How Successfully Do We Educate Tourism, Hospitality, and Events Graduates?

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ABSTRACT

This study examines perceptions of university-level tourism, hospitality and events (THE) graduates with regards to whether the degree prepared them for a successful career. "Success" is a highly nuanced term that can be interpreted narrowly as producing job ready graduates or more broadly as producing graduates who have a quality and enjoyable education that equips them with a desire for lifelong learning, a positive value set, and the skills to develop their careers in a dynamic work environment. Listening to the graduates' voices reveals that a successful educational experience involves far more than making them job ready and instead involves creating passionate future employees who want the chance for personal development and who feel valued in the workplace. However, some issues did arise relating to a relatively high attrition rate from the sector and concern over the degree of practical training provided. The study findings help inform curriculum of programmes.

KEYWORDS

Tourism; hospitality, and events; career success; university

Introduction

How successfully do university tourism, hospitality, and events (THE) providers educate their undergraduate and postgraduate students? That is a difficult question to answer, for the idea of "success" has many dimensions (York et al., 2015). Especially in our field, an ongoing debate about success has focussed on how to balance both education in the classic sense of whole person development with more prosaic training needs that will equip graduates with the necessary skills demanded by industry (Airey & Johnson, 1999; Inui et al., 2006; Mungai et al., 2021; Weiermair & Bieger, 2005). In addition, since many graduates may not choose to work in this sector, it is essential that they are provided with transferable skills (Hsu, 2018). The post-COVID -19 resurgence of tourism has resulted in labor shortages (AusTrade, 2022), while THE students need to adapt to a more volatile job market. In this context, it is timely to explore how successful THE higher education programs have been and how they can best prepare future graduates for work and life. One way to assess how success-fully graduates feel their education has been is to hear from them directly. This study reports on a survey of undergraduate and postgraduate alumni from three of Australia's leading THE education providers. Of 43 universities in Australia, nine offer THE degree programs at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Study Australia, 2022). QS World University ranks the three universities in this study, Griffith University, the University of Queensland, and James Cook University, as the top three Australian providers in the field of hospitality and leisure management fields (QS, 2022). Graduates were surveyed on a wide array of issues during (southern) autumn 2022.

Success

Successful tertiary education is an ambiguous concept where different definitions of success may jostle uncomfortably with each other, resulting in the need to cast the net widely when considering the notion (O'Shea & Delahunty, 2019). York et al.'s (2015) meta-analysis of the prevailing literature highlights the complexities involved by concluding success is defined by a combination of academic

achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, attainment of educational outcomes and post-college performance. Kroger (2016) complements this list by identifying a range of additional personal characteristics, including developing character, self-definition and the pursuit of rich experiences. He, Paris (2011) and others also highlight the importance of preparing students for a dynamic future working environment and the need to foster lifelong learning.

Teichler (2007) suggests three criteria reflect "suc-cess." The first is how smoothly the transition occurs between higher education and the work world. The second is employment which relates to salary, job security, full time work, etc., while the third focusses on work, which is different from employment, for it assesses features such as the job being interesting, challenging and producing career prospects. In many ways, these last two dimensions relate to the idea of career anchors. McGuire et al. (2017) identified three domains of career anchors, including talent-based (management competence, technical or functional competence, entrepreneurial activity), need-based (security and stability, autonomy, independence and lifestyle), and value-based (challenge and dedication to a cause). Chang and Busser (2020) add psychological fulfillment and the ability to thrive at work, while Liu et al. (2021) note personal attitudes, having realistic and achievable goals, as well as pragmatic expectations relating to income, working environment, and societal reputation also play a role.

Certainly, the traditional means of judging success as student retention and grades is far too limiting (Bowden et al., 2021). Within the field, Lewis-Cameron (2015) argues the goal of education should be to create lifelong learning skills that will foster the student's intellectual development and will be useful for any job now and in the future. Inui et al. (2006) and Mungai et al. (2021) add that the nature and purpose of tourism management degrees is the curriculum's relevance to meet both the students' expectations and needs of the tourism industry. Chathoth and Sharma (2007) take a more industry focussed perspective by arguing the success of educational programs lies in the ability to produce graduates who are able to contribute toward the industry's growth and development by being part of the "knowledge worker" work-force. Lyons (2010) adds that most programmes do not prepare students well for professional career mobility.

THE graduates may have different impressions of what they feel is success. Past graduate surveys, for example, noted the importance of having a degree, regardless of the specialization (McKercher et al., 1995) and often cited the importance of generic busi-ness management or marketing skills as playing a key role in their career development (King et al., 2003). These two studies also revealed students value having a variety of subject options, enabling them to tailor their studies to their interests. Other studies have illustrated the importance of a positive workplace or placement experience (Chuang et al., 2007), soft skill development (Hsu, 2018) and transferable skills (Petrova & Mason, 2004).

This latter issue is especially important since the attrition rate is high. O'Leary and Deegan (2005), for example, found only about half of the Irish tourism and hospitality management graduates were working in the industry, while Costa et al. (2013) determined that a high percentage of Portuguese tourism graduates had left the sector. This issue is relevant in an Australian context as well (King et al., 2003; Whitelaw et al., 2015). The reasons are manifest, and can be categorized as follows: job nature, industry factors, organizational factors, and personal factors (Choy & Kamoche, 2021). Employment typically commences with low paid, entry level positions (Whitelaw et al., 2015), that create barriers to rapid advancement in the field (Costa et al., 2013). Tourism and hospitality work is a demanding emotional labor, which may lead to a sense of accomplishment, but may also result in burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or reduced sense of per-sonal achievement (Pabel et al., 2022). Working conditions, poor training, challenging supervisor-subordinate relations, unsuitable or unsocial hours, poor advancement prospects, especially in family-owned businesses and a challenge of achieving work/life balance are among other reasons for leaving the sector (Choy & Kamoche, 2021; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005). These issues remain relevant in the post-pandemic world

with the additional consideration of health and hygiene standards of the employer (Guo & Ayoun, 2022).

There are other influences on staff turnover in THE sector. Rasheed et al. (2020) suggest a negative relationship between career adaptability and turnover intentions and the mediating role of orientation toward happiness. Moreover, employee resilience reduces employee intention to leave the job, while abusive supervision moderates the relationship. Kim (2014) notes differences in turnover antecedents between newcomers (recent graduates or those new to travel industry) and veterans (those with previous travel industry experience). A wider range of turnover antecedents was applicable to newcomers. External causes (e.g., employment opportunities at a competitor), career advancement, and compensation applied to both groups. However, newcomers also required organizational support, personnel management and were impacted by job stress and job clarity. Ramirez et al. (2022) suggest employers need to understand the new generation's expectations in the workplace. Based on their study, students value (in order of importance) flexible schedules, compensation and work-life balance. Differences in preferences emerge when personality traits are considered. Moreover, career self-efficacy is an important personal factor in graduate employment (Wang & Tsai, 2014).

Changes in commitment to a career during one's studies represent a further factor that can lead to attrition. Students' experiences in their placements are a key feature, with those having poor experiences being driven from the sector (O'Leary & Deegan, 2005), while those who had positive experiences showing increased commitment to a career in the field (Chuang et al., 2007; Petrova & Mason, 2004). Robinson et al. (2016) find that after an internship, students tend to shift career preferences from hospitality to tourism, thus changing their career preferences and goals within the broad THE sector, but not necessarily changing to an unrelated industry. Those who thrive in that environment are likely to want to stay in the sector, while those who struggle are motivated to leave or not enter in the first place.

Another reason may be the perceived gap between the type of education provided by universities and the more operationally-oriented skills demanded by an industry that is notoriously short staffed (Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009). As an example, the three most important skills Australian employers want from graduates are good oral communication skills, relationship management skills and a strong work ethic while the three skills least in demand are research skills, legal understanding and academic grades (Wang et al., 2009). Kipli et al. (2022) suggest community college rather than university education may best address hospitality industry requirements, such as exposing students to the industry and teaching practical and technical skills. Furthermore, surveys and interviews of LeCordon Bleu graduates suggest that graduates have vocational and instrumentalist orientation which may be helpful to secure employment upon graduation. The liberal aspects of education are more likely to be appreciated later in life (Gross & Manoharan, 2016).

Graduates also appear to have their own sets of priorities when determining if their education has been a success. Chang and Busser (2020) write about the importance of psychological fulfillment and finding a work environment where graduates can thrive. Tolkach and Tung (2019) high-light the importance of multi-skilling, noting that employees not only seek vertical movement up the ranks in their specialization but also in acquiring a diversity of skills enabling them to move horizontally within their career. Others have cited the idea to find some form of acceptable work/life balance, along with a good salary and clear career path and achievable and realistic goals as being important (O'Leary & Deegan, 2005). These issues are especially prescient for women who still face a glass ceiling in many parts of the industry, especially if they take time out to start a family (Liu et al., 2021).

At the same time, THE education has gone through an unplanned large and quick adjustment of the curriculum due to COVID-19 lockdowns (Baker, 2021; Park & Jones, 2021). Thus, this is a timely

study that con-tributes to the discussion on optimal structured for THE programmes in the post-COVID world.

Method

This study reports on part of a larger survey of graduates from the James Cook University, Griffith University, and The University of Queensland, all located in the State of Queensland, Australia. These three universities constitute the major undergraduate and postgraduate degree granting institutions in the State. Each has a history of more than 30 years in THE education. QS (2022) ranks the three universities as leading Australian providers. With the commonality in tourism education history, the similarities in the current curriculum, and the geographic proximity, the graduates of these institutions are likely to share homogenous, rather than heterogenous, traits.

The survey instrument was based on existing literature on tourism education research (King et al., 2003; McKercher et al., 1995; Teichler, 2007; York et al., 2015). The questionnaire consisted of nine major parts that involved a series of closed and open-ended questions canvasing a range of issues. Part 1 sought information on the respondent's most recent qualification, while Parts 2 and 3 gathered information on prior and post-graduation studies respectively, if relevant. Part 4 gathered details on respondents' first full time job after graduation and determined whether the qualification and skills matched the job. Information on the transition from student to employee was also gathered. Part 5 sought additional information on their current job, if it was different from their first job. Section 6 focussed on career development while Part 7 gathered information on their future career aspirations. Part 8 asked a number of questions on graduates' perceptions of their time at university. Finally, Part 9 gathered standard demographic information to assist coding and analysis. The study focusses primarily on Parts 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8.

The survey was disseminated online between April and June, 2022 to graduates who had majored in tour-ism, hospitality, events or related fields at the three institutions. The population was derived from the partner universities' alumni databases, which proved to be quite dated and therefore, not particularly accurate. In total, 174 respondents completed all or part of the sur-vey. This figure includes 109 respondents with a Bachelor's degree (102 Bachelor's degree and 7 Honors degree), 53 with a coursework postgraduate qualification (50 Master's degree and 3 Postgraduate diplomas), and 12 with a PhD degree. As is typical of most THE programs, 70.2% of respondents were female. Because of the outdated alumni databases, the sample is skewed toward recent graduates. Half the respondents (50.6%) graduated in 2016 or later, about one-third (28.2%) graduated between 2010 and 2015, and the remaining 21.3% graduated prior to 2010.

Findings

Table 1 highlights the career development of respondents. About three-quarters of graduates began working in the sector, regardless of the qualification earned. However, a substantial amount of attrition was noted between respondents' first and current job, especially among those with undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. Graduates are highly mobile, as demonstrated by the observation that while most respondents feel they will be working in the same field in the next five years, few feel they will be working in the same job or for the same employer.

Most respondents with postgraduate qualifications, including PhD graduates, feel their careers have developed or are developing in a logical manner. This finding contrasts with the majority of undergraduates who feel their careers are developing in a non-logical or chaotic manner or who are still looking for their careers. One reason is that they have had fewer jobs and employers that undergraduates. In addition, they also report having fewer "careers." Careers were measured with the question "there is a difference between jobs and careers. In your mind, how many "careers" have you had?' Undergraduates, especially those who have shifted away from THE are more likely to have explored different careers than those staying within the sector.

Career instability seems to be an enduring feature of THE graduates, highlighting Lyons (2010) call for the education system to better qualify students for highly mobile careers. As an example, those who graduated prior to 2010 reported a mean of 7.1 jobs since graduation, compared to 3.7 for those who graduated between 2010 and 2015 and 2.1 for those who graduated after 2015. Moreover, few people expect to remain in the same job or stay with the same employer within the next five years, although most express willingness to remain in their current field.

Table 1

Career Development

	Undergraduate (109)	Coursework Postgraduate (53)	PhD (12)
1st job in THE	72.9	72.5	72.7
Current job in THE if not in 1st job	43.6	68.2	60.0
Current job in THE (incl. still in 1st job)	51.4	67.7	80.0
Has your career developed in a logical manner?			
Logical manner	47.8	60.5	90.0
Non-logical or chaotic manner	35.9	25.4	10.0
Still looking for my career	16.3	14.0	
Mean number of full time jobs since graduation	3.7	3.0	3.1
Mean number of employers since graduation	3.8	2.7	2.8
Mean number of 'careers' since graduation	1.6	1.3	1.3
Likelihood of remaining in the same position in 5 years (% probably or definitely)	22.2	18.2	50.0
Likelihood of remaining with the same employer in 5 years (% probably or definitely)	37.5	28.9	50.0
Likelihood of remaining in the same field in the next 5 years (% probably or definitely)	60.1	65.8	90.0

Ideally, programs equip graduates with a range of skills that enable them to secure employment and progress up the career ladder. Table 2 summarizes respondents' opinions about how well their education prepared them for their first and current job. For the most part, the results are encouraging as a large majority of both undergraduate and coursework postgraduate respondents feel their qualification prepared them well for and played some or an important role in securing their first job. In a follow-up open ended questions asking respondents to explain their responses, graduates who said their qualifications played some role, also high-lighted relevant work experience as a significant contributing factor. Under-employment in first jobs seems to be an issue, in general, and especially for people who completed coursework postgraduate qualifications. A small majority of undergraduates felt their first job was suitable for their qualifications, with even fewer feeling it was suitable for their skill levels. By contrast, a majority of post-graduates felt their job was not suitable for their qualifications, again with only a small majority feeling it matched their skills. Neither issue was relevant for the small sample of PhD graduates surveyed.

For the most part the transition to the work-world was relatively smooth. Many found work almost immediately after graduation, with the vast majority taking only a few months to secure full time employment. COVID-19 played a key role in delaying many graduates' entry into the workforce, for fully half of those who graduated in 2019, 2020 or 2021 reported that they faced many months of un- or underemployment or had to look for work outside the sector.

It appears that the qualification remains relevant as graduates' careers develop over time. Most graduates, and especially those who completed a postgraduate qualification felt their THE qualification played some to an essential role in securing their first posts, while a majority of both undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts felt it prepared them for their current jobs. Most also felt their current jobs were suitable to both their qualifications and skill levels.

Table 2

Career Preparation

	Undergraduate	Coursework Postgraduate	PhD
1st job (n)	**78**	**36**	**10**
How well did the THE qualification prepare you for your 1st job?			
% very well or extremely well	39.7	33.3	90.0
% adequately	41.0	61.1	10.0
Importance of THE qualification in securing 1st job after graduation			
% very important or essential	44.9	47.3	80.0
% played some role but other factors were as important	33.3	30.6	10.0
Was the 1st job suitable for your qualifications (% met my qualifications)	60.5	48.6	90.0
Was the 1st job appropriate for my skills (% appropriate for my skills)	52.6	51.4	90.0
Transition between study and employment (%)			
Was already working or secured employment immediately	52.0	47.6	70.0
Took a number of months to secure full time work	32.9	31.4	10.0
Struggled (many part time jobs, unemployment or finding a job in a different field)	15.7	20.0	20.0
Current job if different from 1st job (n)	**55**	**22**	**5**
Importance of THE qualification in securing current job			Cell size too small
% very important or essential	25.4	27.2	
% played some role but other factors were as important	29.1	40.9	
How well did the THE qualification prepare you for your current job?			Cell size too small for meaningful analysis
% very well or extremely well	21.7	36.0	
adequately	56.4	54.5	
Current job suitable for your qualifications (% meets my qualifications)	67.3	63.6	Cell size too small for meaningful analysis

Current job appropriate for my skills (% appropriate for my skills)	74.5	59.1	Cell size too small for meaningful analysis

Respondents were asked to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of their respective programmes of study. The key themes to emerge and the number of responses per theme by level of qualification are summarised in Table 3. The subject offerings, choice of specialisations and quality of teaching were identified most frequently by all cohorts. Respondents commented on the diversity of subjects, the offering of core business management courses, and as one student mentioned the "good balance between practical requirements and theory." Others commented on the development of strategic thinking and critical thinking skills during their course work, as well as "soft skills. Students are well-prepared with useful soft skills, that will help a lot in the real world".

Quality teaching was also appreciated, with one graduate noting "all the teaching staff involved were very enthusiastic and engaged with the students, making it a joyful experience to learn new concepts and do our best in all tasks/assessments." Others noted "the lecturers actually had real world experience and were very knowledgeable" and "good lecturers who for the most part were knowledgeable and interested in sharing that knowledge."

The issue of practicums or work integrated learning proved divisive. Those respondents who had practicums felt they were extremely important to their career development noting they "provided insight into working and what this would be like [on graduation]" offered "great opportunity to gain industry experience" and how "having an internship as part of course credit helped with the barrier of not being able to sacrifice paid work." Most universities have since dropped their practicum requirement which led to a great deal of dissatisfaction among more recent graduates. Respondents felt "more internships relevant to the event industry" would be beneficial," as well as such comments such as "more hands on experience would have been great" and how the "opportunity for work experience would be valuable."

Another limitation cited in programmes related to the fact that many subjects were too theoretical or lacked real world application. Respondents called for "more practical input" into subjects, noting "the outside world requires practical experience and this should have been integrated more." They also wanted more "real world applications - I felt many of my subjects didn't include real world applications to learn from."

Table 3

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Programme

Programme strengths		
Undergraduate (65)	**Coursework Postgraduate (30)**	**PhD (9)**
Subject offerings and/or specialisations (48)	Subject offerings and/or specialisations (30)	Quality of teaching / teachers (7)
Quality of teaching / teachers (33)	Quality of teaching / teachers (8)	Subject offerings and/or specialisations (6)
Practicum or equivalent (21)	Quality of the University or programme (7)	Fellow students (4)
Opportunity for exchange (7)	Practicum or equivalent (4)	Resources (2)
Fellow students (7)	Fellow students / alumni (3)	Recognised degree or university (1)

Quality of the University or programme (5)		
Resources (4)		
Programme weaknesses		
Undergraduate (58)	**Coursework Postgraduate (31)**	**PhD (7)**
No practicum or internship (31)	No internship or practicum (16)	Resources (3)
Subjects too theoretical (14)	No mentors (12)	No mentor (2)
No real world application (13)	Comments on specific subjects (7)	Bad lecturers/ bad teaching (2)
Lack of mentors (12)	Bad lecturers / bad teaching (6)	No real world application (2)
Limited variety of subjects / electives (11)	Too theoretical (6)	
Comments on specific subjects (10)	Limited variety of subjects / electives (5)	
Bad lectures or teachers (8)	No real world application (3)	

In general students were satisfied with their programme of study, as shown in Table 4. A strong majority thought the quality of teaching was between good and excellent, with post graduate respondents feeling their teaching quality was better than undergrads. Likewise most students felt the subject variety was good to excellent, with post grads somewhat less satisfied. Some students, though, were dissatisfied with the quality of teaching staff, with tutors, in particular being singled out. As a general comment, one person stated "tutors and lecturers need more real life experience. Some of them are too academic that their knowledge and concept is out of date." Another mentioned "teaching quality [is poor]. A lot of lectures are useless and far below what I expected," while a graduate specifically cited tutors who "didn't seem to care - very impersonal teaching."

On a somewhat sobering note, when asked if they could choose their field of study over again, less than half of undergraduate and coursework post graduate students said they probably or definitely would choose THE again. Whether respondents would choose to do a THE programme if they had their time over depended strongly on what field of work they were in, for two-thirds (66%) of those still working in the industry would probably or definitely choose to study THE, compared to only 28.6% of those not working in the sector.

Those who would remain in the programme offered such comments as "I love this industry and think it's a huge part of our current world. The opportunities in this industry are endless", "the skills learned from this degree are universal. Even though content is relevant as much to me, the concepts and skills are relevant. And "no other field interests me as much as TH&E." By contrast, those who would choose a different field often made quite scathing comments, such as "I would have just picked business management and economics. The tourism degree was a joke and not worth the money" and "choosing to study THE is the biggest mistake of my life! It gave me nothing but anxiety and depression because of the 4 year unemployment I experienced after my graduation. This degree is USELESS!"

Participants were asked to rank the top three attributes in developing their career, from a list of 11 attributes derived from McGuire et al (2017), Changer & Busser's (2020) and Liu et al.'s (2021) career anchors. Table 5 rank orders the frequency with which each attribute was mentioned by the level of qualification completed. For the most part, value-based anchors were ranked as being more important to a successful career than either talent or need based attributed.

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Table 4

Impressions of the programmes (%)

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	Undergraduate (n = 72)	Coursework Postgraduate (33)	PhD (10)
Overall teaching quality			
Very poor to acceptable	25.0	18.2	10.0
Good	51.4	48.5	30.0
Excellent	23.6	33.3	60.0
Subject variety			
Very poor to acceptable	27.8	36.3	20.0
Good	52.8	33.3	50.0
Excellent	19.4	30.3	30.0
Level of practical training			TS
Very poor to poor	40.7	46.6	
OK but nothing outstanding	29.7	20.0	
Good to excellent	29.7	33.3	
Would still study THE if could do degree over (%)			
Probably or definitely would choose THE again	44.5	42.5	70.0
Possibly would choose a different field of study	18.1	27.3	30.0
Definitely or likely would choose a different field of study	37.5	30.4	0.0

Notes: UG: Respondents with an undergraduate degree. PG: Respondents with a coursework postgraduate degree. PhD: Respondents with a PhD degree. TS: Cell size too small for meaningful analysis.

Respondents with an undergraduate degree identified a mix of value-based (working in a place where my contribution is valued, and chance for personal development), need-based (work life balance) and talent based (salary and benefits package) as their four most critical issues. Interestingly, such need based anchors as autonomy and security and talent based attributes as strong promotional opportunities were not as important. The lack of concern about such issues is explained in part by the fact that respondents felt they were highly mobile.

Those with post graduate coursework qualifications highlighted the importance of value-based anchors far more than any other item, for the top three issues identified (personal development, values at in the workplace and a happy workplace) all fell under this thematic domain. Talent based attributes ranked low on the list, while need based attributes ranked as middle order concerns. The small cohort of PhD graduates also identified value-based concerns of wanted to feel valued in the workplace and having a chance to develop personally as being very important. But, they also wanted a degree of security and autonomy, which is proving challenging for many new PhD graduates who are struggling to find permanent employment and long term career prospects.

Table 5

Key Attributes in Developing a Career

Undergraduate (n = 84)	Coursework Postgraduate (39)	PhD (10)
Working in a place where my contribution is valued (44)	Chance for personal development (24)	Working in a place where my contribution is valued (6)
Work / Life balance (40)	Working in a place where my contribution is valued (22)	Chance for personal development (5)
Attractive alary and compensation package (36)	Happy workplace (14)	Stable and secure work environment (4)
Chance for personal development (32)	Attractive alary and compensation package (13)	Autonomy and independence (4)
Happy workplace (24)	Stable and secure work environment (9)	Happy workplace (4)
Stable and secure work environment (19)	Strong promotional opportunities (8)	Strong promotional opportunities (2)
Strong promotional opportunities (16)	Thriving at work (8)	Thriving at work (2)
Autonomy and independence (14)	Work / Life balance (7)	Work / Life balance (2)
Thriving at work (11)	Challenging position (7)	Working in a place with a strong service culture (2)
Challenging position (10)	Autonomy and independence (3)	Challenging position (1)
Working in a place with a strong service culture (8)	Working in a place with a strong service culture (3)	Attractive alary and compensation package (1)

Finally, respondents were asked to give one piece of advice to prospective students. Table 6 highlights the key themes that emerged and also gives some exemplars of typical comments received. Respondents could not emphasise strongly enough the importance of gaining practical experience to accompany their degree. In some cases, they felt it was more important than qualification, while in other instances, it helped set them on a positive career path. Hard work and taking a strategic approach to subject selection emerged as the second most important theme, with advice ranging from ensuring one developed transferable skills to careful selection of elective subjects. These positive comments were balanced somewhat by the third theme, in which respondents suggested student thinks twice about studying THE. Here, respondents observed that a degree was not essential to develop a career in the industry, and instead work experience was more important. Alternately, they suggested getting a general business degree and then if desired, study THE at a post graduate level. The fourth theme related to advice on how to get the most out of your time at university. Here, enjoying, taking advantage of opportunities and getting involved in all activities as a student emerged as common suggestions. The last two more minor themes to emerge related to finding and pursuing your passion and also taking a pragmatic approach to building networks, even as a student.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study asked if university-level THE providers in the state of Queensland, Australia were successful in educating their students. It is acknowledged that 'success' is a highly nuanced term that can be interpreted narrowly as producing job ready graduates or more broadly as producing graduates who had a quality and enjoyable education that equipped them with a desire for lifelong learning, a positive value set and the skills to develop their careers in a dynamic work environment. Ultimately, success can only be defined by the graduates themselves, based on their impressions about how satisfied they are with their education and how well it has equipped them for the future.

For the most part, the three universities in question seem to be successful, regardless of the criteria used. At a pragmatic level, their educational offerings prepare students well for their first jobs, future career progress and facilitate relatively easy transition between study and work, especially if students have gained work experience while studying. Students themselves appreciate the variety of subjects and specialisms on offer and the fact that their education provides them with transferable skills. They also commented on the critical thinking and soft skills developed during their studies and for the most part, feel their education provided them with solid career anchors.

However, some issues did arise, including high attrition rate of graduates who never entered the sector or who left after a few years, the lack of practical skills offered in the programme and the observation that many students would not choose to study THE if they had the opportunity to repeat their education. That some of our graduates do not end up working in the THE sector is not, in itself, a sign of an unsuccessful education. The fact that their education equips them with highly transferable skills that enables them to develop careers in a multitude of sectors is an indication of success. Indeed, it can be argued that if their educational experiences convince them that THE is not a desired field, then, that can be regarded as an acceptable outcome that saves industry and graduates from making poor employment choices.

An issue that needs to be addressed is the perceived relevance of subjects, including and the provision of suitable working experiences for students, to ensure that they are job ready. Placements are a challenging issue for universities as their necessity seems to change over time. Applied universities and vocationally-oriented degree granting institutes see their merits, while traditional universities struggle with balancing applied training and educational needs. Increasingly, though, these universities are reassessing their reluctance to offer placements and are including them more and more for the benefits of relevant work experience help building career contacts, enable network development and providing better access to job markets. Moreover, they provide insights and confidence in future employment, serves as a mode of pre-professional socialisation and emerging identity enhancement, and also helps to build career confidence and goal mapping (Jackson & Tomlinson 2022: 1132).

The fact that many students would not choose to study THE if they had their time over, coupled with the fact that many do not enter the sector after graduation are further issues that require addressing. Here, though, the issue lies more with career guidance offered to high school students who are making naïve choices about their career options. Tourism, hospitality and events seem like glamorous careers to a lot of young people whose only exposure to this world is their own holiday experiences in exotic places. A more realistic understanding of both the very real merits of developing a career in this area balanced against the lifestyle challenges new graduates face would benefit potential students. This sector is not all glamour and glitz. It is hard work that requires passion, dedication and commitment that make a satisfying career as much an avocation as a vocation.

This study identified many of the criteria that relate to the development of effective tourism, hospitality and events programmes that lead to successful outcomes for students. Listening to the graduates' voices reveals that a successful educational experience involves far more than making them job ready and instead involves creating experiences that create passionate employees who want the chance for personal development and who feel valued in the workplace. Our curriculum needs to reflect those values.

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