

# WARNING! GRADUATE SEEKS WORK

## EXPECTATION - EXPERIENCE - REALITY

**Introduction.** To compare how undergraduates, graduates and employers view desirable employability qualities and skills and employment expectations. The results would be used to suggest possible strategies to improve employment opportunities for graduates.

Ashton (2010) states that according to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), employability is regarded as transferable core skills, which represent both functional and enabling knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for today's workplace.

The aim of this research project was to highlight any differences regarding key employable qualities as viewed by three separate parties: the undergraduate, the graduate and the employer. The results would then be used to identify differences of expectation and how we, as a university, can work towards instilling the ideal qualities required by the workplace into the University experience.

All ethical guidelines and procedures were adhered to in gathering and using information supplied by the participants.

The method of obtaining the results primarily uses the Likert (1961) scale statistical analysis, which asked the three parties to list in order of priority (5 high - 1 low) Five given predefined qualities, which would enhance employment opportunity. The list contained:

- Qualification
- Subject knowledge
- Communication
- Department
- University where a degree is gained.

Participants were also asked:

- 'Should a graduate be offered the opportunity to be fast tracked in employment?'
- 'Please add any further comments on how, in your opinion, the university experience and degree qualification could be an advantage or disadvantage in job prospects.'

The questionnaire was handed to a variety of small and large businesses, educational employers and professional companies. This was to take into account the current difficult climate for both employers and employees and give an opportunity to compare employer attitudes. By asking undergraduates and graduates to take part in the survey, this gave an opportunity to compare how a student's attitude may differ pre and post-degree qualification.

The results revealed unsurprisingly that each participating group had differing opinions, regarding what were deemed to be desirable employability qualities. The undergraduates regarded the 'qualification' as a priority; the graduate's

preference was overwhelmingly the 'subject knowledge' and the employers overall opinions were evenly grouped with 'Department' as the highest priority.

What must be remembered is that a qualification can open the door for an interview and if a candidate holds solid transferable skills and good communication and department, this will have influence over the final job offer.

The least important quality agreed by all the groups was, 'university where the degree was gained'. This begs the question, how relevant is the university name on an application? Clearly for some specific careers i.e. nursing and certain professional groups the university is important. In reality the popularity and success of a university can vary on which opinion pole is read? A combination of qualities including location i.e. London and Manchester, course availability and the social side aspect add to the overall university experience and popularity, but this does not guarantee a university a position deemed to be a 'higher profile establishment'.

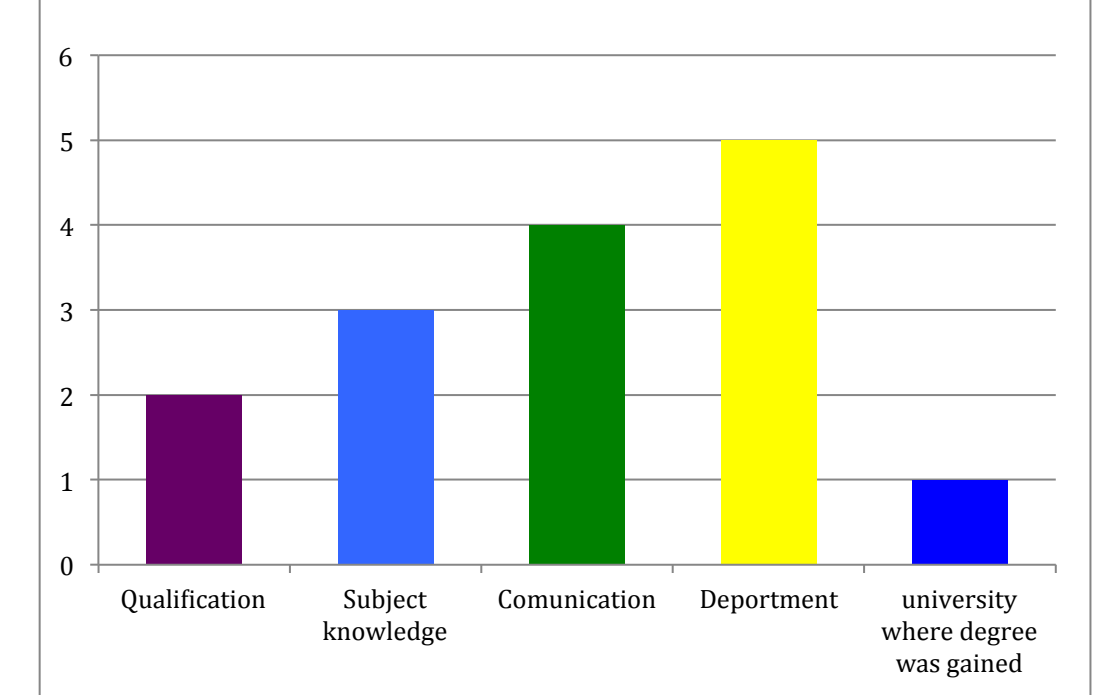
These results helped to identify and highlight expectation 'gaps' held by the three parties. This information could assist the university to work towards a strategy to deliver within the university experience an educational package that includes and promotes the university, student qualification, knowledge and application, communication and department. All are key qualities for a successful graduate in the job market.

## References

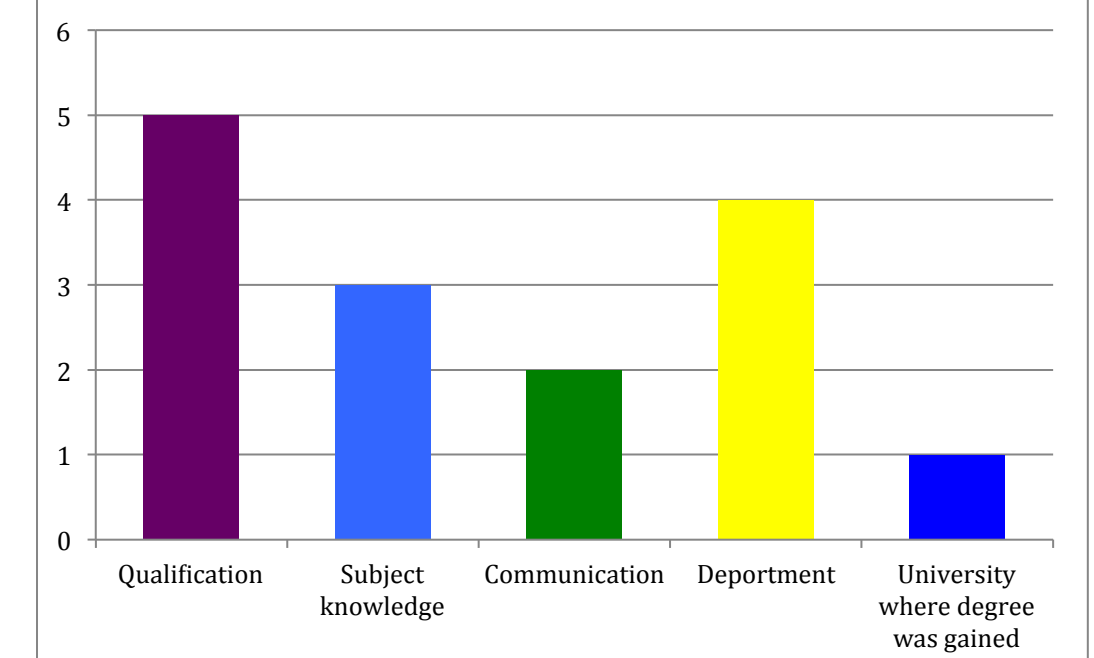
Ashton, D. (2010) 'You just end up feeling more professional': Media production and industry-ready personhood. *Networks Issue 10*, Summer 2010, pp.14-19. ADM-HEA Subject Centre.

Likert, R. (1961). *New Patterns of Management*. McGraw-Hill

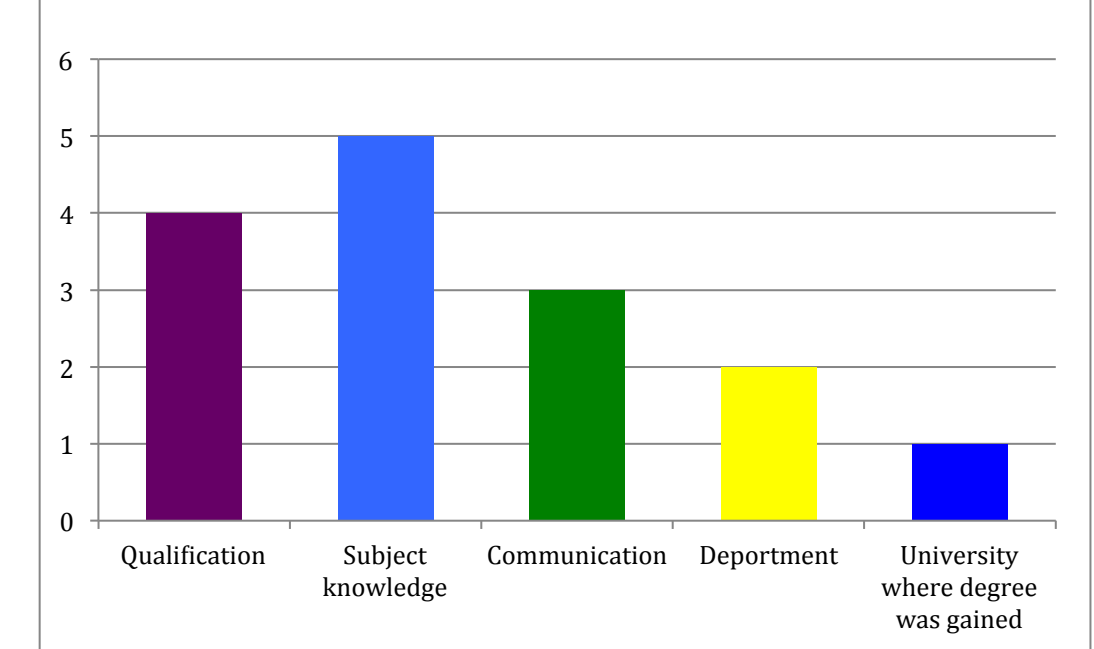
## EMPLOYERS PREFERENCES



## UNDERGRADUATE PERCEPTION



## GRADUATE PRIORITY



## INDICATION AND EXPECTATION

Universities are now in a competitive market and to maintain status their focus has to extend beyond the academy grounds and be credible to three parties

- \* The undergraduate
- \* The graduate
- \* The employer

Undergraduate students are now fee-paying customers and their educational expectations are high, as such they expect a service to match their fee-paying monies.

Universities and colleges of higher education in England, Scotland or Wales will be able to charge new full-time undergraduates fees of up to £9,000 a year (Department for Employment and Learning, 2012)

The graduate is an important extension of the university programme, success in the work place leads to the next generation of employees and indirectly promotes the university in it's academic standing. For the graduate employment motivation is twofold to forge career and to pay an outstanding student loan.

The UK's largest survey of student finance, published in 2011 on Push.co.uk, reveals that students who started at university last year can expect to owe over £23,200 by the time they leave and new students should reckon on around £1,500 more than that.

The Confederation of British Industry and National Union Students joint survey (2011) of just over 2,500 students showed that over half the participants (57%) wanted universities to do more in helping them understand employability skills, including customer awareness, team working and self-management and two thirds (66%) would like more support in developing these skills. This comes as the majority of students (79%) state they decided to go to university to improve their job opportunities.

The employer has the right to expect exacting standards regarding a degree qualification and requires that the graduate seeking employment has both the knowledge, competence and people skills to achieve a successful career.

The Higher Education Careers Services Unit and Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Service (HECSU & AGCAS, 2011) suggest that in order for the student to achieve experience in the workplace volunteering is regarded as 'a savvy use of an individual's time, valued by employers'. They argue that volunteering provides insight into a profession and a company, allowing individuals to build confidence in a role, develop or enhance relevant skills and generate useful contacts that can offer insider knowledge, potentially leading to paid positions. They state that 'overall, it is a great way of improving a CV'.

## References

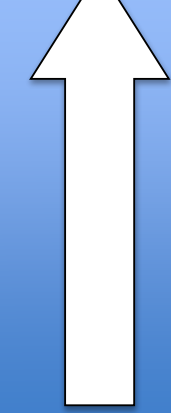
Department for Employment and Learning (2012) <http://www.delm.gov.uk/index/further-and-higher-education/higher-education/student-finance.htm>

HECSU & AGCAS, 2011. [http://www.prospects.ac.uk/what\\_do\\_graduates\\_do\\_employers.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/what_do_graduates_do_employers.htm)

Push.co.uk (2011) <http://push.co.uk/Document.aspx?id=70721341-E658-4583-8082-124474259582>

The Confederation of British Industry and National Union Students (2011) Working towards your future: making the most of our time in higher education. Centrepoint, London.

## FORWARD ONLY



Invite and encourage companies into the university on a regular basis, affording them the opportunity to enter into dialogue with both university staff and students.

Promotion of the university is key to raising the profile of the Graduate.

Students are an investment for the mutual success of both the university and the workplace.

## THE EMPLOYER

'Having a degree can sometimes lead a candidate to expect that they have already reached a position of learning and expertise which needs little further development and learning in a work environment.'

'I would prefer a candidate to have undertaken their further and higher education as part time whilst being in full time employment, therefore being able to immediately contribute to the business in terms of working knowledge and client management.'

'A degree is only an advantage if the job requires a degree level qualification to be a suitable applicant.'

## THE GRADUATE

'University degrees lack hands on experience which is a vital source of information in the majority of professions'

'Some courses are not run 9 - 5 so graduates do not experience a working environment.'

'Qualification could be a disadvantage when looking for employment after university if applying for a menial job to cover living expensive etc, until an ideal job is available...'

## THE UNDERGRADUATE

'Two people going for a job, the one with the degree should always get the job?'

'If a guaranteed job is on offer on the completion of your degree then this can motivate you to achieve what is required of you.'

'Because having a degree shows dedication and perseverance with the subject that the person obviously takes serious.'

'I believe experience takes priority over the degree as it allows the employee to demonstrate skills they have learnt doing whereas through a degree it seems more through reading and research.'

## FAST TRACK?

When asked the question, 'Should a graduate be fast tracked through employment?'

The response from employers was 100% no.

The graduate's reply was 60% yes - 40% no.

The under-graduate's expectation, 100% yes.

These results confirm the change in attitude and trend by employers towards a graduate's expectations of being fast tracked once employed. The results also indicate that far from being expected the graduate is aware of this stance and accepts that it's no longer the privilege that was once experienced.

"CAN THEY MAKE ME START AT NINE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING DAD?"

BSC GRADUATE 1984

'You need to have an MA to work in this cheese shop'

MA Graduate Fine Art 2011

NO!

THE EMPLOYER

MAYBE?

THE GRADUATE

YES!

Under-graduate

