



Lisa Worrall

One of my daughters recently graduated from ANU with a PhD in the biosciences. I attended the graduation ceremony and was pleasantly surprised to find that a well-known Australian geologist was addressing the new graduates – including graduates in the geosciences. He had an optimistic message: they all had a good degree from one of the best universities in the world and the future was theirs.

'Typical of a baby boomer' was my daughter's response, 'they have no idea'. I probed a little deeper and discovered that she, and her cohort, were of the view that individuals who graduated in science in Australia in the 60s and 70s had graduated during a golden era. Today's graduates think that the employment landscape back then was so different to the employment landscape today that the baby boomers may as well have been graduating on the moon. They did not

have to 'manage' their career, to wrestle it into existence. They had their careers gifted to them on a plate – along with their generous superannuation salaries and lucrative redundancy payments.

Now, my daughter is managing her career very well. She has already been first author on a number of papers in prestigious journals, including *Nature*, and has a well-funded post doctoral position at Oxford University. But I take her point, and wonder if we are doing enough to prepare geoscience students for the vicissitudes of our profession. Are we being honest or overly optimistic in our advice – particularly to those just starting out? I am regularly asked for career advice. I was approached by a UQ student after a talk I just gave to the local chapter of the AusIMM so I thought I'd test her understanding of her prospects by saying something about the current downturn. I was astonished to discover that this student had no idea that the minerals industry was subject to boom bust cycles. None of her career advisors or her lecturers had discussed the matter with her. It was all travel and adventure and astronomical salaries – never mind put half your salary aside as you could be unemployed half the time you're out there! The profession might lose her – or it might not – either way, with a better understanding of the industry she is better informed and better able to shape her future.

Concern about the impact of the downturn on the availability of qualified and experienced professionals to serve the industry in boom times is expressed by Bill Shaw and Jon Hronsky in the feature on the AGC published in this issue of *Preview*. Ken Witherly expresses similar concern in his commentary on the downturn, also published in this issue of *Preview*. He suggests, however, that elements of this downturn portend a radical change in the nature of the industry. If he is right, the nature of the advice we offer to students will have to change dramatically.

Innovation and creativity are hallmarks of our profession, especially in difficult times, and Kim Frankcombe's work on extracting three component magnetic data from downhole surveys, which is published in this issue of *Preview*, is typical. Free data are good. Free, albeit basic, software packages for analysing and interpreting data are also good. Now, if only the AGC could corral state and federal governments, and related organisations, into providing access to equipment and facilities for underemployed industry professionals through some kind of fellowship scheme, graduates planning to join the industry could be less concerned about their future.

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