Supporting (or not) the career development of culturally and linguistically diverse migrants and refugees in universities: insights from Australia

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Abstract

The present study used a mixed-methods approach to understand the challenges faced by Australian higher education institutions in supporting the career development of students from culturally and linguistically diverse migrant and refugee backgrounds. Specifically, this project included a desktop audit of all Australian universities, data from a survey ($n=32$) and interviews with staff in various functions ($n=10$). Four main challenges were identified: (1) difficulties in identifying and engaging with students; (2) a lack of targeted resources and programs; (3) difficulties faced by students in engaging with employers; and (4) a lack of work-readiness and unfamiliarity of Australian work culture.

Keywords Careers development · Higher education · Migrants

Résumé

Soutenir (ou non) le développement de la carrière des personnes migrantes et des réfugiées culturellement et linguistiquement différentes dans les universités: aperçu de l'Australie

La présente étude a utilisé une approche à méthodes mixtes pour comprendre les défis auxquels sont confrontés les établissements d'enseignement supérieur australiens pour soutenir le développement de carrière des étudiantes issues de milieux migrants et réfugiés, culturellement et linguistiquement divers. Plus précisément, ce projet comprenait un audit de documentation de toutes les universités australiennes, des données provenant d'une enquête ($n=32$) et des entretiens avec le personnel de

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diverses fonctions ($n=10$). Quatre défis principaux ont été identifiés: (1) des difficultés à identifier les étudiantes et à nouer le dialogue avec eux; (2) un manque de ressources et de programmes ciblés; (3) des difficultés rencontrées par les étudiantes pour entamer le dialogue avec les employeurs; et (4) un manque de préparation au travail et une méconnaissance de la culture professionnelle australienne.

Zusammenfassung

Die Förderung (oder Nichtförderung) der beruflichen Entwicklung von kulturell und sprachlich vielfältigen Migrant*innen und Flüchtlingen an Universitäten: Einblicke aus Australien

In der vorliegenden Studie wurde ein Mixed-Methods-Ansatz angewendet, um die Herausforderungen zu verstehen, denen australische Hochschuleinrichtungen bei der Unterstützung der beruflichen Entwicklung von Studierenden mit kulturell und sprachlich unterschiedlichem Migrations- und Flüchtlingshintergrund gegenübersehen. Konkret umfasste dieses Projekt ein Desktop-Audit aller australischen Hochschulen, Daten aus einer Umfrage ($n=32$) und Interviews mit Mitarbeitenden in verschiedenen Funktionen ($n=10$). Es wurden vier wesentliche Herausforderungen ermittelt: (1) Schwierigkeiten bei der Identifizierung und Ansprache von Studierenden; (2) ein Mangel an gezielten Ressourcen und Programmen; (3) Schwierigkeiten der Studierenden bei der Ansprache von Arbeitgebern; und (4) mangelnde Arbeitsbereitschaft und Unkenntnis der australischen Arbeitskultur.

Resumen

Apoyando (o no) el desarrollo de la Carrera de los emigrantes y refugiados cultural y lingüísticamente diversos en las universidades: percepciones desde Australia

El presente estudio usó un enfoque de métodos mixtos para entender los desafíos afrontados por las instituciones de educación superior australianas en el apoyo al desarrollo de la Carrera de estudiantes provenientes de contextos migración y refugio lingüísticamente diversos. Específicamente, este proyecto incluyó una auditoría de escritorio para todas las universidades australianas, los datos del estudio ($n=32$) y las entrevistas a trabajadores en distintas funciones ($n=10$). Cuatro grandes desafíos fueron identificados: (1) dificultades en la identificación e involucración con los estudiantes; (2) falta de recursos y programas específicos; (3) dificultades afrontadas por estudiantes para involucrarse con los empleadores y (4) una falta de preparación para el trabajo y una falta de familiarización con la cultura del trabajo australianas.

Introduction

Internationally, widening participation agendas have massively diversified the student cohort in higher education systems, resulting in increased numbers of previously under-represented students, such as those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who arrived in the country as a migrant or refugee (henceforth: CALDM/R students) enrolling as domestic students, graduating from universities

and entering the labor market (Baker et al., 2021). However, there is growing evidence that CALDM/R students face significant barriers in transitioning to employment from higher education, including greater under- or unemployment after graduating compared to other groups (Hugo, 2011; Li et al., 2016; Mestan & Harvey, 2014; Richardson et al., 2016). Despite this representing a significant equity issue, there is currently limited knowledge concerning how these students are supported by higher education institutions to explore their career options and seek employment after they graduate (Newman et al., 2021). Given the persistent dominance of the employability and graduate outcomes agenda (for example, Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017; Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019), this gap in policy and practice is concerning.

Developing responsive practices and policies in higher education institutions requires exploration of how universities understand the concept of equity and whether this includes supporting individuals' transition out of higher education and into employment and/or further study. Moreover, there is a commensurate need to explore how universities' practices and policies impact on the provision of meaningful and fit-for-purpose career guidance services. As such, this article considers how universities apply equity frames to the employability support for one particularly disadvantaged cohort—CALDM/R students—by drawing on institutional theory to explore and discuss current career guidance policies and practices.

Careers guidance support for CALDM/R students

Over the last decade, we have witnessed a growing body of research on CALDM/R students' access to and experience of higher education in countries across the world, including Australia (Harvey & Mallman, 2019; Mestan & Harvey, 2014; Ramsay & Baker, 2019). For example, researchers have examined the challenges CALDM/R students face in relation to navigating university systems and processes (Bajwa et al., 2017), temporality (Baker et al., 2020), and differences in learning expectations and approaches used in their host country as compared to their home country (Morrice, 2013). Research also highlights the unconscious bias and racism that CALDM/R students experience on university campuses (Mangan & Winter, 2017). However, there remains a dearth of literature on the career guidance support provided to CALDM/R students in their transitions from higher education to employment.

This gap is problematic since education and employment are recognized as two of the central pillars that aid integration (Ager & Strang, 2008), fostering development of networks and increased participation in the local community (Harris, 2014; Harvey & Mallman, 2019). In terms of higher education, the connections CALDM/R students build through their studies not only contribute to a sense of belonging to the host country, but also facilitates transition into meaningful employment (Baker et al., 2021). Meaningful employment here refers to employment that is aligned with an individual's skills, training and experience, is remunerated accordingly, and provides employees with a sense of purpose (Lysova et al., 2019).

The employment outcomes of CALDM/R graduates are typically worse than those of the general population (Harvey & Mallman, 2019; Hugo et al., 2014). For example, past research has found that approximately only 40% of young

adults aged 18–24 from a CALD background were in full or part-time employment, compared with around 70% of their Australian-born counterparts (Hugo et al., 2014). In addition, Mestan and Harvey (2014) found that CALD graduates in Australia were 67% more likely to be seeking full-time employment post-graduation than non-CALD graduates. Other research has explored differences between graduates from CALDM/R backgrounds and the general population in terms of the type of employment and remuneration obtained. For example, Hugo (2011) found that university graduates from a refugee background were 12% less likely to be employed in professional roles than the general population. Researchers have also established that CALDM/R graduates are more likely to be working in professions for which their degree is not required (Hugo, 2011), more likely to be receiving lower salaries than the general population (Li et al., 2016; Mestan & Harvey, 2014), and disproportionately ending up in low-skilled jobs where they earn less money (Colic-Peisker, 2009).

Indeed, individuals from CALDM/R backgrounds—including graduates of higher education institutions—face significant barriers to securing employment that is commensurate to their qualifications and experience in Australia and others countries across the world (Cheng et al., 2019; Kosny et al., 2017). The reasons for this are multi-faceted (Lee et al., 2020). Individuals from a CALDM/R background tend to have less knowledge of employment options and workplace culture than those born in the host country, and have fewer social networks they can rely on in the job search process (Beadle, 2014). Discrimination from employers in the job search process and perceived weakness in English language proficiency are also often cited as reasons for poor graduate outcomes of CALDM/R students (Abur & Spaaij, 2016; Harvey & Mallman, 2019; Hugo, 2014; Szkudlarek, 2019), as well as claims of racism, discrimination and exploitation of CALD immigrants in the Australian workplace (Kosny et al., 2017). As such there is a critical need for targeted career and employment support for this particular cohort.

In developing career and employment programs and support, there is general recognition that such programs need to be targeted carefully to the needs of CALDM/R individuals and standardized approaches may be ineffective (e.g., Bimrose et al., 2016; Harvey & Mallman, 2019; Newman et al., 2018). It is therefore imperative to understand what constitutes appropriate career and employment support for CALDM/R students. Although there is a developing body of work that has explored issues related to access to support (for example, Baker et al., 2018), limited research has explored CALDM/R students' engagement with career services (Stebbleton, 2007). In particular, there is a dearth of understanding as to what constitutes good practice when it comes to assisting student transitions out of higher education into employment. This is a critical omission given research suggesting that CALDM/R student groups are systematically disadvantaged in finding meaningful employment (Li et al., 2016; Richardson et al., 2016). In addition, there is little known about the factors that predict CALDM/R students' engagement with career services. This too is a critical limitation as recent research suggests that students from equity backgrounds are

less likely to access career services than the general population (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017).

Exploring the policies and practices

The current study adopted institutional theory (Scott, 2001) lens to explore the policies and practices of Australian universities in relation to the provision of career guidance services for CALDM/R students. This framework suggests that organizational structures are upheld by three pillars that collectively shape the characteristics of an institution. These pillars are: (1) the *regulatory* pillar, comprising the rules, laws and governance arrangements in which the organization operates (for example, equity policy and national agendas reflected in provision—or lack thereof—of targeted career guidance and support for CALDM/R students); (2) the *normative* pillar, comprising internal processes such as the values and norms of institutions which help frame roles, social obligations, professional duties and moral obligations, and; (3) the *cultural-cognitive* pillar, which includes the values, beliefs and assumptions of the collective (staff and student) body of the university. This final pillar provides opportunities to challenge the other pillars, particularly the normative elements, through individual or collective challenges to taken for granted assumptions or norms (Scott, 2001; Webb et al., 2019). Within institutional theory, it is the alignment and misalignment between the three pillars that direct staff within the higher education sector to determine how and what they perceive to be the most appropriate career services that can/should be provided CALDM/R students.

In order to address the limited understandings of careers and transition-out support for CALDM/R students, we report findings from a -funded study comprising a desktop audit and research with university staff and students from CALDM/R backgrounds across Australian higher education institutions. This study commenced with a desktop audit of publicly available information about career guidance on Australian university websites, followed by an exploration of students and staff perceptions of what is offered and what could be improved upon. We draw upon institutional theory to explore the challenges and facilitators for offering targeted support. Specifically, the paper explored the following research questions:

- (1) What careers support is currently on offer for CALDM/R students in Australian universities?
- (2) What are the challenges staff face in supporting CALDM/R students in relation to employment and careers?
- (3) What does good practice career support for CALDM/R students look like?

Method

This study was located in the qualitative, interpretive paradigm, using a mixed-methods design to capture both breadth and richness of the experiences of careers and equity practitioners working in Australian universities. In order to understand

the extent of existing publicly-reported careers provision for CALDM/R students, we conducted a desktop audit of Australian university websites. Secondly, to supplement this and to explore the challenges faced in delivering support to CALDM/R students, we disseminated an online survey of careers advisors (CA), equity practitioners (EP), and work-integrated learning (WIL) staff working in all public Australian universities. Thirdly, to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by higher education institutions in supporting the career development of CALDM/R students, we conducted interviews with staff members who signaled interest following their participation in the survey. Prior to commencement of the project, formal ethics approval was attained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at each university involved in the research.

In terms of our positions in the research and the interpretive lens we bring to our work, we are all experienced researchers and advocates who have long worked with CALDM/R communities. Karen is a management researcher and practitioner whose research interests include progressing the field of effective refugee resettlement. Sally is an educational researcher and activist-scholar whose research interests connect issues of equity, access, participation and success in higher education for CALDM/R students. Clemence is a social and health psychology researcher and lecturer, who works closely with communities concerning issues concerning their health and wellbeing. Alex is a management researcher whose research interests include careers, employment and human resource management. Connie has an honors degree in psychology and experience working and researching in cross-cultural communities.

Desktop audit

The desktop audit was conducted between January–May 2020, prior to and after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. Specifically, the research team searched for key terms related to support for CALDM/R students (e.g., refugee support and migrant support together with the name of the university) in the Google search bar and key terms (e.g., refugee support, migrant support, humanitarian, widening participation) on the search bar of each Australian higher education university website. We mapped the findings in relation to any mention of CALDM/R-specific career services.

Quantitative survey

Staff from career services, equity units and diversity and WIL portfolios at all 37 Australian public universities and two private universities were invited to participate in our study. The contact details of staff were obtained from their institutions' public websites and invited to participate in a survey about the careers support for CALDM/R students. A total of 32 responses were received from 20 higher education institutions. The respondents consisted of 19 career staff, nine WIL staff and three equity and diversity staff. Out of the 32 staff, 25 identified as female and six as

male. Seven staff were in the 30–39 age group, 12 in the 40–49 age group, seven in the 50–59 age group and 4 were over 60.

The survey consisted of 27 closed ended questions. Some of the questions sought further information such as, how do you evaluate and/or measure the success of the career programs and other forms of support? The survey was designed by the research team with questions based on previous research, took on average 15 min to complete, and was administered via the Qualtrics online survey platform. Prior to distribution the survey was piloted by members of the research team. Before completing the survey, participants were presented with a plain language statement and consent form to complete. If consent was not given, the survey did not proceed. The survey covered demographic questions such as gender, ethnicity and migrant/refugee status, as well as the types of programs offered by the university (e.g., group career guidance, one-on-one counseling, work-integrated learning, internships), and for whom (e.g., CALDM/R students specifically, all students together, international students, domestic students-not CALDM/R student specific). Participants were also asked questions to obtain more information about the programs offered to CALDM/R students, how often programs were run, how they were advertised, how many participants attended, and what proportion of attendees were CALDM/R.

Participants were also asked questions about whether the programs were formally evaluated, and their perception of the effectiveness of the programs they had identified which included CALDM/R students. Open-ended questions were then asked about challenges to support offered to CALDM/R students as well as what could be done better. The responses to the open-ended questions on the challenges faced by CALDM/R students and suggestions about what could be done better were categorized into themes and the frequency at which different themes were mentioned was noted.

Interviews

The qualitative data collection commenced with participants reviewing the plain language statement, providing an overview of the research project. Participants were made aware that participation in this project was voluntary and were under no obligation to consent. They were then asked to sign the consent form if they consented to participate in the project.

The qualitative data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews with a subset of EU, WIL and CA university respondents ($n = 10$; see Table 1) indicating what currently works well and what gaps exist in the provision of career guidance within each of their institutions. There was a separate interview protocol for different groups of staff; career practitioners, equity staff and work-integrated learning staff, with 9, 6 and 7 questions respectively. Participants were recruited through the survey and convenience sampling. All interviews were conducted via Skype or Zoom, by members of the research team trained in interviewing. They were audio recorded with the participant's

Table 1 Overview of interview participants

Pseudonym	Role
Bob	Careers practitioner
Andy	Manager of careers and employability
Alice	Career counselor
Maggie	Manager of careers and employability
Nick	Manager of careers and employability
Peggy	Manager of careers and employability
Kate	Academic researching on work-integrated learning
Brenda	Manager of work-integrated learning and employability
Jane	Equity practitioner and ex-careers practitioner
Matt	Equity practitioner with career guidance as established part of the role

permission. The interviews lasted for 45–60 min. Audio recordings were transcribed and participants were asked to select their own pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality. Trustworthiness of the findings from interview data were also ensured through a member of the team checking the coding of qualitative data.

Analysis

The survey was analyzed using descriptive statistics for closed questions (e.g., frequencies), and challenges faced by CALDM/R students highlighted in open-ended questions were hand coded into three key themes that emerged from examining the responses to the questions. The key themes were developed through an iterative process. Data analysis of the interview data was conducted using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006). To facilitate this, the transcripts were uploaded into NVivo and a broad coding framework was developed initially using the main categories within the interview schedule as well as inductively from readings of the data. After multiple readings of the transcripts and to ensure internal validity, the data were first coded independently by a member of the research team and then reviewed by a second coder in the research team to further develop the codes. Subsequently, themes were developed iteratively after multiple readings, and representative extracts were chosen. A total of three major themes were identified.

Results

Findings from the desktop audit

In response to our first research question regarding what CALDM/R-specific career support is currently on offer, our desktop audit highlighted that universities provide very little, instead offering a range of academic support services to the general

Table 2 What career support do higher education institutions provide to CALDM/R students

	All	Domestic	CALDM/R	Int	Don't know
Group career guidance sessions	26 (89%)	9 (31%)	6 (21%)	21 (72%)	3 (10%)
One-on-one counseling	26 (89%)	11 (38%)	12 (41%)	7 (24%)	1 (3%)
Work-integrated learning (university-wide)	26 (89%)	14 (48%)	5 (17%)	7 (24%)	2 (5%)
Work-integrated learning (faculty-specific)	26 (89%)	7 (24%)	4 (14%)	8 (27%)	3 (10%)
Internships (university-wide)	26 (89%)	7 (24%)	4 (14%)	9 (31%)	3 (10%)
Internships (faculty-specific)	23 (79%)	7 (24%)	5 (17%)	7 (24%)	6 (21%)

student population that CALDM/R students may also benefit from using (e.g., academic advisors, mentor programs). Only two public universities offered tailored academic support services for CALDM/R students at the time of the search. In the absence of specific services, five universities provide online guides which summarize a list of available services that can assist CALDM/R students.

In terms of career support specifically for domestic CALDM/R students, most universities provide generic career support to all students, with some providing additional programs specifically for international students. Although some universities had partnerships with external organizations to assist adults from CALDM/R backgrounds (non-student) find employment, it is unclear whether these extended to university students. Very few universities offered tailored career programs to CALDM/R domestic students. Examples included one university which supports CALDM/R students to undertake paid internships through a non-profit organization, and another university which provides people from refugee backgrounds with career support and training.

Given that the desktop audit was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia, we also looked at whether there was any specific support for CALDM/R students during this time. Most existing services that were available were still being offered but over the phone or online.

Findings from the survey

The survey identified that out of the 20 higher education institutions whose employees replied to our survey, very few offered targeted careers and employment support for CALDM/R students. Table 2 shows results from the 29 participants who responded to questions about support on offer.

As can be seen, rather than offer specific support, participants indicated that most institutions offered generic career and employment support for all students, or support for domestic students which CALDM/R students were able to access on the same basis as others. Notably, 72% of participants indicated that there were specific group programs for international students; however, CALDM/R domestic students were unable to access such programs. Only two institutions (6 participants) who responded to the survey highlighted that they had developed targeted group-based careers/employment programs for CALDM/R students. The survey also showed that

Table 3 Perceived effectiveness of each of the program types on transitioning out of university

	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Not at all effective	Don't know/ not at my university
Group career guidance sessions	4 (16%)	15 (60%)	0	6 (24%)
One-on-one counseling	19 (76%)	1 (4%)	0	5 (20%)
Work-integrated learning (university-wide)	13 (52%)	6 (24%)	0	6 (24%)
Work-integrated learning (faculty-specific)	13 (52%)	6 (24%)	0	6 (24%)
Internships (university-wide)	12 (48%)	8 (32%)	1 (4%)	5 (20%)
Internships (faculty-specific)	14 (56%)	6 (24%)	1 (4%)	5 (20%)

very few universities provided specific work-integrated learning opportunities such as internships for CALDM/R students as a distinct group.

Participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of each of the program types on preparing CALDM/R students to transition out of their university and into employment. Table 3 shows the results (total participants = 25):

As can be seen, one-on-one counseling was rated as the most effective, followed by work-integrated learning and then internships. Group career guidance sessions were rated the lowest in terms of effectiveness.

Participants were then asked if they had seen any difficulties specifically in relation to placing students into professional internships or placements, and to provide more information if so. Ten participants (43%) said that they had had difficulties, with key reasons being their understanding of cultural and procedural expectations, language barriers and not enough work experience. Participants also asked if they had seen issues in providing other WIL opportunities for CALDM/R students, with nine participants (39%) saying that they had. Key reasons included willingness of partners (employers) to take on CALDM/R students, anxiety from students going into such programs, and language and communication issues.

Supporting these findings, the open-ended survey questions identified a number of challenges faced by staff at universities in supporting the career development of CALDM/R students as per our second research question.

A lack of targeted resources and programs for CALDM/R students

The most common theme highlighted by respondents was the lack of targeted resources and programs for CALDM/R students. Many respondents ($n = 12$; 50% of respondents to this question) highlighted that their career units did not have sufficient staff and financial resources to develop programs specifically targeted at different equity cohorts, including—but particularly—CALDM/R students. As such, they tended to use their resources to offer more general support to all students irrespective of their background, and/or offer dedicated programs for international students as seen in Table 2 above. Participants also highlighted a lack of training for career advisors on how to support CALDM/R students as impacting on their ability to provide responsive careers advice.

Difficulties in identifying and engaging with CALDM/R students

Another common theme highlighted by respondents was the difficulties they faced in identifying and engaging with students from a CALDM/R background ($n = 6$; 25%). A number of respondents highlighted that it was difficult to identify CALDM/R students and understand their specific needs as they did not often disclose their background, for example one survey respondent wrote:

We have no knowledge of students' CALDM/R status or circumstances unless they declare that as part of their engagement. We explicitly promote our services as being inclusive and open to all students and graduates, offer one-one/private consultations (online or on campus, including after-hours) with a quali-

fied career counselor and work with the University Access and Diversity unit when a student seeks career support in a related context.

Other respondents highlighted the difficulties they faced in building awareness among CALDM/R students about the specific career and employment support they offered. These findings suggest that at many institutions the careers service does not work with equity and diversity staff to develop targeted career and employment support that meets the needs of different equity groups. Finally, a number of respondents highlighted that it was difficult to get CALDM/R students to engage as they often had competing demands on their time, especially since many of the career and employment programs they offered were not compulsory.

Difficulties in engaging with employers and lack of work-readiness

Another common theme highlighted by respondents was difficulties engaging with employers when supporting CALDM/R students to access work-integrated learning experiences and apply for jobs. A number of respondents highlighted the reluctance of employers to consider CALDM/R candidates in recruitment processes, especially those for whom English was not their first language. Respondents also pointed out that concerns about visa status and ongoing work rights contributes to employers' unwillingness to consider CALDM/R candidates. Other respondents highlighted instances of outright discrimination on the part of employers who expressly indicated an unwillingness to consider CALD candidates in their internship programs.

Findings from the interviews

The individual interviews added rich, nuanced data to the qualitative comments gathered from the open-ended questions in the survey.

Difficulties identifying and engaging with CALDM/R students

A common challenge relates to identifying and engaging with CALDM/R students. Participants indicated that if they were unaware that a student was from a CALDM/R background they would not know whether students needed additional tailored support, with students therefore needing to 'disclose' their domestic CALDM/R status:

... we in the careers department, we would not necessarily be aware of someone's background as a domestic student [so] if we're just looking at domestic students and I'm just thinking — I don't know if they haven't disclosed and I haven't asked about their background — so I don't know that we wouldn't be differentiating our service really for people from refugee backgrounds in particular ... I guess in our consults, when you're meeting someone you can pick up quite quickly, or you need to maybe spend more time or whether there's a level of understanding there or not.

(Alice, CA)

Similarly, participants also noted that, while distinctions between domestic and international students were easy, categorizing students who fell within the CALDM/R group was more difficult, particularly in relation to the different needs that local students may have:

Well, I think that might be one of the biggest challenges for providing a bespoke support for that group just because it's so hard to virtually categorise them. Local versus international, it's very simple, it's just citizenship or visa status, so but whereas you have this middle sort of massive grey area in the spectrum.

(Bob, CA)

This difficulty in identifying and categorizing CALDM/R students leads to corresponding challenges in tailoring careers advice to students' needs, something that most participants agreed was not currently being done well within Australian universities. However, a range of barriers were identified by participants in relation to appropriately tailoring services, including the challenges of a one-size-fits-all approach and the need to consider impacts of psychological trauma. As Jane (EP) explained:

...I think that the way that equity groups have been defined in the past and particularly this group, it has had lots and lots of problems around it because everyone is thrown into the same bucket... they're referred to as culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, but not everyone within that group is going to be the same, because all the culture is different within that — so they come here with different life experiences as well too. Some with trauma-based life experiences as, and others who don't necessarily have that trauma-based experience.

As such, a common thread through participants' interviews related to the issue of generic support services which did not target the needs of any particular students:

A lot of communication that comes out through universities is actually in a particular format. It might, it's a template basically now I don't know about you, as having been a student or are a student. But students as generally speaking they tend to often ignore the things that come out in a template format. And that look like they're general things across the university, they tend to respond better if it is, that it comes out, there's something that looks personalised to them. (Jane, EP)

Participants agreed that current 'templates' were not effective at engaging students across the university, and particularly those with CALDM/R backgrounds. However, participants also indicated that their appropriately tailored supports did not currently exist:

So, yeah, I don't feel as though we're fantastic in the tailoring, other than the one on one conversations, to be honest, we haven't sort of, as I said, hit the magic bullet in terms of what they need.

(Matt, EP)

The challenges in identifying and categorizing CALDM/R students lead to associated difficulties in providing targeted career support services which meets their needs.

A lack of targeted resources and programs for CALDM/R students

Another common theme was the lack of targeted resources and programs for CALDM/R students. In general, resourcing within the university was seen as a key barrier to providing such programs, combined with structural pressures to have a large number of students:

But like everything it comes down to resources, and commercial pressures of the university to bang out big numbers.

(Nick, CA)

Nick noted that these broader university pressures—which ultimately came back to financial imperatives—led to university management preferring career programs which could be offered at “scale” rather than smaller supports tailored to specific equity groups such as domestic CALDM/R students. Nick explained that,

The uni seems to like embedding in curriculum as that gets scale, and that gets a digital approach. And they seem to be less focused on individual cohorts getting funded exclusively to look at that particular cohort.

However, participants highlighted several issues with such approaches. In particular, participants did not feel as though CALDM/R students were appropriately supported by such broad responses:

Once [CALDM/R students] are in and moving out, no I don't think they're sufficiently supported. I think... holistically we think we have the programs that are there to support those students. But because it requires them to be proactive and it requires students to probably feel as though they're supported. So not, it's not just an issue of including them in some of our engagement and our marketing strategies, I think it is creating a bit more of bespoke support services.

(Peggy, CA)

In general, many participants highlighted that their careers units did not have sufficient staff and financial resources to develop programs specifically targeted at equity cohorts, including CALDM/R students. Where specific supports or programs were developed, participants also indicated that these were often not delivered in ways which best-suited CALDM/R students—with online supports often identified as not ideal:

I actually worked with someone in careers to develop some online resources for students of asylum seeker refugee and therefore migrant backgrounds. Now they're online self-help services, now when I think about how many people of refugee backgrounds like to access information, it's not self-help, that many of them actually prefer someone to be guiding them. Now because of tightening of funding even pre-COVID, because of tightening of funding across all universities, I believe that Career Services and their personalised service has been squeezed.

(Jane, EP)

Given the interviews occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning was frequently referred to by participants—although participants did highlight that a shift to online delivery was already standard practice prior to the pandemic. Overall, participants suggested that while online delivery was cost- and resource-effective for universities, it was not best practice when working with CALDM/R students:

I've worked with 4 different unis. I felt early in my career there was much more leeway to do more face-to-face interventions with students who need it most. And now I felt over the years we're changing to 'let's just put it online', and the students have to be trained to go to that online intervention... So I'm finding a disconnect between university expectations, and perhaps what's best for the student cohorts in need.

(Nick, CA)

Overall, participants indicated that universities tended to use resources to offer general careers support to all students irrespective of their background (with international students a notable exception). CALDM/R students were seen as overlooked, with few specifically designed services to support their needs as they transitioned out of the university and into employment.

Difficulties in the workforce (work-in-learning, internships and employers)

A key issue related to career support for CALDM/R students was internships or WIL programs. Many participants noted that CALDM/R students were often not equipped for these programs, including a lack of knowledge of the Australian workplace (discussed more in the final theme), limited access to networks and other resources, and some issues around English language skills. For example, Brenda (CA) responded to a question about whether there were any disciplines where CALDM/R students were more likely to struggle with the following:

...possibly in our clinical areas — it's very specific knowledge and skill development that needs to be undertaken and so when a student is in an aged care home there might be some situations that students come up against that a domestic student may not find as a barrier for them. I would say in some of the areas where students need to find their own internship it can be a struggle again because of the limited access to networks and knowledge of how to put a resume together and a cover letter in what's appropriate for that discipline area.

In addition to issues concerning language and how to position oneself best for internships or WIL opportunities, participants also discussed more general integration issues, including a lack of the social networks and cultural familiarity often required when trying to find internships or enter the Australian workforce. For example, Alice (CA) said:

You need to have the network and what we know about CALD migrant and refugees, more so than internationals I think in lots of ways, is that they don't

often have that network knowledge and some people might call it capital but I'm not really on board with that, I think it's too simplistic.

Notably, Alice suggests here that focusing on an individual's 'capital' in relation to finding internships or other opportunities is too simplistic. This echoes the argument made in Harvey and Mallman's (2019) study exploring the experiences of new migrants in Australian higher education institutions, that found that universities often fail to recognize the talents and range of capital, this subset of CALDM/R students possess.

Participants in general highlighted that there was an imperative to also consider Australian workplace practices and norms when considering the difficulties many CALDM/R students face to when seeking employment—that is, the focus cannot only be on the individual student, but rather needs to look at the structural issues they often face. As such, participants highlighted difficulties engaging with employers when supporting CALDM/R students to access work-integrated learning experiences and apply for jobs. For example, several participants highlighted the reluctance of employers to consider CALDM/R candidates in recruitment processes, especially those for whom English was not their first language:

But one thing that I would say is, and this is something that we've always struggled with, engaging with employers and educating them as well. There's an inherent and unfortunate bias, racism, that exists out there, and I think we at the university are only one part of the puzzle. We can do so much to educate and help a student assimilate into the workplace culture, but until employers are aware and willing to, and open to be accepting that cohort of students into the workplace you know, our work can only do so much. Now of course on the flipside, employers will then say it's our responsibility and around and around we go. But I do think that involving employers and making them aware of the importance of supporting this cohort of students is a vital piece to the puzzle as well.

(Peggy, CA)

Bob expanded upon this "inherent bias" against CALDM/R students in the Australian workforce and individual employers:

...I guess we are just trying to make sure that this group who often fall between the gaps, because they do have some of the issues that international students face in terms of language but also in terms of racism in the workplace and disadvantage because of things like accent or even non-Anglo names...

The participants' observations presented here illustrate how it is that CALDM/R students are disadvantaged in the research on graduate outcomes, as described by Li et al. (2016) and Richardson et al. (2016).

Overall findings

Our first research question asked what careers support is on offer for CALDM/R students in Australia. Overall our findings from a desktop analysis, and surveys and

interviews with staff from across higher education institutions highlight that limited support is available to students from a CALD background in Australia. Our second research question asked what were the main challenges faced by staff in supporting CALDM/R students. Across both the surveys and interviews, staff highlighted four key challenges faced in supporting the career development of CALDM/R students. One key challenge they faced was a difficulty in identifying and engaging with students from CALDM/R backgrounds. This meant it was difficult to target relevant support. They also highlighted a lack of targeted resources and programs for CALDM/R students. Another challenge they highlighted was in relation to the difficulties faced by students in engaging with employers. Finally, they highlighted a lack of work-readiness and unfamiliarity of Australian work culture as a key challenge faced by CALDM/R students.

Discussion

The findings from our study paint a stark picture of the challenges that university staff and support services face with regard to providing targeted support for domestic CALDM/R students, and equity cohort students more broadly. In particular, the findings obtained from our mixed-methods study demonstrate that there is little specific support available to students from a CALDM/R background across Australia, despite the clear disadvantage that this cohort faces when transitioning into the labor market (Li et al., 2016; Mestan & Harvey, 2014; Richardson et al., 2016). This is complicated by a context of diminishing funding that demands making difficult decisions about where and how to allocate resources, and the challenge of identifying domestic CALDM/R students—the “massive gray area”, according to Bob—in order to offer targeted career guidance and transition-out support. In the following section, we return to the conceptual framework to explore how the three pillars of institutional theory can inform understanding of how and why these challenges exist, and what can be done to transform career support for CALDM/R students.

The regulatory pillar

The most significant challenges, highlighted consistently through our survey and interview data, are caused by the diminishing funding context, which is driven by federal government policy and institutional responses to the ambiguity of equity policy and funding.¹ In Australia, universities’ reliance on international student revenue to cover the costs of teaching and learning and research activities has resulted in job cuts due to COVID-19 related border closures, which include key support staff roles. At the policy level, the federal government’s signature equity mechanism—the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)—only formally recognizes three (unhelpfully) broad equity categories: students

¹ In Australia, the federal government is responsible for higher education, while state governments are responsible for school education.

from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Indigenous students and students from rural and remote areas. This means that there is no mandate to support the needs of CALDM/R students, although they are often captured in equity practice by virtue of living in financially-disadvantaged areas. The absence of any strong mandate in policy and funding creates significant challenges for universities to respond to, particularly when diminishing resources forces difficult decisions to be made in how to allocate resources. In numerical terms, domestic CALDM/R students do not constitute a significant national cohort—although we recognize that some Australian universities have higher CALDM/R enrolments as a result of their geographic location—meaning that it is difficult to craft a ‘critical mass’ argument for the use of precious resources.

A further challenge that falls under this pillar relates to the identification of and reporting on equity cohorts who fall outside of the three broad categories. In order to develop a nuanced picture of the learning and support needs of CALDM/R, it is essential that universities collect and report on data with regard to this cohort; however, there is no mandate to do so, meaning we have a limited picture of how many CALDM/R students are currently engaged in university study, and therefore require career guidance. Although the argument has been made to make CALDM/R students a formally-identified equity cohort (Sladek & King, 2016)—thus attracting funding and mandating more targeted funding and practice—this call has not been heeded by the federal government.

The normative pillar

Best practice career support for CALDM/R students is undermined not only by the regulatory pillar, but also by aspects that fall within the normative pillar. While the resource constraints caused by federal policy and funding create significant barriers to creating bespoke supports, there are normative elements that exacerbate these challenges. The lack of bespoke supports for CALDM/R students speaks to the extent to which they are undervalued in the university student cohort. Conversely, the high (financial) value placed on international students—a cohort with whom CALDM/R students share several experiences related to their relative unfamiliarity with Australian labor market norms and conventions, and workplace culture—means that universities are more likely to fund bespoke roles and departments to support the employability needs of international students. This speaks to the high value universities place on satisfying the expectations of international students, and the reputational currency that this satisfaction offers in terms of future recommendations to potential students (Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020).

A further barrier located under the normative pillar is the dominance of the discourses of employability and graduate attributes within the university sector, but with a critical absence of shared definitions and understandings of what this should look like in practice (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019). The high value placed on employability is driven by the regulatory pillar through the federal government’s economically-rationalist, employment-focused constructions of higher education

and its value.² However, this has not translated into the provision of targeted support for equity cohorts more generally (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017), and our findings clearly demonstrate there is little targeted career support for CALDM/R students. This then speaks also to barriers created under the regulatory pillar, with regard to the narrow focus of equity policy, funding and practice on access, but also to a lack of creativity on the part of universities to support the development of targeted approaches for CALDM/R students. Where we did collect examples of these, they were funded by fixed-term equity funding and were not evaluated nor reported upon, meaning the valuable lessons from these context-dependent activities were not shared with the wider community. This offers insight into the ways that the federal government and the higher education sector undervalue equity practice and its impacts beyond access.

The cultural-cognitive pillar

There are several challenges and opportunities that emerge from our data that can be located under the cultural-cognitive pillar. It is clear from the responses to both the survey and the interviews that individual staff work hard to support CALDM/R students, making this an issue for specific, passionate individuals rather than supported by overall institutional structures. In other words, current practice means that support for CALDM/R students is provided often on an ad-hoc basis depending on individual staff commitment (see Baker et al., 2018 for how this is the case with other university supports), with significant consequences for both the broader field of career guidance and for the broader cohort of students. In universities where there is a lack of individuals that are passionate about supporting equity students, CALDM/R students often fall through the cracks and have to be self-reliant in seeking career support.

A key challenge that sits under this pillar is the perceived discrimination that exists in the Australian labor market, and which arguably contributes to CALDM/R graduates' lower employment outcomes when compared with other equity cohorts, as reported in the literature (Li et al., 2016; Mestan & Harvey, 2014; Richardson et al., 2016). While these levels of prejudice are not the responsibility of higher education institutions, the participants in this study were clear about the role that universities can play in educating employers about the advantages of hiring CALDM/R graduates and diversifying their workplaces, while also highlighting how such implicit intolerance for diversity—especially linguistic diversity—is inherently racist. This finding echoes that of Andrewartha and Harvey (2017), whose survey of careers services managers working in Australian universities also identified significant challenges in bridging the divide that exists between universities and employers. They argue that,

² As evidenced in the Australian context by the recent reform package for higher education, unambiguously titled the 'Jobs Ready Graduate Package' (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2021).

...the lack of centralised coordination of employer relationships, reflect[s] a ‘silo mentality’ with universities, and the lack of staff with direct responsibility for the management of these relationships, such as dedicated employer liaison roles. Major barriers to employers recruiting from under-represented groups related to organisational cultures and potentially lowered expectations about the abilities of these students (p. 77)

Such discriminatory assumptions about CALDM/R graduates perpetuates the ‘soft bigotry of low expectations’ that set up these students to be less successful with their employability, which Rubel and McCloskey (2019) argue is a mechanism of white supremacy. Australia is not immune to such critiques; indeed, recent research illustrates a stark increase in racialized discourse in the Australian media, particularly toward Chinese Australians, Muslims and Indigenous Australians (All Together Now, 2020). This public/discoursal backdrop informs not only employers’ perceptions that result in discriminatory and exploitative practices (Kosny et al., 2017), but also shapes the responses (or lack thereof) of universities to this intolerance. While arguably beyond the scope of the higher education sector’s reach to dictate, the participants in our study noted the importance of educating not only students, but also employers. The perceived ignorance or even hostility noted by participants represents a key normative challenge to creating better employment outcomes for CALDM/R graduates in Australia.

The rationale for this article stemmed from the literature that identified the many institutional challenges faced by CALM/R students in accessing careers development support. The first two research questions (i) What careers support is currently on offer for CALDM/R students in Australian universities? (ii) What are the challenges staff face in supporting CALDM/R students in relation to employment and careers?

Answering these initial questions highlighted the restrictions the regulatory pillar places on formally recognizing CALDM/R students as an equity group. This therefore leads to further challenges for students, drawing attention to the normative pillar and in particular the institutions’ provision of inadequate targeted resources to support, identify and engage CALDM/R students. In addressing the final question, what does good practice career support for CALDM/R students look like? The cultural-cognitive pillar of the organization is made clear when passionate and committed staff recounted their experiences around the provision of supportive careers guidance for their CALM/R students. Bringing to the fore, individual attempts to search for ‘workarounds’ (Webb et al., 2019). For example, Alice a careers advisor, recounted that upon meeting a students that ‘you can pick up quite quickly... you need to maybe spend more time’. Thereby recognizing the importance of such practices, but at the same time acknowledging structural barriers and normative practices prevent adequate service delivery, especially those from the CALDM/R cohort.

Recommendations for policy makers and higher education institutions

Given the lack of targeted careers support to CALDM/R students, we call on policy makers to consider CALDM/R students as a separate equity group who are worthy

of targeted attention (policy, funding and practice) in the Australian higher education sector. In doing so, universities will be able to use equity funding to provide targeted career guidance for CALDM/R students, and to employ dedicated staff in careers and WIL roles. Moreover, the formal identification of CALDM/R students as an equity cohort would facilitate the provision of training that highlights the barriers faced by this cohort in obtaining employment and how they might provide culturally safe support to meet their needs. It is also critical for career and WIL practitioners to share good practice via professional associations.

Limitations

While this study provides evidence on how best to support CALDM/R students it is not without its limitations. Firstly, as the research was undertaken in the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic, participation in the research was not as high as expected. As a consequence, we were unable to do sophisticated quantitative analysis due to the limited number of staff participating in the survey. In future work, researchers might draw on a larger sample of participants from across higher education institutions across the world to undertake quantitative analysis as to the factors which impact on the provision of targeted career support to CALDM/R students. Secondly, our sample might have been biased toward staff who are passionate about supporting students from equity groups, and CALDM/R students more specifically.

Conclusion

Adopting a mixed-methods approach, this study sought to understand the challenges faced by Australian higher education institutions in supporting the career development of students from CALDM/R backgrounds. Overall, the present study suggests that very little targeted career support is offered by Australian universities (RQ1), and that there are therefore few examples of ‘good practice’ (RQ3) to report upon.

We were, however, able to offer a significant account of the challenges that university staff observed and experienced (RQ2). Our findings illustrate the overlapping and multi-faceted nature of the factors that impede the graduate outcomes and employability of CALDM/R as highlighted by exploring our data through the normative, regulatory and cultural-cognitive lenses of institutional theory. We argue there is clear misalignment within the pillars when you consider the challenges created by narrowly-configured national higher education equity policy (regulatory pillar) and the constricted focus of these equity policies when it comes to addressing the exclusion of CALDM/R-specific career guidance and employment support (normative pillar). However, committed staff who favor more responsive approaches recognized that both the normative and regulatory elements sit in tension with the cultural-cognitive element, although—as this study highlights—they were uncertain how to address these tensions, with dwindling resources, limited training, and a lack of institutional support or recognition.

Our findings have drawn attention to the role of key frontline staff administering and delivering career support while highlighting the disconnect with internal normative policies and practices and national regulatory system-led policies. These require a more considered approach if we are to support long-term, sustainable and inclusive career and employment strategies for CALDM/R students graduating from our universities.

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Data availability Data is not available for public review due to confidentiality reasons.

Declarations

Conflict of interest There are no conflicts or competing interests.

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