Charles Sturt University

Ready, Not Finished

What Universities Can Promise at Graduation

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TO BEGIN

Two in five graduates say their job doesn't use what they know.

29.4%

of full-time employed undergraduates feel their skills and education aren't fully utilised in their current job

41.4%

of all employed undergraduates say the same — including part-time work and career stepping-stones

Source: 2025 Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) — short-term survey, QILT

THE REVEAL

It's tempting to hear that as failure. The data says something else.

The single biggest reason graduates give for feeling underused:

“I'm in an entry-level job — a career stepping stone.”

Not too much taught. Not too little. A graduate with threshold capability, stepping into a role that hasn't yet asked for everything they can do — because no one is handed full responsibility on day one.

Source: 2025 Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) — short-term survey, QILT

A SECOND GAP — NOT THE SAME ONE, AND NOT CAUSED BY IT

People often describe this as an AI crisis.

It isn't.

It's a story about confidence — in assessment, in evidence, in what our qualifications represent, and, separately, in graduates themselves, which the gap I just showed you speaks to on its own terms.

Today I want to spend our time on one specific place that confidence has broken — the gap between what we can promise at graduation, and what everyone assumes we're promising.

A COMPOSITE, BUILT ENTIRELY FROM DATA

Meet Zoe.

Eighteen months into her first job as a lab technician at a water authority. A science graduate.

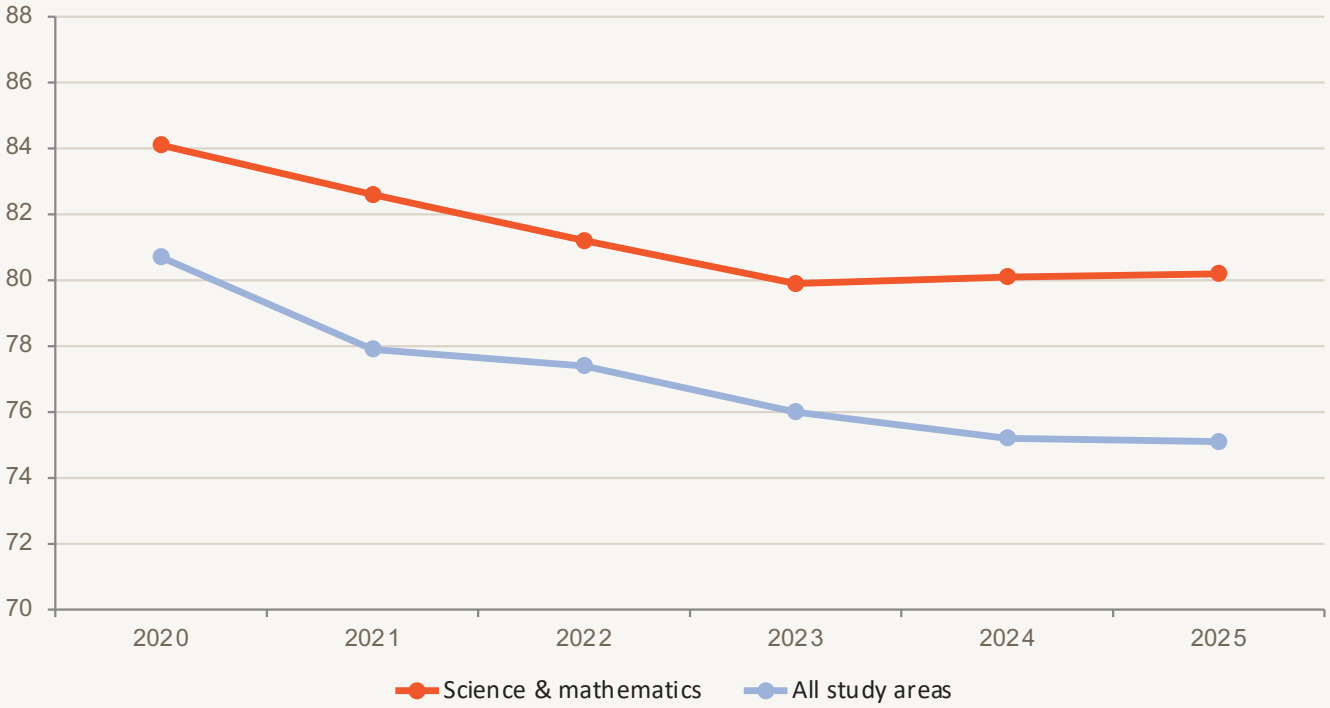
Three things are true about Zoe at once:

She liked her degree. She doesn't feel ready. She feels underused.

Every word of that is drawn from national survey data on graduates just like her.
Let's look at what each one actually shows.

ZOE LIKED HER DEGREE

Science satisfaction has beaten the sector average for six years running



+5.1pts

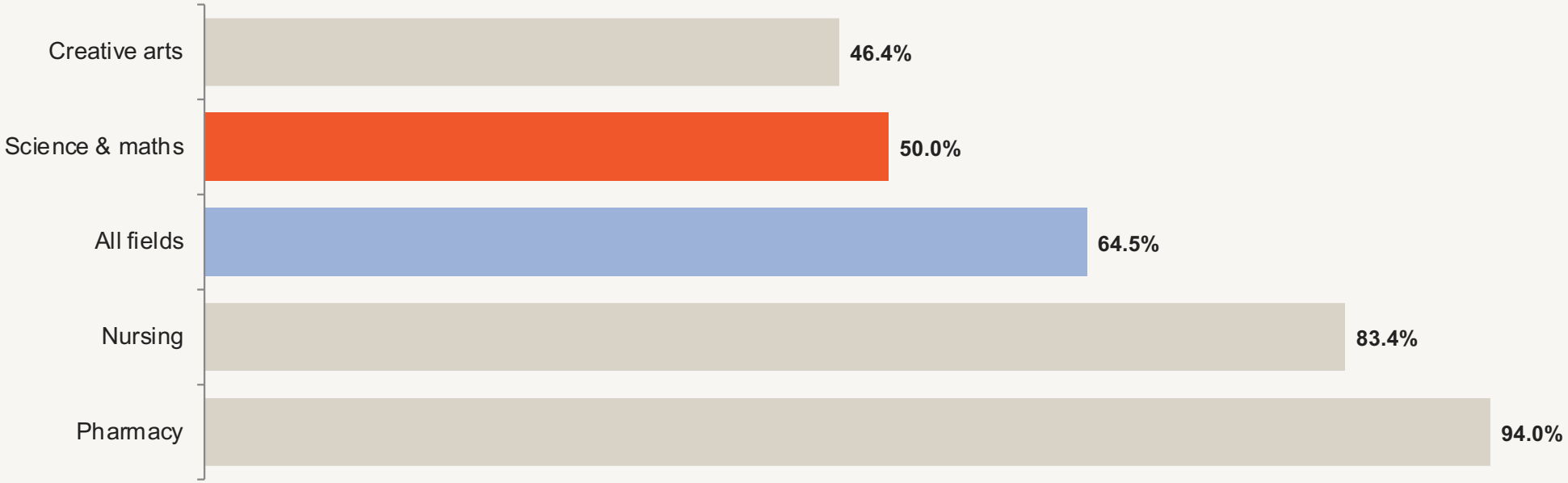
science's satisfaction lead over the sector, in 2025 — up from +3.4pts in 2020

Both are falling.
Science is falling slower.

Source: QILT Graduate Outcomes Survey, 2020–2025

ZOE ISN'T SURE HER DEGREE PREPRARED HER FOR THIS JOB

Feeling well-prepared for the job: science sits near the bottom



Overall employed graduates, 2025 GOS. Even during study, science students rate their own skills development below average — a gap present for at least four consecutive years (SES 2021–2024).

ZOE FEELS UNDERUSED — BUT WHO AGREES?

What do you think her supervisor thinks?

ZOE'S SELF-REPORT

61.5%

of science graduates feel overqualified or underused in their role — roughly 1.5× the national average (41.4%)

Overall employed, 2025 GOS (short-term)

HER SUPERVISOR'S VIEW

83.1%

satisfied — a strong absolute score, and also completely average: within 2 points of the national figure every year for 5 years, through the AI period.

Employer Satisfaction Survey, 2021–2025

For an earlier cohort of science graduates (finished 2022), this same measure fell from 53.8% to 36.2% three years later — GOS-L 2025. The fuller picture is next.

The confidence gap isn't between universities and employers. It's between a graduate and her own sense of herself — for reasons the data can name, but not yet fully explain.

TALK AT YOUR TABLE — 4 MINUTES

Where have you seen a graduate's own sense of readiness diverge from how they're actually regarded?

In your own faculty, program, or discipline — not necessarily science.

NAMING THE STANDARD

Two standards, quietly conflated

A **What the regulation actually requires**

"Broad and coherent knowledge and skills for professional work and further learning."

— Australian Qualifications Framework

A threshold. A floor of readiness to enter practice — not a ceiling of professional independence.

B **What the sector has drifted toward**

A "complete professional" — fully independent, job-ready on day one.

— nowhere written into the Standards

Curriculum overload. Assessment overload. A program designed to produce complete professionals rather than capable graduates.

NOT ONE SOURCE OF PRESSURE — SEVERAL

The push toward “complete professional” doesn't come from one place

Pull on any one of these and it doesn't resolve the tension — it just relocates it.

1	**Professional accrediting bodies**	Some science disciplines have bodies that shape curriculum content directly. Most don't. The pressure isn't evenly spread, even within science.
2	**Government and “job-ready” rhetoric**	The Job-Ready Graduates package built funding settings around graduates being ready for immediate employment. The Accord has moved on from that framing. The expectation hasn't.
3	**Public and community expectation**	For a regional graduate who becomes the town's only nurse, “ready now” is a reasonable community expectation, not a naive one.
4	**The regulatory apparatus itself**	HESF and TEQSA exist to assure compliance with the threshold — but scrutiny alone still shapes what a program chooses to include, well beyond what's strictly required.

None of these is the villain on its own. Together, quietly, they add up to a standard nobody actually wrote down.

SETTING THE SCENE

Many sessions. One question underneath.

As you listen today and tomorrow, hold this question: what is this session telling us about the gap between promise and threshold — and who's being asked to close it?

1	**Engagement & employability**	Where students feel the gap earliest	*Wakeling*
2	**GenAI & assessment**	Where the evidence for the gap broke publicly	*Macaulay · Hogan*
3	**Social licence & transitions**	Where the gap shows up as a question of trust	*McDonald*
4	**Equity & first-in-family**	Who pays the highest price when the gap goes unnamed	*Whitsed*
5	**Disruption & capability**	What it costs the sector to hold the gap steady	*Johnson*

WHY NOW

AI didn't create this gap.
It made it impossible to look away from.

BEFORE

Essays and reports were always thin proxies for capability — contract cheating and surface learning predate any chatbot.

NOW

Detecting AI use in submitted work is, for practical purposes, impossible — TEQSA has said so plainly, twice.

THE REAL FIX

Not better detection. Redesigned evidence — gathered across a program, through observation and demonstration, not crammed into single tasks.

HOW THE SECTOR IS ANSWERING

Assurance across the whole degree, not bolted onto each unit

PROGRAMMATIC ASSESSMENT

Evidence of a graduate's threshold capability gathered across a whole course — multiple, integrated tasks over time — rather than certified by any single high-stakes unit.

It's exactly the kind of redesign the TEQSA resources cited earlier are pointing toward — but outside medicine, nursing and allied health, large-scale programmatic assessment is still rare, and genuinely under-evidenced.

Science sits squarely in that gap.

WHAT TRYING LOOKS LIKE — CSU'S OWN RESPONSE

MEA — Models of Engagement and Assessment

A five-year transformation repositioning the course, not the subject, as the primary unit of curriculum and assessment design, across more than 200 courses.

CEA — Curriculum-Embedded Assurance

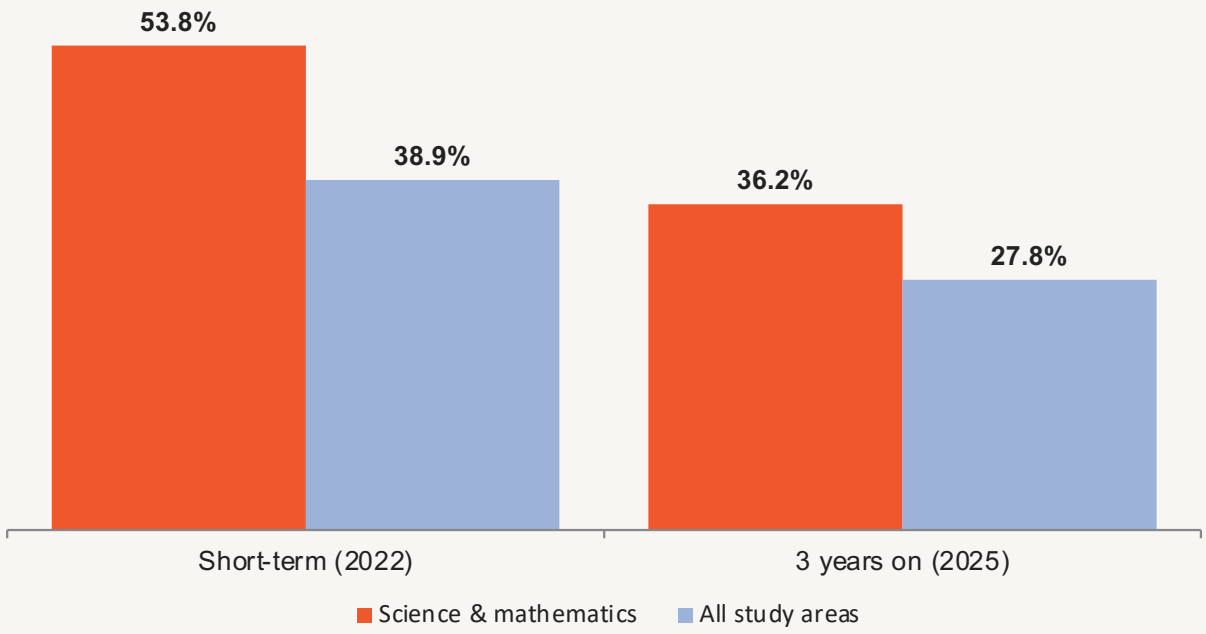
Confirms course-level outcomes through designated subjects and Course Assurance Plans, tracked across four stages:

Mid-implementation, not a finished answer — offered as what one institution's attempt at this looks like, not a solution to hand you.

THE HANDOVER

Science starts further behind — and the gap narrows over time

A different survey, and an earlier cohort — graduates who finished in 2022, not the same group as Zoe.



Science's gap above the national average:

14.9 → 8.4 pts

The gap closes by 44% within three years — a bit faster than the sector average falls.

We can't yet say whether that's industry doing its job well, or graduates simply adjusting on their own.

Source: 2025 Graduate Outcomes Survey – Longitudinal (GOS-L), 2022→2025 cohort, overall employed, QILT

NOT ONE GAP — THE WHOLE CURRICULUM, NOW

Assessment is one gap. This is a curriculum transformation moment.

Institutions are already mid-transformation, right now, sector-wide. Patch assessment alone and the rest sets around it. The moment to treat this as the whole curriculum is while it's still moving:

Who our students are

Equity, part-time work, remote and regional location, first-in-family — the same threshold means something different depending who's meeting it.

AI, and where not to use it

Deliberate calls, at specific points in a course, about when AI-assisted work is appropriate and when it genuinely can't be.

Support, engagement, transitions

Assurance evidence is only honest if students had a genuine chance to reach the threshold in the first place.

Capacity and disruption

What a redesign actually costs staff, in time and workload, before it's asked to also produce better evidence.

Every university in Australia has a different purpose and a different ethos. The right response is built from that difference, not smoothed over it.

Different, but not alone — ACDS has done this before, with the 2011 Science Threshold Learning Outcomes, and its 2026–2030 Strategic Plan commits to doing it again.

TWO INDEPENDENT ACCOUNTS, THE SAME DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis is already on the record

ACDS Strategic Plan 2026–2030, Goal 1 — the national challenge (paraphrased):

Declining public trust in science. Unclear signals about what jobs a science degree leads to. Falling domestic enrolments. Uneven AI literacy across the sector. Mounting pressure on the staff who teach.

— summarised from ACDS's account of the national challenge facing the sector

A separate diagnosis reaches the same place — the Australian Academy of Science's Science 2035 report warns that training people to operate today's tools prepares them for yesterday's challenges. The fix isn't technical training. It's the adaptability that research-led education builds.

This isn't a story about artificial intelligence.

It's a story about confidence.

Confidence isn't rebuilt by resolving a tension in forty-five minutes.
It's rebuilt by naming it honestly, together, over the next two days.

Keep asking, in every session that follows:

Whose confidence is this session trying to rebuild?

Somewhere out there right now, someone very like Zoe is waiting to find out.

Thank you.

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