



# The evidence base on effectiveness of HE employability practice what do we know and what's missing?

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Understanding skills gaps and employability for HE professionals and stakeholders

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# Background

- European Commission (2017, p. 1) the “employability of graduates is of concern in many EU member states. In some parts of the EU, a significant share of tertiary graduates are unemployed or working in jobs for which they are overqualified.”
- Widening dispersion of graduate outcomes
- Economic pressure towards HEI
- Expansion of employability programs units

# Literature review RQs

- a) What are the key challenges for enhancing employability programmes and graduate outcomes?
- b) What is the stated or implied theory of change underpinning employability practice in HEIs?
- c) What methods are used to evaluate employability practice and how robust are they?

# Employability

- “A set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations”

Knight & Yorke (2003:7)

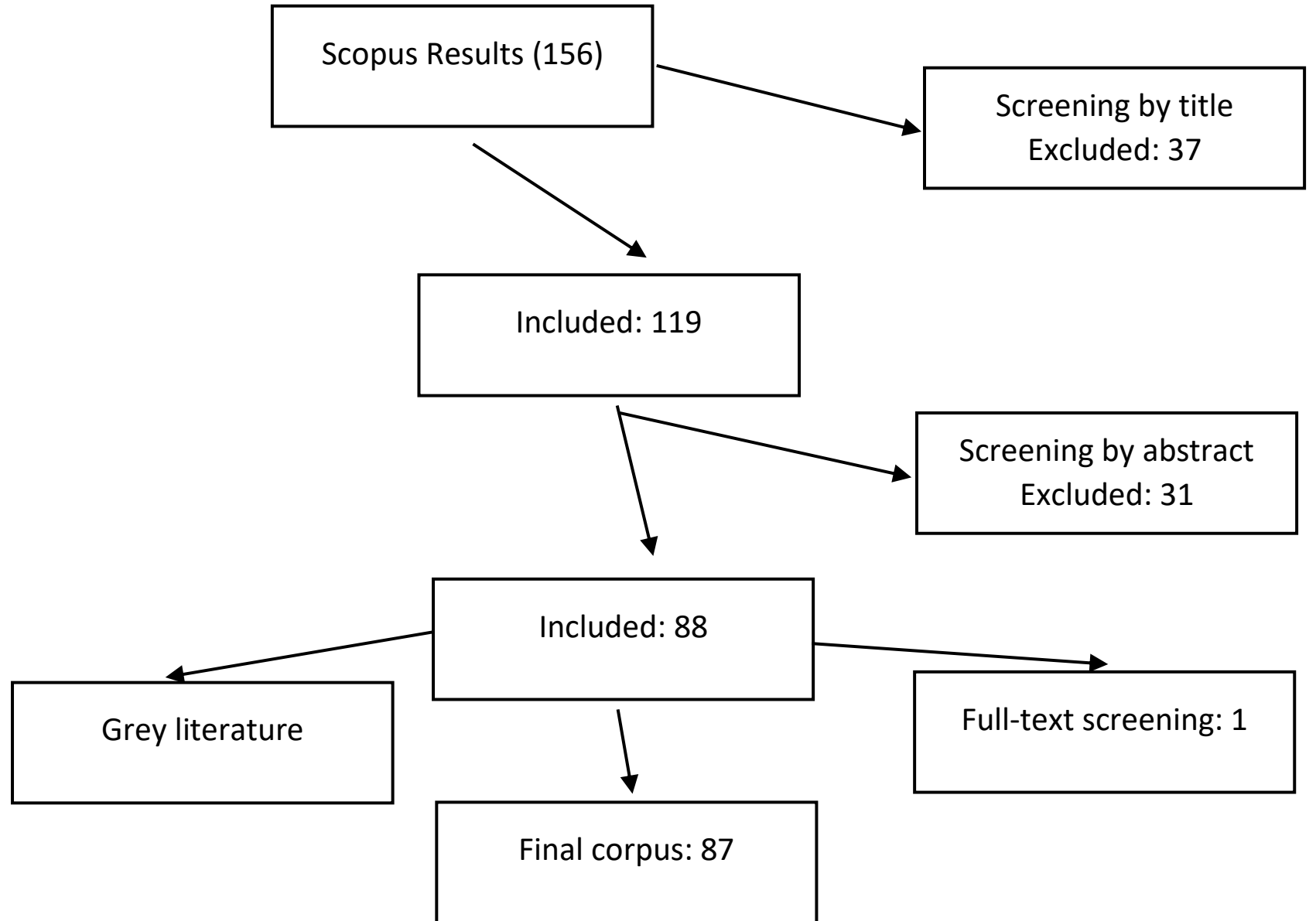
- “The combination of factors which enable individuals to progress towards or get into employment, to stay in employment and to progress during career”

CEDEFOP (2008)

# Systematic Review Methodology

- Systematic Review provides a good method to implement literature reviews.
- At the same time, this method has important shortcomings:
  - Small number of primary studies review (MacLure, 2004).
  - Researcher interpretations are limited.
  - No able to explain the mechanism working under programs analysed (Pawson, 2006).

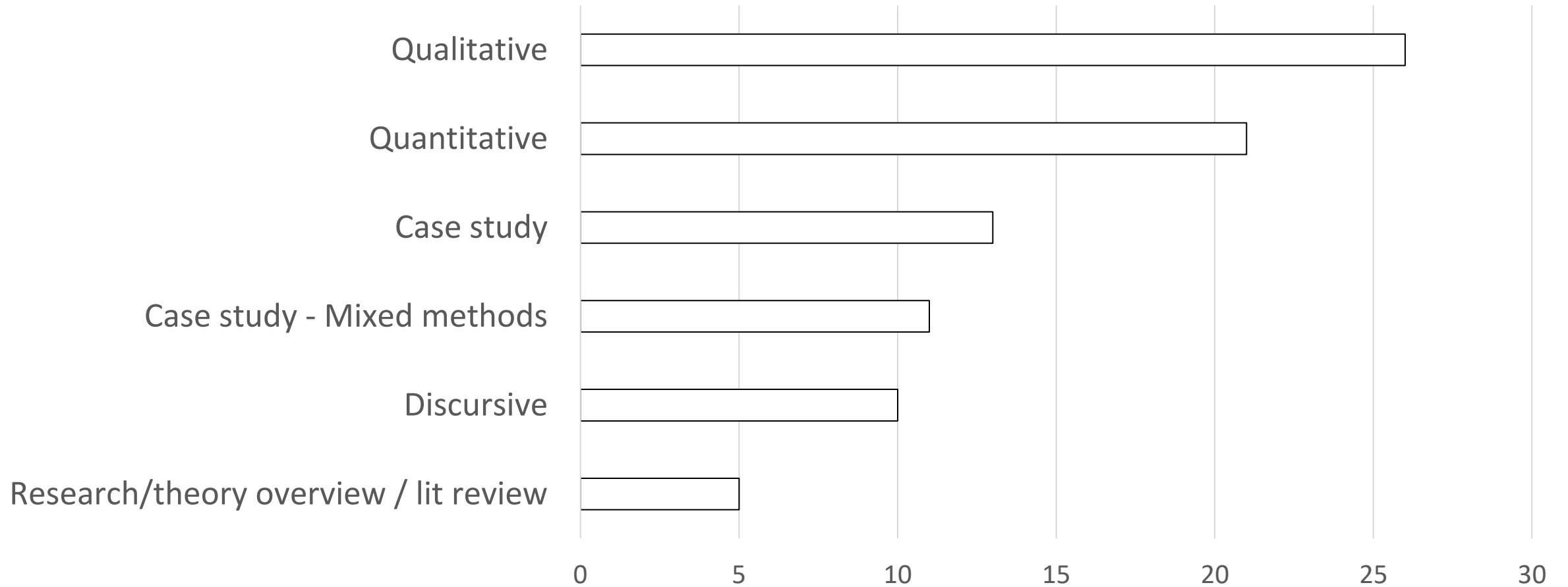
# Screening process



# Results (i)

- 87 published papers, with Anglo Saxon bias (predominantly UK and Australian based).
- Most of the literature in the corpus refers to case studies of WBL (which includes full-scale internships to project-based learning exercises) as the main source of LMI. These studies are by enlarge small scale (carried out by individual departments or universities).
- WBL when well designed (student centred) is seen as highly beneficial in improving student employability
- Anecdotal evidence based on very circumscribed data and weak research design.

# Research design





# R1. What are the key challenges for enhancing employability programmes and graduate outcomes?

- HEI activity and practice in this area is highly contextual and resource intensive
- Need for obvious advantages for Students, HEI and Employer
- Graduate skills needs, specific or general?
- Graduate labour market outcomes are highly unequal

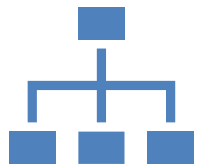
## R2. What methods are used to evaluate employability practice and how robust are they?

- Most of the studies do not assess empirically graduate market outcomes.
- Weak evidence base. If interventions (which are small scale in nature) are evaluated this takes the form of subjective feedback on perceived benefits from some of the stakeholders.

## R3. What is the stated or implied theory of change underpinning employability practice?

- No emerging theory of change underpinning graduate employability practice has appeared.
- Implied theory of change seems to reflect general policy debate on employability.
- Assumptions are not challenged by research.

# Urgent research priorities



Conceptual understanding -  
what is the theory of change  
behind?



More robust research design  
(rich case studies...)



To what extent are local case  
in employability practices  
scalable?



Aligning research to  
practitioners and students  
needs

# Discussion



What are the key challenges to make employability programme effective and efficient?



As a sector, how can we improve the evidence base in order to align this with needs of day-to-day employability practice?



Does this chime with your experiences?  
Thoughts/observations?



How does this align with the non-academic literature (Grey literature)?

Thanks for your  
attention

Links to the documents:

- a) [Draft literature review for discussion](#)
- b) [Summary literature review](#)

