Making Sense of Employability in Research-led Teaching Environments

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There are increasing demands for undergraduate degrees to develop graduates who are prepared for employment. These demands often focus on the need for undergraduate degrees to prioritise the development of students' generic skills over the development of rich understandings of disciplinary or professional knowledge. Such demands can be particularly challenging in research-led teaching environments, where academics are deeply committed to enabling students to engage with knowledge. In this keynote, I will argue that these conflicts are based on a false tension between the role of universities in preparing graduates who can contribute to society and their responsibility to offer students access to disciplinary and professional knowledge. I will argue that it is through engagement with disciplinary and professional knowledge that students can be prepared to make a contribution to society, which includes but is not limited to employability. However, in order to do this, academics need to design their curricula with a clear sense of the kinds of graduates they intend their students to become.

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