

Honours and Employability: Perceived Value, Null Effects, and Decision Psychology

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Abstract

This study examines the gap between law graduates' perceived employability value of the Bachelor of Laws (Honours) and actual employment outcomes. Using a convergent mixed-methods survey of Bachelor of Laws (LLB) alumni ($n = 66$), we integrate perception data with propensity score matching analysis comparing Honours and non-Honours graduates. Honours completers reported substantially higher perceived job-market value ($M = 3.91$ vs. 2.56), yet causal analysis revealed no effect on legal-sector employment ($ATE = 0$ percentage points, 95% CI $[-48.8, 48.4]$). We interpret this pattern through expectancy theory and decision psychology: heterogeneous Honours models weaken completion–outcome linkages, while confirmation bias elevates post-decision perceptions among Honours graduates. The tentative findings suggest a need for evidence-based program communication and transparent outcomes reporting to align student expectations with realistic employment payoffs. This research informs advising practices and Honours program design in law schools, with implications for credential evaluation across professional education contexts.

Keywords: *Honours; employability; propensity score matching; expectancy theory; signalling; legal education*

Introduction

Honours programs in Australian legal education are often marketed as conferring employability advantages. Yet employers face heterogeneous signals due to divergent Honours models (embedded, embedded pathway, separate), and students make decisions under uncertainty about labour-market payoffs. This article tests the employability claim by juxtaposing graduates' perceived job-market value of Honours with matched employment outcomes.

We make three contributions. First, we quantify perceptions of Honours' job-market value among recent high-achieving Bachelor of Laws (LLB) graduates and contrast perceptions between Honours and non-Honours subgroups. Second, we estimate the causal effect of Honours completion on legal-sector employment using 1:1 nearest-neighbour propensity score matching (PSM) that balances on key covariates (Practical Legal Training [PLT] status, employment sector, graduation period). Third, we explain the divergence between perceived value and null treatment effect through expectancy theory (expectancy, instrumentality, valence) and decision-psychology mechanisms (confirmation bias). Our tentative findings show a clear perception gap between Bachelor of Laws (Honours) [LLBH] graduates, who perceive greater job-market value ($M = 3.91$ vs. 2.56), and a null matched effect on legal-sector employment (0 percentage points, 95% CI $[-48.8, 48.4]$). We argue that weak instrumentality (unclear mapping from completion to outcomes) and post-hoc rationalisation can reconcile this divergence, and we conclude with recommendations for evidence-based communication and improved signalling at program and sector levels.



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Beyond contributing to the Law Honours literature, this article addresses a broader challenge in higher education: how students evaluate advanced credentials with value that is partially socially constructed, weakly communicated, and poorly measured. In such contexts, perceived prestige and anecdote can dominate over evidence, especially when the costs of additional study are salient and the opportunity costs high. By integrating decision psychology with matched employment outcomes, we offer insights relevant to other professional programs where claims of employability advantages outpace robust evidence.

The Australian legal education landscape changed with the introduction of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) in 2011. The shift to AQF Level 8 Honours degrees led law schools to adopt three structural models. Embedded programs integrate Honours requirements directly into the LLB curriculum. Embedded pathway models offer a designated stream requiring specific courses and higher academic standards. Separate Honours programs constitute an additional year of study following LLB completion, often involving substantial independent research. Now, when employers encounter graduates with “Honours” qualifications, they cannot readily distinguish between these models or infer the specific skills or achievements the credential represents, constituting a signalling problem in the labour market (Caplan, 2019; James, 2020; Spence, 1973).

Importantly, entry to legal practice in Australia requires completion of PLT, a structured professional program typically undertaken through an external provider after or alongside the LLB or Juris Doctor. PLT—not Honours—is the primary prerequisite for admission to practice, and its completion is therefore a stronger proximate driver of legal-sector employment than any other academic credential. This distinction is critical for interpreting our results: where Honours programs offer recognised prior learning (RPL) credit for completed PLT (as at the University of Southern Queensland [UniSQ]), the practical value of Honours may lie as much in its integration with the professional qualification pathway as in its academic content.

For students, the decision to pursue Honours involves weighing uncertain benefits against known costs. Time constraints, financial considerations, and opportunity costs of delayed workforce entry motivate a search for clear evidence of employment advantages. However, heterogeneous program models and a lack of sector-wide data on graduate outcomes make such evidence difficult to obtain. Students must rely on institutional marketing, peer narratives, and incomplete information when making these consequential decisions. The resulting divergence between perceived and actual value has important implications for student decision-making and transitions into professional careers.

Our study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence on both perceptions and outcomes, using methods to control for selection bias and isolate the causal effects of Honours completion on employment outcomes. By integrating quantitative analysis with theoretical frameworks from decision psychology and expectancy theory, we offer insights that can inform student advising, institutional policy, and program design.

Literature and Framing

Employability Claims and Evidence

Across disciplines, Honours and cognate credentials are frequently positioned as enhancing employability. Common rationales include deepened research and analytical skills, extended writing and project experience, and an implied signal of excellence (Horstmanshof & Boyd, 2019). However, credible causal evidence is sparse, and heterogeneous institutional models complicate interpretation. In legal education, the shift to AQF Level 8 Honours diversified formats and blurred external signals, making simple comparisons problematic (Backer & Benckendorff, 2018; Barron & Zeegers, 2012; Burton et al., 2020). Employers may be unsure whether “Honours” signifies high grade point average (GPA), a discrete research year, embedded coursework at advanced level, or a mix (James, 2020).

Graduates also enter segmented labour markets (e.g., private firms, government, in-house, non-legal roles), where academic credentials may be discounted against experiential factors (work history, clinics, internships) and local networks. Claims of generic employability effects therefore warrant careful empirical testing with attention to selection bias and observable covariates related to both the decision to pursue Honours and employment outcome.

The broader employability literature highlights the limitations of credential-focused explanations of labour-market outcomes (Brown et al., 2003; Holmes, 2013; Tomlinson, 2007, 2012). Human capital theory assumes that additional education directly enhances productivity and hence employment prospects (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961), but this assumption is strained when credentials are heterogeneous, labour markets segmented, and signalling mechanisms unclear. In Australian law Honours,

these features are pronounced: the credential itself may not provide clear information about the specific skills or experiences that employers value. Empirical work on Honours effects has been limited, often relying on simple comparisons without controls for selection and focusing on non-law fields (Allan, 2011; Carduner et al., 2011; Kool et al., 2016; Tsai et al., 2024).

Decision Psychology in Postgraduate Choices

Expectancy theory posits that motivation reflects beliefs about effort performance (expectancy), performance outcome (instrumentality), and the value of that outcome (valence) (Condrey, 2005; Porter & Lawler, 1968; Vroom, 1964). When students cannot see a reliable link between completing Honours and valued job outcomes (weak instrumentality), decisions and post-completion satisfaction are shaped by uncertainty. Under such conditions, people rely on heuristics and narratives and, once they commit to a costly path, may reduce dissonance by elevating the perceived value of their choice.

Cognitive dissonance and confirmation bias (Aronson, 1969; Festinger, 1957; Nickerson, 1998) thus help explain why graduates may maintain positive perceptions of Honours even when objective evidence suggests limited benefits. After investing time, effort, and resources, it is psychologically easier to focus on positive information and reinterpret disappointing outcomes. We therefore expect relatively modest perceptions among non-Honours graduates and elevated perceived value among Honours graduates whose sunk costs incentivise positive evaluations. Recent applications of expectancy-value models to postgraduate study choices (Bergann et al., 2025; Wang & Degol, 2013) support the central role of instrumentality and subjective value in such decisions.

Signalling Under Heterogeneous Honours Models

From a signalling perspective (Caplan, 2019; Spence, 1973), the credibility of a qualification depends on consistent standards and employer understanding. Divergent Honours models introduce noise that weakens the labour-market signal. If employers cannot infer whether Honours denotes exceptional undergraduate performance, a substantial thesis, or local program design (Burton et al., 2020; James, 2020), the marginal signal will be discounted. In turn, students face a noisier mapping from completion to outcomes; instrumentality weakens, and decisions hinge more on perceived prestige, peer narratives, and pragmatic factors such as time, cost, and prioritising admission to the profession.

Our study contributes to this literature by examining a context where Honours is actively promoted as enhancing employability, yet where signalling ambiguity and limited outcome data create conditions in which perceptions can diverge markedly from measured employment effects.

Methods

Design, Participants, and Measures

We employed a convergent mixed-methods survey (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) of UniSQ LLB alumni (n = 66 complete responses) from 2020 to 2024 who met the Honours GPA threshold (5.0 on a 7-point scale). Restricting the frame to eligible graduates ensured that all respondents could, in principle, have pursued Honours. The 10-minute survey was distributed via email with an initial invitation and two reminders. Respondents reported Honours status (completed/current vs. none), PLT status (completed/current/planned/none), current employment sector (legal, non-legal, seeking), and perceptions of Honours' job-market value on a 5-point scale ("What is your perception of the value of an LLB Honours degree in the job market?", 1 = not very valuable, 5 = very valuable).

The 66 complete responses represent approximately 30 per cent of the eligible population (N = 221). While this introduces potential non-response bias, Honours graduates are relatively well represented, which is important given Honours completion is the key predictor. Honours was operationalised as a binary indicator of whether the respondent had completed or was currently completing law Honours.

Control variables for PSM included PLT status (completed, current, planned, or none), employment sector (legal, non-legal, seeking), and graduation period (2020–2021, 2022–2023, or 2024). These variables were selected based on data availability and their expected relevance to employment outcomes, though the small sample limited the range of possible controls.

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Analysis

We report descriptive distributions and subgroup means of perceived value in the job market by current employment sector and Honours status (Table 1). To address selection on observables when estimating employability effects, we conducted 1:1 nearest-neighbour PSM (no replacement) with covariates PLT status, employment sector, and graduation period. Each Honours graduate was matched to one similar non-Honours graduate. Balance diagnostics (standardised mean differences and variance ratios) assessed the quality of matching (Table 3). We computed treatment effect estimates (ATE/ATET) on legal-sector employment with 95 per cent confidence intervals and emphasise uncertainty given the small sample and wide intervals. Qualitative responses contextualised quantitative patterns but are reported selectively to preserve focus on the perception versus outcome question.

Ethics and Limitations of Design

The study received ethical approval from the University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee (ETH2024-0912). All participants provided informed consent and were assured that their responses were anonymous and used only for research purposes.

The single-institution scope and small Honours subsample ($n = 11$) limit generalisability and statistical power and yield imprecise treatment effect estimates. Results should be interpreted as suggestive and motivating multi-site replication rather than definitive. Potential unobserved confounding (e.g., motivation, career aspirations, family background) may influence both Honours decisions and employment outcomes in ways not fully captured by the available covariates.

Results

Perceived Job-Market Value of Law Honours

Table 1 summarises perceived job-market value overall and by subgroup. Overall mean perception was 2.79 ($n = 66$), with 37.9 per cent selecting low/very low (1–2 on a 5-point scale). Perceptions were similar among those employed in the legal sector ($M = 2.75$, $n = 36$) and those employed outside the legal sector ($M = 2.74$, $n = 23$), while those seeking employment reported a higher mean ($M = 3.20$, $n = 5$). Honours graduates (including currently enrolled) reported substantially higher perceived value ($M = 3.91$, $n = 11$) than non-Honours graduates ($M = 2.56$, $n = 55$).

Table 1

Perceived Job-market Value of Law Honours by Subgroups

Group	n	Mean (1–5)	SD	% Low (1–2)	% High (4–5)
Overall	66	2.79	1.17	37.9	28.8
Legal sector	36	2.75	1.20	38.9	25.0
Non-legal sector	23	2.74	1.25	43.5	34.8
Seeking employment	5	3.20	0.45	0.0	20.0
LLBH	11	3.91	0.94	9.1	72.7
Non-LLBH	55	2.56	1.08	43.6	20.0

The overall mean of 2.79 suggests that graduates viewed law Honours as having moderate value in the job market, with over a third rating it as low or very low. Perceptions were similar for graduates working within and outside the legal sector, suggesting that current employment context does not strongly shape views of Honours. The most striking pattern is the large difference between Honours and non-Honours graduates (Cohen's $d = 1.27$), consistent with the expectation that direct experience and post-hoc justification elevate perceived value among Honours completers.

Employment Outcomes: Unmatched Versus Matched

Unmatched comparisons suggested an apparent advantage for Honours graduates: 70 per cent of LLBH respondents were employed in the legal sector, a gap of approximately 15.3 percentage points relative to non-LLBH graduates (Table 2).

Table 2

Employment Outcomes by LLBH Status (Unmatched Sample)

Group	n	% Legal-sector employment	Gap (pp)
LLBH	10 ^a	70	NA
Non-LLBH	53	54.7	15.3

^a One LLBH participant (ID 25) was missing employment status data, which is why the group total is not the same as the total number of LLBH graduates (n = 11).

However, after 1:1 nearest-neighbour matching on PLT status, employment sector, and graduation period (Table 3), the average treatment effect on legal-sector employment was 0 percentage points with wide confidence intervals (95% CI [-48.8, 48.4]), indicating no detectable causal effect within the matched sample (n = 14) (Table 4). Balance diagnostics showed standardised differences reduced to ~0 on matching covariates, indicating excellent balance.

Table 3

Balance Diagnostics Before and After Propensity Score Matching

Covariate	SMD (Unmatched)	SMD (Matched)	Var. ratio (Unmatched)	Var. ratio (Matched)
PLT status	large	NA	0.00	NaN
Employment sector	large	~0	0.94	1.00
Graduation period	small	~0	1.13	1.00

Table 4

Treatment Effects on Employment Outcomes

Estimator	Effect (pp)	95% CI lower	95% CI upper	Notes
ATE	0	-48.8	48.4	Matched sample = 14; legal-sector employment
ATET	0	-48.8	48.4	Identical outcomes across groups post-match

The wide confidence intervals reflect the small sample size and resulting imprecision. While the point estimate is zero, the intervals are compatible with both substantial positive and negative effects, underscoring the need for cautious interpretation and replication.

Sensitivity and Robustness Notes

Sensitivity checks using alternative caliper widths for 1:1 nearest-neighbour matching produced substantively similar conclusions: no consistent evidence of an Honours employment advantage within the limits of the sample. Bootstrap confidence intervals (1,000 iterations) likewise remained wide. While the modest sample size limited our ability to conduct subgroup analyses, the impact of additional covariates (such as undergraduate GPA, clinic or clerkship experience) could not be explored because these data were not collected.

Qualitative responses from Honours graduates contextualise the perceived job market value scores. One graduate noted that Honours allowed them to “have on my CV to potential clients that I had received an LLB (1st class),” also noting “the potential for study abroad [where] the institutions required a first class honours” (Respondent ID 25). Similarly, another illustrative

comment on the perceived value of Honours, from Respondent ID 33, stated, “I wanted my degree to be on par with the sandstone uni programs. I hope to pursue a PhD in the next couple of years.” Of the five Honours respondents (of 11) who provided open-text comments on additional enrolment factors, two mentioned professional signalling or prestige and one mentioned PhD aspirations, while the remaining responses cited knowledge expansion, convenience, and personal circumstances. These qualitative responses are thus consistent with the broader quantitative pattern: Honours graduates valued the credential primarily for professional signalling and postgraduate preparation.

Non-Honours graduates most often cited time constraints (19.5%), financial costs (15.4%), and having gained employment (13%) as barriers. Some expressed scepticism about employability benefits, describing Honours as offering “no greater chance of employment” (Respondent ID 42) or being “more of a ‘nice to have’” (Respondent ID 97), while others emphasised the relative value of prior work experience and career-change backgrounds.

Discussion

The evidence from this single-institution study of UniSQ LLB alumni reveals a notable divergence: Honours graduates reported markedly higher perceived job-market value of their credential compared to their non-Honours peers, yet PSM showed no detectable effect on legal-sector employment. The null employment finding is consistent with Kool et al. (2016), who found that Honours alumni in the Netherlands could not be distinguished from non-Honours alumni on early career outcomes. It also aligns with Horstmanshof and Boyd's (2019) broader questioning of the value proposition of Honours in Australian universities. Importantly, two caveats qualify the interpretation of this gap between Honours and non-Honours graduates. First, the matched sample ($n = 14$) provides limited statistical power; with confidence intervals spanning nearly 100 percentage points, moderate true effects would remain undetectable, and some portion of the apparent perception–outcome divergence may be methodological rather than substantive. Second, the perception question asked about “value in the job market” broadly, while the outcome variable captured only legal-sector employment at a single time point. Graduates may have interpreted “job-market value” as encompassing dimensions beyond sector of employment—such as quality of role, professional networks, cultural or academic capital, or salary—that our outcome measure does not capture. These caveats should be borne in mind throughout the discussion that follows. Subject to these qualifications, expectancy theory and decision psychology together help explain this gap between perceptions and outcomes.

Expectancy theory highlights instrumentality—the belief that performance (completing Honours) leads to valued outcomes (legal-sector employment). In a context of heterogeneous Honours models and limited transparency about labour-market returns, the instrumentality link is weak for many prospective students. Where instrumentality is weak, decisions lean on proxy indicators (institutional prestige, peer narratives, convenience features like PLT credit) rather than verified outcome data. This pattern aligns with the moderate-to-low overall perceived value ($M = 2.79$) and the sizeable subgroup rating Honours' job-market value as low.

Decision-psychology mechanisms help account for why LLBH graduates nevertheless report higher perceived value ($M = 3.91$). After incurring costs (tuition, time, opportunity cost) and expending effort, individuals are motivated to maintain cognitive consistency. Confirmation bias and post-hoc rationalisation may elevate perceived value, especially when external signals are noisy. This does not imply irrationality; rather, it reflects sense-making under uncertainty. In practice, weak prospective instrumentality and strong retrospective justification produce a stable perception gap between LLBH and non-LLBH graduates.

However, our cross-sectional design cannot definitively distinguish post-hoc rationalisation from self-selection: it is equally plausible that graduates who already placed higher value on academic credentials were more likely to pursue Honours in the first place. Both mechanisms may operate simultaneously—prior attitudes may predispose enrolment, and post-completion justification may reinforce those attitudes. Disentangling the two would require longitudinal data capturing perceptions before and after enrolment, which our survey did not collect.

Human capital considerations provide further context. The most frequently cited barriers to Honours uptake were time and financial constraints, and many non-Honours graduates had already secured employment. When opportunity costs are high and the payoff ambiguous, abstaining from Honours is economically rational. The survey did not directly ask Honours students whether they had secured employment prior to enrolment or declined offers to pursue Honours. However, contextual evidence suggests many undertook the program alongside employment, given that all 11 had completed PLT and seven reported

working full-time in the legal sector during Honours (e.g., Respondent ID 50). So, it may be that those who do enrol have stronger intrinsic or pragmatic motivations (e.g. PLT credit, personal challenge), who can perceive value without necessarily requiring a measurable employability premium. This is consistent with Bergann et al.'s (2025) finding that both intrinsic and extrinsic motives shape postgraduate enrolment decisions.

From a sector perspective, signalling problems likely exacerbate these dynamics. Honours credentials from different institutions may reflect completion of an integrated program of study, research-focused electives, or a substantial thesis. As Burton et al. (2020) argued, this diversity of approaches may itself corrode the market relevance of Honours. Without a consistent external referent, signalling theory predicts that the marginal signal of “Honours” will be discounted (James, 2020; Spence, 1973). Graduate perceptions in our data are consistent with this prediction. One Honours graduate observed that “the legal industry does not appear to have much understanding of this system, with most prospective employers being unsure why I would have both an LLB degree and an Honours degree” (Respondent ID 25), while a non-Honours graduate questioned whether employers would view it as “more of a ‘nice to have’” rather than essential (Respondent ID 97). While direct employer-perception research remains limited in the Australian law Honours context (see Limitations and Future Research below), these graduate reports suggest that signalling ambiguity is perceived at the point of recruitment, particularly in entry-level recruitment where GPA can serve as a proxy measure of legal research skills and communication.

Theoretical Implications

The findings extend expectancy theory by illustrating a temporal asymmetry: instrumentality appears weak at the decision point yet is retrospectively reconstructed in more positive terms by those who completed Honours. This suggests that expectancy theory's components may operate differently before and after commitment to an educational pathway.

The study also contributes to signalling accounts of education by showing how ambiguous, heterogeneous credentials can generate weak prospective signalling but strong retrospective justification. Honours graduates report substantially higher perceived value ($M = 3.91$) despite null matched employment effects, highlighting how perceptions may be shaped more by cognitive processes than by observed labour-market returns.

Finally, the results underscore the role of cognitive biases in educational decision-making. Confirmation bias and cognitive dissonance reduction appear to operate differently across groups, creating systematic differences in perceptions that are not mirrored in outcomes. This has implications for how institutions frame credentials and for how students interpret their own trajectories.

Practical Implications for Institutions

Rather than making generic employability claims, programs could identify concrete ways that supervised research, advanced writing, or project management prepare students for particular professional tasks, ideally with authentic employer-endorsed assessments.

Evidence-based communication about program outcomes—including cohort-level employment patterns, role types, and time-to-employment for Honours versus non-Honours graduates—could give students a clearer basis for decision-making. Such reporting should explicitly acknowledge uncertainty, sample size limitations, and selection effects.

Advising practices could be enhanced by equipping staff with transparent scripts that help students articulate their goals (e.g., research-focused or practice-oriented) and weigh Honours against alternative investments such as paid legal work, clinics, or clerkships. For some students, Honours may be most instrumentally valuable as preparation for higher-degree research or specialised roles (e.g., Judges' Associateships, academic careers). For others, particularly those primarily seeking entry into practice, tangible benefits such as PLT credit integration, skill development, or prestige may matter more than broad employability claims.

For prospective students, the perception gap we document suggests that decisions should be grounded in concrete benefits aligned with specific career goals—such as PhD eligibility, PLT credit, or suitability for specialised roles—rather than assumed labour-market premiums.

Implications for Policy and Regulation

At a sector level, the findings tentatively point to the value of greater clarity and comparability in Honours program design and signalling. While institutional autonomy is important, discipline-specific descriptors of Honours learning outcomes could help employers interpret credentials and reduce noise in the labour market.

Improved data collection and reporting on graduate outcomes—especially for programs marketed as enhancing employability—would support more informed decisions by students and educators. Multi-institution reporting frameworks that distinguish Honours models and track outcomes across time and role types could address the information asymmetry that contributes to weak instrumentality and reliance on anecdote.

There may also be value in differentiating Honours pathways more explicitly according to student goals. A clearer distinction between research-intensive Honours (designed as a pathway to doctoral study and academic careers) and practice-oriented Honours (integrated with PLT and applied legal skills) could strengthen instrumentality for both cohorts and support more transparent signalling.

Limitations and Future Research

The single-institution scope and small Honours subsample ($n = 11$) limit statistical power and produce wide confidence intervals. Our null effects should therefore be interpreted as “no detectable effect” rather than “no effect whatsoever.” Reliance on self-reported perceptions and employment status may introduce measurement error. The focus on a single outcome—legal-sector employment at one time point—means we cannot assess other potential benefits of Honours such as salary growth, career advancement, job satisfaction, or role complexity.

Future research should pursue multi-institution replication to compare different Honours models and enhance generalisability. Incorporating richer covariates—such as grade distributions, clerkships, professional experience, demographics, and geographic location—would strengthen causal inference. Employer-perception studies could illuminate how Honours is interpreted relative to GPA and experience, and longitudinal designs could track career trajectories over time. Qualitative work with students, graduates, and employers could deepen understanding of how Honours’ value is constructed and communicated.

Conclusion

This study documents a pattern that warrants further investigation: law Honours graduates perceive substantially higher job-market value ($M = 3.91$) than non-Honours graduates ($M = 2.56$), yet PSM reveals no detectable causal effect of Honours completion on legal-sector employment (0 percentage points, 95% CI $[-48.8, 48.4]$). We interpret this divergence through expectancy theory and decision psychology. Heterogeneous program models and scarce outcome data weaken the prospective mapping from Honours completion to legal-sector employment, while post-completion cognitive consistency and confirmation bias appear to elevate perceived value among Honours graduates.

Although based on a single institution and a modest sample, the findings raise questions about assumptions that law Honours programs universally confer employability advantages. Honours may deliver important educational benefits—such as research skills, intellectual challenge, and preparation for doctoral study—but students evaluating the credential primarily for labour-market returns face an uncertain value proposition. Prospective students should therefore base decisions on concrete benefits aligned with their goals (e.g., eligibility for specific roles, PhD entry pathways, PLT credit, research training) rather than generic employability assumptions.

At the same time, the study highlights systemic challenges in how advanced credentials function within segmented professional labour markets. When program models create signalling ambiguity, when outcome data are limited, and when professional qualifications such as PLT provide the main gatekeeping, additional academic credentials risk being discounted regardless of their educational content. Addressing these challenges may require clearer differentiation of Honours pathways, more transparent outcome reporting, and advising practices that support realistic, evidence-informed decision-making.

Within the limitations of single-institution sampling and modest statistical power, our findings motivate a multi-site research agenda examining how different Honours models, student populations, and labour-market contexts shape both perceptions and outcomes. Aligning student decisions, institutional practices, and policy frameworks with empirical evidence will require

moving beyond anecdote and assumption to rigorous, transparent assessment of what Honours programs deliver—and for whom.

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Supplementary Information

The data and materials that support the findings of this study are available in the Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/4j6fz>

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