

Underemployment Amongst New Zealand Graduates: Reflections from the Lived Experience

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It is generally accepted that one of the most significant reasons many people choose to study today is to improve their employment opportunities. However, in today's competitive market driven economies, western nations around the world report their graduates as struggling to find relevant, graduate level employment upon graduation. In New Zealand, a dramatic increase in education participation rates in the late 1980s and early 1990s has resulted in a potential bottleneck of overeducated people unable to secure employment at their expected credential level.

The problem of overeducation stems from the significant investments in education by industrialised nations and the inability of market economies to absorb the steady increase in supply of well-educated workers. Yet, paradoxically, there is a clear tendency for government policy to emphasize relentlessly the importance of life long learning, through educational reform, in order to improve economic competitiveness. This paper provides an overview of the established theory and research in relation to the lived experiences of underemployed New Zealand graduates.

Introduction

It is generally accepted that one of the most significant reasons many people choose to study today is to improve their employment opportunities (Corson, 1988; Cox and Pollock, 1997; Muysken and ter Weel, 2001). However, in today's competitive environment, marked with restructurings, downsizing and streamlined global enterprises, western nations around the world report their graduates as struggling to find relevant, graduate level employment upon graduation. Take, for example, the following article titles from around the globe –

"Are more college graduates really taking 'high school' jobs?" – US

"Spring is here and grads are nervous" – Canada

"Hell hath no fury like a graduate waiting on tables" – UK

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"Underemployment in the Netherlands: Why the Dutch 'Poldermodel' failed to close the education-jobs gap" – The Netherlands.

"IT industry offers no guarantees for graduates (disillusioned information technology graduates who cannot get jobs complain the skills shortage is a myth)" – New Zealand

In order to contribute to this important debate there is a need to investigate whether an education-jobs gap exists in New Zealand and to what extent educational attainment is resulting in satisfactory employment outcomes for graduates. Use of the term "satisfactory" highlights the need to look "beyond the probability of getting any job to that of obtaining particular types of job" (Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000: 386). Assessing the quality of graduate employment is important because while New Zealand graduates may not be unemployed, they may very well be underemployed.

Underemployment in New Zealand: Is it a problem?

In 2001, the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC) undertook a review of the delivery of tertiary education within New Zealand. In considering the role of tertiary education within our society, they identified several inter-related purposes, the first being particularly inclusive. "Inspiring and enabling individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential levels throughout life, so that they develop intellectually, are well equipped to participate in the labour market, can contribute effectively to society and achieve personal fulfillment" (TEAC Initial Report, 2000: 10). While this is certainly a worthy ambition for the New Zealand tertiary education system, it places the emphasis, and indeed the responsibility, for the development of individuals squarely in the hands of an education system already producing more highly and widely educated people than ever before.

The result is potentially a bottleneck of overeducated people unable to secure employment in their chosen fields or at their expected credential level (Aitken, 1994). If this is occurring with our university degree level graduates, the implications for those with lower level post-secondary education is predictable. "When people accept jobs below their educational level, ... they start competing with skilled labour at lower levels, and as a consequence these lower educated will also be forced to accept jobs below their level of skills, or even become unemployed, a process that is generally referred to as bumping down or crowding out" (Borghans and Grip, 2000: 3). Paradoxically, despite these potentially negative implications of further investment in education to improve economic competitiveness, there is a clear tendency for government policy to emphasize relentlessly, the importance of building a knowledge society and life long learning, through educational reform (Corson, 1988; Egerton, 2001; TEAC Initial Report, 2000).

In New Zealand, as with many other OECD countries, education participation rates increased dramatically in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in response to difficult economic conditions and high unemployment (NZTES Profiles and Trends, 1999).

There was and remains an increasing public expectation for education to act as a guaranteed ticket to improved labour market opportunities (Collins, 1979). It could also be argued that the introduction of higher individual fee structures and student loans only intensified this expectation in New Zealand.

As part of a wider study designed to help us better understand the early career paths of graduates, this paper provides an overview of theory and offers some initial research findings concerned with underemployment. The intent is to generate questions and facilitate discussion on underemployment amongst New Zealand graduates by examining the lived experiences of those describing themselves as "very" underemployed. Beyond definitions, this will include a cursory look at the economic explanations for why underemployment occurs, highlight the potential effects of underemployment for individuals and society, and consider the ways in which underemployment can be measured and differing types of underemployment. As a work in progress, this paper is primarily concerned with the anecdotal insights of underemployed respondents who offered written comment on the questionnaire, rather than with statistical analysis and conclusions. Using Livingstone's (1998) six dimensions of underemployment as a template for analysis, the intent is to provide a snapshot of the varied and often emotive responses, questions within the survey concerning underemployment elicited from respondents.

Underemployment in the literature

Overeducation, underutilisation, education-jobs gap, occupational mismatch and underemployment are all terms used interchangeably to deal with aspects of the same dilemma. Essentially, it is argued the unprecedented acquisition of formal credentials has not been matched by society's supply of meaningful, fairly compensated jobs, causing wasted ability in the workforce (Batenburg and de Witte, 2001, Livingstone, 1998). According to Asplund and Lilja (2000), the problem of overeducation stems from the significant investments in education by industrialized nations over the past decades and the inability of market economies to absorb the steady increase in supply of well-educated workers. Discrepancies between supply and demand in any market-driven economy are to be expected. However, in many OECD nations this particular mismatch has proved persistent, creating a "graduatization of many jobs previously filled by non-graduates" (Doherty, Viney and Adamson, 1997: 173).

This phenomenon is not a new idea or concern. According to the influential work of Livingstone (1998), even in the 1960s and 1970s, when terms such as *overeducation* and *underemployment* were coined, there was concern that highly educated people who could only secure routine jobs would become bored and reject the established social order. Throughout the past two decades, however, the structural adjustment of world economies to globalisation, increased market competition and the information and communication revolution, has had a dramatic impact on the structure of organizations and the nature of positions within them (Carnoy, 1998). This leads to the important

debate over whether higher educated people occupying positions previously held by lower skilled individuals is indeed the result of overeducation and credential inflation or of *up-grading*. The *up-grading* perspective argues occupations today require more skills in order to support productivity growth, crucial to international competitiveness (Borghans and de Grip, 2000). Certainly, the restructuring of production systems with new technologies and the shift of employment to service-producing industries has had implications for the skill composition of many jobs. However, several studies have found that while there has been increase in the average skill level of occupations, this has remained insufficient to accommodate the increasing educational attainment of the workforce (Wolff, 2000; Batenburg and de Witte, 2001).

The cyclical effects of this reported oversupply of educated workers include such outcomes as *credentialism*. Underemployment, at its simplest, can be defined as a level of education attainment greater than the education requirement of an occupation (Borghans and de Grip, 2000). However, as more graduates flood the market, employers, able to obtain skills at a educational level previously unsought, raise their qualification requirements when recruiting irrespective of any change in the skills required to perform the job (Green, Ashton, Burchell, Davies and Felstead, 2000). Therefore, while the job applicant may need the appropriate qualification to compete for and obtain the position, there may be little or no use for the higher level of qualification once employed. This, in turn, promotes longer initial stays in education or returns to education in order to improve chances of finding or retaining employment. "If the job competition occurs due to an increase in the supply of highly educated labour, then others must improve their educational level, simply to defend their current income position. If they don't, others will and they will not find their current job open to them" (Groot and Hoek, 2000). Egerton (2001) suggests that part-time degree study by mature students has risen steeply during the 1990s, however it seems rather than intending to change careers, they may be acquiring credentials simply to retain their positions in their current careers.

Wage competition vs job competition

Two predominant economic theories, human capital theory (wage competition models) and job competition theory dispute the relationship between the labour market's rising education level and wage differentials and unemployment for various educational categories (Groot and Hoek, 2000). Central to the wage competition model is the standard marginal productivity theory of labour demand influencing wage determination (Gray and Chapman, 1999). According to this model, where there is a surplus of degree level applicants, this will put downward pressure on wages for graduate positions and upward pressure on wages for lower skilled positions with fewer applicants due to decreased supply (Groot and Hoek, 2000). If workers obtain the required skills and are willing to accept market wages, more graduate positions will be created. This will occur as long as the value of the marginal product an additional graduate employee produces is greater than the wages they demand. The basic concept of opportunity cost suggests

individuals will invest in further education while there remains an advantage in wages realised for educational investment expended (Gray and Chapman, 1999). Business and government voices generally support this position based crudely on the correspondence between economic and educational development and the generally higher earnings of those with further education (Livingstone, 1998).

Alternatively, job competition theory is based on the assumption wages are linked to jobs rather than people. Consequently, an increase in supply of highly educated workers does not lead to an adjustment of wages, instead high skilled workers compete for a limited number of well-paid jobs and some lose out (Borghans and de Grip, 2000). Successful applicants are selected based on their ability to perform on the job for the lowest training costs. Other important criteria, where training information is not available, include age, education and gender (Russell and O'Connell, 2001). Those unsuccessful are forced to accept positions with lower skill requirements and lower pay. Not the following finding from the United Kingdom Higher Education Statistics Agency, "Competition for established positions in traditional 'graduate employment' and the professions is fierce and, as a consequence, the range and variety of jobs into which graduates are moving is becoming increasingly diverse" (Fallows and Steven, 2000: 75).

It would be the focus of a much broader study to determine which of these might more closely describe the current state of underemployment in the New Zealand labour market. The focus of this paper is on how underemployment, where it does exist, is impacting on graduates from a New Zealand university. This necessitates a discussion both of the types of underemployment being experienced and the reactions to such a predicament by those affected.

The graduate study

The central purpose of the wider, overarching study was to develop a more comprehensive understanding of labour market outcomes experienced by New Zealand graduates over the first few years following graduation. This is argued to be an important area given the substantial investments of both individuals and government. Other stakeholders such as employers, local communities and educational providers also have a vested interest in how graduates fare upon completion of their tertiary education. However, the way they seek to define and measure successful outcomes of tertiary graduates differs according to their needs (Woodley and Brennan, 2000).

Therefore, it is important to reiterate that the perspective underlying this study is that of the actual participants, the graduates directly involved in managing the transition process. In this context, it is not for the researcher, the government, the education system or employers to decide what a successful graduate outcome might be. The question of whether "they have done well" is for the graduate respondents to answer.

The questionnaire tool was adapted from a study conducted in the early 1990s at a British university (Connor and Pollard, 1996), which explored the career progress of three consecutive graduate cohorts. In line with that approach, 1998 to 2000 graduates from a New Zealand university responded to a postal questionnaire seeking information around five broad areas.

- Individual characteristics informing study choices and expectations
- Employment expectations
- Career path progression and current status
- Employment experiences
- Satisfaction with labour market outcomes.

In line with overseas findings regarding graduate employment experiences, a proportion of the questions within the self-report survey focused on underemployment. Degree level graduates from 1998 to 2000 were selected from across the three Colleges of Science, Social Sciences and Business at Massey University and included both internal and extramural students of all ages. The College of Education was excluded from the study both because of the unique nature of this area of study and the need to limit the survey size. Any degree with less than 100 total graduates over the three years captured within this survey was excluded. Also, initially, all overseas addresses were eliminated due to cost limitations and the intent to focus on New Zealand citizens and the New Zealand labour market rather than overseas graduates. However, a small number of New Zealand citizens identified as traveling overseas by friends and relatives for whom email addresses were supplied were contacted and invited to participate via web access.

The original sample included 2497 graduates relatively evenly distributed between the three graduating years, with 737 from 1998, 924 from 1999 and 836 from 2000. Following a warm up letter and the mail out of the questionnaire in October 2001, this was reduced by 288 to 2209 as a result of GNA or "address unknown" returns. Of the eventual 629 surveys returned, 624 contained useable data, yielding a response rate of 28 percent. Given the length of the questionnaire and the transient nature of this sample group, in terms of residence, this was considered a satisfactory response rate.

Of the respondents, the majority, at 58 percent, were female. This reflects the trend in tertiary education in New Zealand generally, where, according to the NZ Tertiary Trends and Profiles (1999), 70 percent of the growth in tertiary participation rates in the 1990s has been through women. Consequently, by 1998 55.1 percent of university students were women.

According to the NZVCC University Graduates Destinations Survey (2000), 48 percent of graduates in 2000 were aged 25 or over. Within the current study, there was a slightly lower representation from mature graduates at 44 percent, with traditional graduates (18 – 24 while studying) representing the majority. Given the high numbers of mature students at Massey University with its extramural offerings, this could have been expected to be slightly higher and may reflect the orientation of the research

towards the transition from education to employment. For some mature graduates who had remained in employment throughout their studies, this may have been deemed inapplicable to them. A little over half of the graduates were internal students, with 47.5 percent describing themselves as either extramural or mixed mode.

While the level of analysis for this paper remains at the aggregate level, it is worth noting the distribution of responses by graduating year. Respondents were evenly spread across the three graduating cohorts with 211 from 1998, 210 from 1998 and 203 from 2000. Also, of those who responded 27.3 percent were from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, 34.8 percent were graduates of the College of Business and the remaining 37.9 percent were from the College of Sciences.

Livingstone's six dimensions of the education-jobs gap

Given such factors as casualisation, changing work structures, and the increasing supply of graduates to industry, attempting to quantify levels of underemployment is by no means straightforward. Livingstone (1998) suggests the process of identifying wasted ability in the workforce is further complicated by the range of ways in which individuals within society experience underemployment. The education-jobs gap is argued by Livingstone (1998) to consist of six distinct dimensions, identified as being; the talent use gap; structural unemployment; involuntary reduced employment; the credential gap; the performance gap and subjective underemployment. This provides a conceptually useful continuum along which to examine the range of responses elicited from participants experiencing underemployment in the current study.

The talent use gap, concerned with the wasted talents or educational underachievement of people based on poorer social and economic origins, is beyond the scope of this paper. While it is recognized in New Zealand that some sectors of society are underrepresented in higher education, all of the surveyed participants were degree level graduates, irrespective of their socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, the analysis of reported underemployment amongst the graduate sample begins with the dimension of unemployment.

Underemployment amongst a sample of New Zealand graduates

Unemployment

It was expected that structural or long-term unemployment would not be high amongst the graduate respondents. In an analysis of career paths, some graduates reported brief periods of unemployment while searching for work but had generally moved into some form of employment, returned to the education system, or become unavailable for employment fairly promptly. While 23 percent of respondents identified themselves as

having encountered periods of unemployment, 35 percent of these reported this as being for two months or less and for 75 percent unemployment had lasted less than seven months.

However there were a minority of self-reported on-going unemployed and not surprisingly, this was more prevalent amongst mature graduates. It has been found that mature graduates who become qualified at a later age have higher unemployment and take longer to find work than traditional graduates (Egerton, 2001). A 41-year-old male from Palmerston North suggested the factors hindering his search for a suitable job included:

Probably a lack of vocation – limited opportunities in a provincial city. Limitations of a BA degree in today's climate for mature graduate.

Overall, however, long-term unemployment was rare. This supports the proposition that overeducation feeds into a bumping down process whereby the higher educated, unable to gain employment at their expected credential level, begin to compete for and obtain lower skilled positions, generating a flow-on effect. Accordingly, as employers have come to rely more heavily on educational credentials, especially in hiring decisions, those without them have suffered most greatly.

Involuntary reduced employment

Involuntary reduced employment is a more complex issue, particularly in light of the increasing “flexible” work practices being introduced by employers seeking cost efficiencies. Part-time jobs, temporary or casual work, flexible working time and self-employment are all on the rise in advanced societies.

For some workers flexible modes of work may be highly compatible with other lifestyle commitments, for example students requiring extra income or work experience while studying or women caring for dependents as some respondents indicated:

I work as a public relations contractor in local government carrying out projects the organisation doesn't have permanent fulltime staff available for ... I do this about 20 hrs/week and care for my preschool children for the remaining time.

However, for others, part-time or temporary full-time work is a second choice alternative in a labour market where full-time jobs are unavailable. Again, a preliminary look at the data found that just over 30 percent of the respondents had encountered periods of temporary employment and for nearly a third of these it had lasted longer than twelve months. While over a sustained period of time, this form of underemployment dropped off amongst the respondents in the graduate survey, there were still several comments from unsatisfied graduates experiencing this particular dimension of underemployment:

I was 52 years old when declared redundant. I had, at that stage, completed a Diploma through Massey extramurally, but had not uplifted it. On being made redundant I enrolled the following year full-time extramurally to do the full degree ... On graduating I applied for a job as a Proof-reader at a local community newspaper. I have been employed part-time for 20 hrs a week since Nov 98. The work is monotonous, but the people/environment is fun.

I really liked my degree but need to go to England to find the job I want (Product Development). NZ just doesn't have the industry I want to work in.

Too many graduates competing for the same jobs, at least three different degrees qualify people for same jobs. Employment prospects were overstated by University.

This final comment was from a 25-year-old, 1998 male graduate who completed a BSc in Ecology and Zoology, but has been able to find only temporary farm work and labouring positions.

The credential gap

Credential underemployment, which is arguably the most recognized form of underemployment, exists where qualified individuals are forced to accept positions below their expected credential level. US and Canada report 20 percent of the employed workforce as in credential underemployment, while the figure for performance underemployment is closer to 40 percent and on the rise (Batenburg and de Witte, 2001). Likewise, in examining the positions of recent graduates within the New Zealand labour market the two most relevant manifestations of underemployment are the credential gap and the performance gap. Within the current study, often where graduates described themselves as underemployed, there was an association with being employed in lower skilled positions than they had expected with their degree qualification. Increasingly, post-secondary credentials are used as a screening process for jobs which are not traditional graduate positions.

A question within the study asked participants to indicate, from a range of options, in which ways they considered their position to be "graduate level employment". These included; a degree was a formal entry requirement; the degree was helpful in getting the job; the work requires graduate ability, the previous holder was a graduate; or, entry was via a graduate trainee programme. One fifth, or 20 percent of the participants who responded to this section of the questionnaire said that none of these applied or that, in other words, they were not in a graduate position.

This was certainly the conclusion of a 24-year-old 1999 international business and marketing graduate working as a client liaison in the insurance industry:

Believe current world is a v.bad place to get a job – experience, experience, experience counts. Massey degree = 0 experience. BBS (Hons) + Dip Bus Studs hasn't opened a lot of doors and certainly hasn't lead to the career expectations I was hoping for.

And what do a BSc in Computer Science and a BA in Psychology have in common? In this instance, their responses to being underemployed:

Most of the job could be done by a well trained monkey. It was absolutely dead boring, a lot of the time. My creativity and initiative were completely stifled'. (Employed in general labour for a flower exporting company).

A retarded chimp could manage day-to-day systems. No input into decision making. Ideas ignored. Any sort of strategic planning seems to be ignored. (Database maintenance).

However, perhaps most poignant of all is the following comment:

I have an MA – I am overqualified for data entry work and have the potential to earn more than \$13 an hour doing menial, monotonous jobs. I have wasted five years and got into serious debt for a degree that won't even get me a job – my part-time work has been far more beneficial and is the only thing that secured me employment. Bottom line – tertiary education is overrated.

It is interesting to note that at least two of these comments came from graduates who had engaged in further education following graduation. Irrespective of employment outcomes, it is striking in the responses received, how many graduates have continued to educate themselves. This is interesting in light of job competition theory, which argues employees will drive themselves to ever-higher educational levels in order to secure a superior position, relative to others, in a hypothetical job queue for a limited number of attractive jobs.

The performance gap

Performance underemployment is often closely associated with credential underemployment, but is more concerned with level of skill and knowledge required to actually perform the job once you have acquired it. "Those who talk about their own performance gap usually emphasize how easy their jobs have been to learn and how little challenge work presents to their ability, beyond their ability to tolerate demeaning work" (Livingstone, 1998: 108). This type of response accounted for the largest proportion of comments from participants with respect to their perceived level of underemployment:

Capable of so much more than current work. Current work is mostly data entry, so it doesn't use my knowledge/skills.

Am involved in some monotonous, no-brainer tasks that anyone could do and don't use much of my degree.

This job doesn't offer the challenges I was made to believe it would offer. High level of administration work added after I started.

Also, when examining further the responses to the question asking respondents to describe the ways in which their job was "graduate employment" it was noted that while 36 percent of the participants said a degree was a formal entry requirement and 40 percent said the degree was helpful in obtaining the position, while only 30 percent stated that the work required graduate ability. This certainly raises some questions regarding the views of graduates towards their employment and the types of positions they are obtaining which requires further examination.

Subjective underemployment

The final dimension of underemployment identified was subjective underemployment. This may have no bearing on "official" underemployment statistics but it feeds into any debate examining the wasted capability or potential of the workforce. Dimensions of subjective underemployment frequently identified include perceptions of the fit between one's qualification and the work performed; an individual's ability to use his or her knowledge and skills on the job; and finally, a sense of entitlement to a better job. This is identified in comments such as:

Not being able to fully utilize the skills and knowledge I gained from my degree.

No positions available for promotion. Current position is no longer challenging.

There are a lot of skills that I am not using in this job especially computer skills. I am finding that it is a male dominated industry and I am not being heard sometimes.

One graduate, seemingly employed in an appropriate statistical position for his BInfSc in Statistics, wrote:

I do a lot of data entry ... do this, do that type reports. Not using any high level statistics ... very basic ... plots/tables.

Mature vs traditional graduates

Beyond Livingstone's dimensions of underemployment, it was also observed that a significant divide lay between mature and traditional aged graduates in their reasons for studying and responses to underemployment.

The proliferation of academic institutions offering degree courses in ever expanding disciplines means increased competition for a limited number of positions for graduates entering or re-entering the labour market. With the advent of extramural study, it is also important to include in any competing graduate market, those remaining employed in industry while completing their qualifications. Several mature students in the current

study referred to their return to education as an "insurance policy" despite being comfortably employed at present. Take the following comment from a 42-year-old female Flight Attendant who took 10 years to complete her degree.

I am in the same occupation as I was when I started and finished my degree. I expect that if I was made redundant or desperately needed a career change that my qualifications would assist in finding new employment. Basically, my degree is an "insurance policy" (I hope) if I need to move on from my present occupation.

Another mature graduate (49 year old male Senior Business Analyst) responded:

Degree qualification is a good entry point for higher-level employment. Non-degree qualified people with a good performance record may achieve similar career opportunities but the instances are limited.

Although not exclusive to mature graduates, predominantly it was this group of respondents who referred the limiting effects of their current geographical location or family responsibilities as unavoidable constraints on career development. Mature graduates frequently included comments relating to their personal circumstances and work/life conflicts.

Although it appears I have made little use of my degree to date, family responsibilities mean that for now I simply need to keep studying and preparing for the future.

The fact that my employment situation is determined by my choices to consider criteria such as family situations may bias the results. I am not in my current position because I have to be ...

Living in a small town limits job or career opportunities. I'm lucky to have the job I got because its one of the highest paid jobs here but half the hourly rate paid to a city dweller with the same position. The lifestyle compensates for the poor hourly rate ...

Traditional graduates were more likely to respond to experiences of underemployment by commenting on their intention to travel or find a new position, as did the following 25-year-old male Accounts Manager:

I have much more to offer than I am currently able to give. I am leaving NZ for greater opportunities in Britain. The possibility of me repaying my student loan while working in NZ are zero.

Or this 24-year-old male who graduated in 1999 with a BAppIsci in Natural Resource Management and found work in an appliance store as sales support:

No responsibility, cannot use initiative, no challenge (I am quitting soon though!)

Other factors affect the likelihood of younger individuals experiencing underemployment in their career. The "waiting-room effect", highlighted by Batenburg

and de Witte (2001), suggests that many graduates are exposed to “underemployment” temporarily based on their relative inexperience in the workforce. This concept, which would be worth examining further within a longitudinal study, was epitomized in the following comment from a 23-year-old female 2000 graduate who had spent six months in unemployment and six months in temporary employment before obtaining work as a Local Government, “Land Management Officer”, enforcing weed control.

As soon as I had finished my study I thought I'd get a job straight away – way before graduation so I got disappointed. I think I would have handled it better if I just took some time out and didn't feel the need to get a job straight away. There was a big “catch 22” situation where I really wanted a job but didn't have the experience ... so I couldn't get a job.

Summary

While Livingstone's model is useful for identifying the different dimensions of underemployment, distinguishing between these steps, in practice, maybe somewhat contrived due to overlap. The overriding focus of Livingstone's work is the wasted ability in the workforce and this is certainly a dilemma for economies and societies worldwide. Within New Zealand, the emphasis and concern must rest on those failing to capitalize on their investment in tertiary education through their inability to secure appropriate graduate level employment. Credential inflation buoyed by such factors as graduate oversupply to industry, market driven educational institutions and governments eager to maintain economic competitiveness has been a recognised dilemma for sometime now. The evidence here would suggest, for whatever reason, there are a proportion of degree level graduates within New Zealand who are disillusioned with their current employment and the educational system they believed would deliver them superior labour market opportunities.

Finally, while some preliminary statistical findings were reported, this was not intended to be an analytical paper. Rather, this paper sought primarily to present an intriguing insight into the personal comments, offered by New Zealand graduates experiencing underemployment firsthand. Other important demographic variables which have been identified as impacting on a graduates individual ability to secure satisfactory employment include age, gender, social status, work experience and degree specialisation (Aitken, 1994; Egerton, 2001; Russell and O'Connell, 2001). Statistical analysis of the available data should yield interesting findings in this area. Beyond this current study, of particular research interest, would be a study examining the extent to which underemployment amongst New Zealand university graduates impacts on those with lower post-secondary qualifications.

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