could be derived from refining data from the Australian Graduate Outcomes Survey.

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Jill Rowbotham is The Australian’s higher education journalist. Previous roles on the newspaper include bureau chief in Perth and Sydney, Opinion and Media editor and deputy editor of The Weekend Australian Mag... Read more