

# Graduates are looking for challenging work

*“Students are not perceiving their first job as being ideal”*

**C**ontrary to perceived generational differences, the report found there was considerable similarity across generations regarding what was important in employment.

Surveying the future employment expectations and perceptions of 32,000 university students, the report also found that today's students are presenting to employers as more confident than they actually feel.

The students also indicate a greater intention to remain in their 'ideal' job following graduation than employers are experiencing.

Company paid training and development was found to be the most attractive, non-cash benefit a graduate recruiter can offer a new graduate (76 per cent of students).

Additional leave through rostered days off or time-off in lieu (56 per cent) and superannuation (54 per cent) were also rated by students as very attractive employment benefits.

While the overall remuneration package is important to students when considering job offers, the

value of ensuring that the actual salary proposed is comparable with that being paid by other recruiters is also still important.

Nearly two-thirds of students felt that they would stay with their first employer for at least three years. Just over a third felt they would stay between one and three years, with another third estimating that they would stay for at least five years.

However, when graduate employers were asked how long they thought an average graduate would stay with them, over half of the employers surveyed felt the average graduate would leave within the first three years. Only 13 per cent of employers felt that graduates would stay more than five years.

The report says the difference between student and employer expectations suggests that many graduates may go into their first employment following graduation with the expectation of staying longer than they actually do, or that the students are not perceiving their first job as being 'ideal'.

Nearly two-thirds of students were strongly confident (very confident or extremely confident) of finding full-time employment following graduation, with 91 per cent broadly confident (confident, very confident or extremely confident).

However, confidence levels dropped as the type of job moved closer to one related to their field of study, or to their 'preferred or ideal' job. Just under 50 per cent were strongly confident, with around 81 per cent broadly confident

of obtaining a job in their field following graduation. Confidence levels dropped even further when students were asked about finding their preferred or ideal job, with around a quarter strongly confident (and 39 per cent not confident), and just over 60 per cent broadly confident of finding their preferred job following graduation.

By way of contrast, graduate employers' perceptions of students' confidence in finding employment post-graduation was higher than the confidence levels suggested by the students themselves, particularly in relation to the 'ideal' or 'preferred' job.

When asked to rate their generic employability skills from non-existent to very strong on a five point scale, 82 per cent of students rated their communication skills as fairly strong to very strong. This was followed by students' learning ability, their self-management skills and their skills with technology (80 per cent, 78 per cent and 74 per cent). Students rated themselves lowest on their problem solving skills (54 per cent rated as fairly strong or very strong) and initiative and enterprise (60 per cent).

“When examined by course stage, we see that students' generic employability skills self-ratings increase the further through their course they are, the report says.

“This was particularly the case for problem solving, where 41 per cent of students at the beginning of their course rated their problem solving skills as fairly strong to very



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strong and for students nearing completion of their course, 62 per cent rated their skills at the same level, a difference of 20.2 percentage points.

“This suggests that, while students may not see themselves as necessarily having equal strength in all of the generic skills areas, there is a steady growth in these areas over the course of their university education. This finding, coupled with the students' strong desire for (and expectation of) opportunities for further training and development, provides some indication to employers that they

can expect a continued increase in these generic skills as the students enter the workforce and gain workplace experience.

Graduate Careers Australia executive director, Cindy Tilbrook, says, “As the largest and most comprehensive survey of its kind these findings provide valuable information to those seeking to attract and retain the vital student/graduate demographic.”

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