

AUIDF

**Improving the employment outcomes of
international students**

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INTRODUCTION

For the vast majority of international students in Australia, the most important return on investment is employment outcomes. Furthermore, many of these students aspire to working in Australia upon graduating.

This pattern has been reflected by numerous empirical studies, with the results often highlighting the importance of employment and migration opportunities when choosing Australia as a potential destination.

However, various changes to the regulatory environment over recent years have resulted in greater visa complexities and little improvement in graduate outcomes. Only a very small proportion of international students secure full-time graduate entry positions in Australia, particularly when compared with their domestic counterparts. This was highlighted by several universities for this study reporting that less than 5% of international students had obtained full-time employment in Australia within their preferred field.

Many of the major source markets for Australia are experiencing unprecedented economic growth. For example, it is widely expected that by 2020 the GDP of Indonesia will be the equivalent to that of Germany. And whilst many commentators refer to China as a new economic super power, nearby countries are also anticipated to expand rapidly, including the Philippines which grew 6.8% in 2012.

Despite economic growth throughout the region, there continues to be a surplus of domestically and internationally educated graduates. With an increasing proportion of internationally-educated graduates now returning to their home countries, the intensity of competition has heightened recognition towards the importance of acquiring additional skills, competencies, experiences and capabilities in order to be differentiated and employable.

Of absolute importance is relevant work experience, yet so few internationally educated graduates are able to obtain this experience whilst studying abroad. Apart from the challenges of finding relevant work, many employers report being overwhelmed by the volume of Australian students now participating in work integrated learning programmes, thereby leaving little opportunity to consider international students.

Another factor compounding the challenges for graduates educated abroad is that their expectations regarding career opportunities and earning potential are often considered too high and disproportionate to those of locally educated graduates, including those educated within a transnational education environment.

In order to warrant the often considerable investment made by families in securing an international qualification, many graduates are unwilling to accept lower pay scales; and, as many employers in this study observed, graduates are not always willing to stay for extended periods with employers in their quest to build careers and increase salaries. This can cause instability and divisions within the workplace.

Against this backdrop, the Australian universities recognise the growing importance of helping international students to secure graduate employment outcomes. Such outcomes are an essential vehicle for stimulating word of mouth affirmation and endorsement of the Australian proposition. However, Australian universities are not alone in this fact. Anecdotal evidence highlighted the commitment of British universities towards securing outcomes for their international graduates, a pattern which is further evident across Europe and North America.

The challenge for Australian universities is two-fold. Firstly, there is the challenge of encouraging international students to obtain the types of attributes which employers seek, given that so many international students prioritise their studies ahead of building a suitable career resume and skills portfolio. Consequently, a large proportion of international students engage too late in the careers life-cycle.

The second challenge is encouraging employers to recognise the potential afforded by international students educated in Australia, which includes negating many of the perceptions which can shield their eyes towards recruiting international graduates. These perceptions invariably revolve around language and culture in the workplace; and the level of commitment needed in terms of sponsoring students, including the risks if students are not permitted to remain; and, the level of additional administrative burden that may be required.

Therefore, the AUIDF commissioned Prospect Research and Marketing to undertake an extensive study into the employability of international graduates. This study explored the attitudes and perceptions of employers towards international students and examined the types of initiatives being undertaken by Australian and British universities to create and facilitate opportunities for their international graduates.

In October 2012 Prospect Research and Marketing undertook two extensive online surveys designed to assess the understanding of international students about employment-related skills. The results which are not in the public domain have been included in this report.

Chapters 2 to 9 of this report are designed to provide a contextual framework for understanding all of the key issues. Chapters 10 to 12 contain an extensive series of recommendations designed to improve outcomes for international graduates both within Australia and abroad.

EMPLOYERS

The 21 employer interviews occurred between May and September 2013. Whilst they were originally scheduled to only occur in Australia and the UK, additional interviews were conducted in Singapore, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong. The organisations included many of the leading employers in their fields / industries including HSBC, Accenture, KPMG, Singapore Airlines, Unilever, Deloitte, Shell, Lloyds, Glaxo and Siemens. In addition, 11 more interviews were conducted with SME's (Australia 3, UK 3, Asia 5) and four with government / health agencies (Australia 2, UK 2).

Australia and the UK

Whilst a very broad generalisation some of the Australian employers appeared not to fully recognise the value and potential afforded by international students, particularly when compared with their UK counterparts. This was not an intentional policy or concern, rather the perception that domestic graduates tend to take precedent in an environment where there is an abundance of applications and demand relative to the number of graduate positions.

No distinction between international and domestic students was ever considered around ethnicity. Several employers observed that a substantial percentage of their graduates are of Asian heritage, particularly within the Accounting and Engineering industries. Instead, any distinction between international and domestic students is largely based around perceived limitations in the communication skills, lack of knowledge of Australian workplace culture and characteristics and, concerns that the recruitment of international graduates may result in additional administrative workload and sponsorship commitments not associated with the recruitment of domestic graduates.

These points aside, many employers recognise that international graduates of Australian universities are as equally, if not better tertiary qualified, than their Australian counterparts. Many participants referred to the additional language competencies of students who do not speak English as their first language and, many international students and graduates were regarded as having strong numeric, technical and technological (IT) competencies.

A consistent concern amongst the Australian employers was that the written and verbal skills of many international students are poor. This is often reflected in poor quality applications, with most employers lamenting the use of non-tailored covering letters, substandard presentation of resumes, failure to recognise the needs and expectations of the employer in question and applications that are often received months past the critical recruitment window.

Along this line, several employers observed that when international students have been invited to interview, they had undertaken limited research into the organisation itself.

The aforementioned patterns were less evident in the UK. Whilst many of the employers lamented the additional administrative and bureaucratic workload associated with recruiting international graduates, the general consensus was that international graduates educated for several years at university in the UK are well prepared to enter into dialogue with employers. This was particularly attributed to the efforts of the universities to engage early in the student life-cycle¹ and to ensure that students are adequately prepared.

In addition, employers in the UK consistently reported that the quality of international students educated in the UK has improved dramatically over recent years. This was much less evident in Australia, although several participants in Sydney and Melbourne observed that language competencies and results appear to have improved of late.

One of the reasons for improvement in the UK was attributed to employers setting the bar much higher for international students and graduates. For example, an upper second class honours degree is the absolute minimum, with the vast majority of the most coveted employers setting a first class Honours as a pre-requisite. This was not always the case however for local UK graduates although the competition is still fierce.

In both Australia and the UK almost every employer observed that they have increased their IELTS standard requirements over the past few years and it was not uncommon to learn of an IELTS eight minimum across all measures.

In both Australia and the UK, very few employers specifically recruit for their overseas operations. Instead, their recruitment priority is either regional (i.e. State based) or national. As many of the university career participants observed, this severely impedes opportunities for international graduates, including opportunities within their home countries. Therefore, many of these participants were keen to see any initiative designed to enhance employer awareness towards more lateral recruitment procedures, particularly through adopting a broader global context and cross-referral mechanisms.

In Australia, several employers indicated that they specifically seek Australian citizens at recruitment fairs. Several participants acknowledged that they have seen notices at careers events to this effect. In some instances, such notices were reportedly warranted. For example, several participants observed that only Australian citizens can work in Defence. Similarly, one participant from the resources industry observed that whilst there were no legislative barriers to recruiting international graduates, these graduates do not possess the additional *tickets* required to work in the field.

¹ As this report later identifies are far more committed to assisting international students with employment applications and often start the process of engagement in First Year.

This pattern was less evident in the UK where there was a much greater degree of political and cultural sensitivity and where several universities and employers have been reportedly subject to legal claims by international graduates under the genre of *discrimination*. Whilst some of the UK employers indicated that there are regulatory barriers, they do not actively assert this fact to international students on event stands; instead they declare such barriers on recruitment materials in the hope that international students will not apply.

Almost every employer reported that careers events are dominated by the presence of international students. That said, there was some acknowledgement amongst the Australian employers that many of these students may be Australian citizens of Asian heritage.

Even so, several employers reported frustrations about the amount of time which international students absorb, particularly those whose language and communications skills are deemed inferior; and several employers reported being frustrated by requests which should only occur much later in the recruitment cycle. Cited examples included the processes for securing sponsorship, promotion and transfer opportunities, salary and working conditions, and additional benefits.

Most employers observed that recruitment levels are generally back to the pre-GFC levels. However, with greater participation in Higher Education among both domestic and international students, together with a backlog of graduates from previous years (many of whom have utilised spare time to acquire additional qualifications and workplace experience), there is an abundance of talent on the market.

All of the employers reported that graduates are now presenting a much greater portfolio of skills, competencies and experiences. Employers reported that among the Australian and UK graduates, there is very strong evidence to suggest that graduates are creating and maximising opportunities to build a portfolio through voluntary projects, work experiences, mobility, supplementary qualifications and extra-curricular activities. And whilst, the general consensus was that international graduates are similarly committed to building their portfolios, the general breadth and depth of their Australian and UK counterparts is far greater.

With a few exceptions where employers are seeking graduates for behind the scenes roles (e.g. research environments, analysis, laboratories), most employers seek strong evidence of customer facing skills, strong communication capabilities (verbal, oral, interpersonal, intercultural), high levels of applied technological skills (many employers are advocates of double degrees with IT as one stream) and the ability to work both independently and as part of a team. For some environments and in particular, the SME organisations, employers prioritise lateral thinking.

For the vast majority of employers, the first degree is generally seen as sufficient to be considered for a graduate entry position. However, every employer will first evaluate the potential afforded by an individual graduate's application based upon their academic results; and then stream or filter applicants according to such criteria as relevant work experience, extra-curricular activities, evidence of language and communication competencies and an initial assessment of the aforementioned portfolio of individual attributes.

In both Australia and the UK, employers reported that other activities are enabling graduates to become more differentiated and employable. Many of these activities can be attributed to the values of a generation which is now more globally connected than ever before, not just through the power of the internet and digital media, but through individual deed.

Today's generation of graduates were consistently reported as more practically and pragmatically involved in activities designed to enhance their life experiences and capabilities. Further, every employer acknowledged a high level of graduate mobility and a general willingness to embrace the concept of career portability (i.e. the ability to seamlessly move between different roles, environments and locations)

Apart from voluntary work, many of the most sought after graduates demonstrate international travel experiences through school tours, secondary languages, exchange programmes and project experiences. One employer described these as *activities designed to create a generation of project nomads*.

Certainly, empirical evidence is pointing to a generation of graduates whose identity is more a reflection of their Facebook page than their personal attire. Some commentators refer to the current generation as more conservative and even cautious, yet for today's generation of graduates, borders are no longer considered barriers and the joy of travel is no longer in the journey, but in the end-purpose of that journey. In the New Colombo research study conducted by the author, this generation is described as *never completing one journey without another journey planned*.

Given the aforementioned considerations, employers in both Australia and the UK observed that the integration of industry based learning experiences is substantially improving the work readiness of graduates.

According to some participants, the number and type of opportunities which domestic students enjoy is not necessarily extended to their international counterparts; which is therefore expanding the employability gap between the two cohorts.

Employers in both Australia and the UK observed that graduates have traditionally targeted the larger corporations and those organisations which offer graduate entry schemes.

However, the overwhelming consensus was that graduates now need to be prepared to work in small to medium sized enterprises, short term contract related environments, start-ups, partnerships, NGO's etc.

In the view of many employers, these types of organisations require fundamentally different skillsets, not least the ability to multitask and quickly immerse and participate within often complex environments where no specific experience can be applied. Such environments call for graduates who are highly versatile and flexible and according to one employer, graduates who *are willing to get their hands dirty*.

Another feature which employers consistently referred to was the importance of graduates who possess global perspectives. The general consensus was that the next generation of graduates will need to be highly portable and mobile, able to quickly assimilate into different environments and domains, and appreciate the nuances of different societies and cultures.

These points of discussion yielded an important distinction between domestic and international graduates. Several multinational participants observed that many international students select broad subject matter in order to ensure diversity and identify areas of interest once their studies are underway. However, an increasing number of domestic students are choosing to specialise in much narrower areas in order to concentrate their efforts in fields of interest and ultimately differentiate their resume. This was seen as particularly applicable in the IT and Engineering fields.

Neither pattern of selection was considered a weakness however this did raise several frequently cited observations regarding the discipline choices of international graduates.

- There is an abundance of Business, Commerce and Accounting graduates.
- Too many international graduates are focussed upon a specific professional career rather than broader entry schemes where graduates can be placed in different roles.
- Many coursework graduates have studied disciplines associated with intended career (and salary) outcomes, rather than careers of interest.

Most of the larger employers operate sophisticated graduate entry schemes, where graduates progress through a more generalist stream or a narrower vocational stream. The first option tends to apply for graduates from broader disciplines such as Arts, Humanities, Business / Commerce and general Science whereas the second applies more so for graduates from vocational and professional disciplines such as Engineering, Health, Accounting, IT / Technologies and applied Sciences.

Participants were asked to comment upon anticipated business and operational trends over the next few years and stipulate their recruitment and selection priorities, based around these trends. This line of enquiry yielded the following insights.

- Growth in the use and application of integrated technologies, including ICT systems, network security and augmented reality.
- Continual improvement in business modelling, forecasting and scenario planning.
- Expansion of operations into new and emerging markets, notably East Asia, Central Europe and South America.
- Growth in e-: business, trading, media, communications and security.
- Growth in the number of SME's and consultancies providing specialist services, leading to greater out-sourcing, project integration, contract management and security (e.g. of intellectual property).
- Greater focus upon the sourcing, management and protection of intellectual property.
- Consolidation of English as the platform for international business.

Consequently, employers are now placing an enormous priority on those graduates who can enter the workplace with a very solid understanding of applied technologies; the ability to actively participate in a diverse range of projects and roles; the ability to think laterally, creatively and strategically; and an evident willingness to be (internationally and vocationally) mobile, flexible, organised and communicative.

Employers were all asked how the employability rates of international graduates could be improved.

- Better education by universities about the qualities and attributes required of international graduates, such as secondary languages, work experience, global perspectives, analytical skills, independence and work ethic and commitment.
- Reinforce the absolute importance of general and technical English language competencies and communication skills.
- Negate barriers to consideration such as concerns about sponsorship, cultural integration, the protection of intellectual property, communication skills, administrative workload and heightened career and salary expectations.
- Provide more avenues for international students to become exposed to employers, through short-term placements, research projects and networking events.
- Evidence to show how international graduates can pro-actively contribute to business success, from sales generation, networking and alternative / innovative thinking through to the expansion of an organisation's cultural knowledge.
- Better understanding of *what is an international student* through case studies, testimonials, events, media and general avenues to meet and engage with these students in the community and in the workplace.
- Address the perception that the domestic cohort should be the first priority, by encouraging employers to think how other operations may benefit from recruiting graduates from around the world.

- Educate international students better about how the graduate recruitment cycle works, and the types of qualities sought by employers. This includes creating positive first impressions through the appropriate and accurate presentation of resumes, covering letters, background research and interview skills.
- Impress upon employers that international students have benefitted from the same university education experience as their domestic counterparts.

Asia

Some of the Asian employers had a slightly different perspective. For many of these participants, workplace practices have not changed to the same extent as Western nations. There remains amongst many employers a stronger sense of formality and whilst most employers look to some form of relevant work experience, the focus upon augmented skills and attributes based around extra-curricular activities was less evident.

For every one of the Asian employers, academic credentials / performance, communication skills and to an extent, the reputation of the graduating university and destination are important considerations. However, a number of issues were raised which illustrate the major challenges with recruiting internationally educated graduates. Several genres emerged which highlighted the extent to which locally educated graduates, including those enrolled in foreign branch campuses, are growing in relative appeal.

According to several participants, the challenges associated with recruiting internationally educated graduates are as follows:

- Whilst English language competences are high, many employers refer to the lack of technical English language competences and the inability to successfully communicate technical terms within the home country language.
- Whilst the general consensus was that many foreign universities offer a very high standard of education, with many of these universities regarded as coveted brands, many employers lamented the lack of context within the curriculum which can be applied in local applications and environments. This often extended to the professions, where graduates clearly possess strong understanding of content relevant to the country of instruction, but not necessarily the country of work.
- Many employers in countries where graduate salaries are considerably lower than the larger and / or more established economies indicated that many graduates educated abroad have higher expectations regarding both salary and career progression than their locally educated counterparts. This was particularly attributed to the relative importance of securing high earning prospects in order to offset the investment in education.

- Several employers referred to excessive employment attrition rates amongst graduates given the aforementioned point about career progression and the subsequent career impatience of many internationally educated graduates.
- Aligned to the above, one of the major problems which many employers face in Asia is the internal division which occasionally occurs between locally educated graduates, who are generally more willing to steadily progress into the organisation, and international graduates, the majority of whom seek accelerated career progression. This is often compounded by the fact that graduates returning home from abroad often resent the need to return home.
- Many employers across Asia lamented the fact that there is an abundance of Business graduates whereas many of the emerging industries are experiencing shortfalls in suitably educated talent in niche professional and vocational fields, especially where the curriculum focus is upon the practical and applied.
- The lack of work experience amongst returning graduates, including significantly postgraduates, is considered by many employers to be a major barrier which needs to be addressed in order to develop more Western and international business models.

The multinational employers all ran graduate entry schemes along similar lines to those outlined by the employers in Australia and the UK. This includes the horizontal general streaming and the vertical specialty streaming. However across all of the employers there tended to be a much greater emphasis upon recruiting graduates and then allocating them into roles aligned with their degrees, rather than into a formal and / or more generalist graduate entry programmes. The exceptions were the multinational employers, most of whom run very similar graduate entry and development programmes around the world.

Most employers review graduates based around their performance with one employer observing that this forces many graduate to work exhausting hours for fear of not being seen as one hundred percent committed to the employer. Cultural fit into the organisation was also deemed important.

One of the major points raised by employers is that as the economies of the Asian region evolve further, there will be a pattern of *skipping a generation* both socially and technologically.

The major social pattern will be a shift to more westernised work practices, such as more flexible hours, more attractive working environments, less top-down styles of management and a greater emphasis upon professional development.

The technological trends were best described as *going straight to mobile phones and not bothering with installing land lines*. In particular, participants referred to the following:

- Investment in the very latest technologies within the workplace
- Massive economic growth in technology development, production and innovation
- The use of portable devices as workstations
- An expectation that newly employed staff and especially graduates *given that their formative years have been spent on the Web*, will already be highly technically competent

The anticipated trends largely mirrored those of the UK and Australian employers; however there were a few notable additions which reflect the evolution of economies across Asia, as follows:

- Growth in the expansion and use of technology as a business tool
- Growth in more sophisticated marketing and human resource practices
- Growth in compliance and the strengthening of the regulatory environment
- Growth in demand for international knowledge in specific areas (e.g. patent law, funds management)
- Greater sophistication in terms of product development and innovation
- Aligned to the above, greater emphasis upon creativity (i.e. inventiveness, innovation, design) as a necessary workplace attribute
- Greater expectation that staff will be more flexible, adaptable, mobile and lateral in their thinking and approach
- Greater emphasis upon creativity in the workplace, together with issues associated with innovation and development; including the development and protection of intellectual and organisational capital
- Substantial growth in SME's operating in such fields as Apps development, bio-technology, software programming, network security, telecommunications, media, research, games and e-commerce
- Substantial growth in demand for health and aged care, leisure and entertainment, property, education, transport access, communications systems, financial services, architectural and planning services, travel and aviation
- Absolute expectation that managerial positions will require communication skills (including very high English language competencies), as well as intercultural and interpersonal communication skills

The employers in Asia were asked how Australian universities could improve the career opportunities of their international cohort returning home:

- Improve employment participation in a related industry and role whilst in Australia
- Promote how an Australian education per se equips graduates with attributes designed to improve employment outcomes and performance
- Demonstrate how graduates educated in Australia can contribute to business growth and performance
- Ensure that graduates are adequately trained for local market entry
- Invite employers to in-country networking events, presentations and seminars
- Utilise the alumni to strengthen awareness and perceptions
- Encourage careers and curriculum specialists to visit employers to better understand local needs, expectations and priorities
- Invite employers onto campus

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS: UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANTS

The objective of the university interviews was to examine the types of initiatives and strategies being conducted across Australia and the UK to better enable the employability of international graduates. The university interviews were conducted between May and September. All of the interviews were conducted in confidence and several universities only participated on the basis of non-attribution or acknowledgement. Therefore permission was sought for the various case studies and references contained in the report. The interviews were generally held with senior careers staff although in approximately half of the discussions a senior member of the international office was also present. In many of the UK interviews alumni and development representatives also participated.

The objective was to examine 10 to 12 universities within each country. In total 33 universities participated including Oxford, LSE, York, Durham, UCL, Kings College, City, Queen Mary, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Bristol, Kingston, Roehampton, UWA, QUT, UQ, Deakin, UniSA, Murdoch, RMIT and UNSW.

When this project was initially being developed, the general consensus was that discussions would take place between the international directors and the careers directors of various universities.

Whilst the remit was to obtain a general overview, it very quickly emerged that across different universities, different staff members are involved in the consultative process regarding career outcomes for international graduates.

This was especially the case in the UK where the vast majority of discussions were based around invitations to the international and careers teams but which subsequently, also involved participation by specialist alumni staff and curriculum development staff. The much broader collaborative approach which emerged between the Australian and UK operations highlighted a fundamentally different way of approaching the issue of employability for international graduates.

Overall, participants in both Australia and the UK immediately acknowledged that there is a climate of surplus talent. Increased university participation and heightened student awareness about the importance of obtaining the attributes needed to secure employment has led to an abundance of local graduates compared with previous decades.

Consequently, the opportunities available for international graduates have waned in both countries and whilst a small proportion of international graduates do secure employment, such employment is not necessarily in the industry, career or location of choice.

Part of the challenge which international and careers offices face in both countries is adequately preparing international graduates for roles which do not necessarily match their aspirations. In both countries, the greatest opportunities for graduates reside with Government agencies, SME's and start-ups (including self-employment). However, the desire to earn a high income within multinationals and major employers continues to drive the motives of many international students, particularly those from the more general disciplines, with the expectation that employment in these types of organisations is considered a measure of individual attainment and success.

Compounding the aforementioned observation, the challenge for university careers offices in many of the higher ranked universities, notably the Group of Eight and Russell Group institutions, is that many international graduates within these universities have much higher expectations regarding employment outcomes and destinations than their counterparts at other universities, particularly those where there is a strong technology orientation.

As one UK participant observed, *we have to give the message to students that the LSE badge is not enough and that you need professional work experience to become marketable*. This view was mirrored by a Group of Eight careers director who stated *students will hear what they want to hear, so it's up to us to give clear guidelines*.

All of the participants acknowledged that a key deliverable for international students is successful employment outcomes. Many of the careers representatives reported that participation at careers fairs is often dominated by international students with some participants reporting figures as high as 70 to 80% international student attendance.

This highlights the expectation that careers fairs are considered a primary gateway into employment in the mindsets of international students, even though as many participants acknowledged, such fairs are often the end product of a long career search process. One Australian university reported that over 50% of domestic graduates secure their employment during an internship period, often one year ahead of graduation.

The segregation of domestic and international students in careers fairs is symptomatic of the lack of social integration between the two cohorts. Even though the current Generation of university students (the author has coined the term Gen G for *Generation Global*) are widely regarded as more inclusive and accepting of different ethnicities and cultures, many participants observed that, within a study environment, there is still ample evidence of internal community segregation.

As this report will later show, many universities now run schemes designed to create a greater sense of inclusiveness for international students. In the UK, the consistently reported view was that strategies are designed to service both domestic and international students equally with additional services available to international students, rather than services only available to domestic students.

The greatest success stories often emanated from universities which have introduced unique strategies, designed to kick-start a broader portfolio of support services and initiatives.

For example, some of the most successful examples of internship programmes in the UK were where the alumni are heavily involved in identifying and facilitating opportunities. There was strong evidence in the UK as well that some of the most successful internship schemes exist within smaller universities and those universities with a niche specialisation.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO INTERNATIONAL CAREER OUTCOMES

Across most Australian universities, there appears to be a good sense of collaboration between the international offices and the careers offices. According to some participants, such collaboration has improved markedly over recent years. However, the careers teams still often view their roles as having to manage the expectations of international students given that their employment objectives cannot be realised.

As one participant in NSW observed *we have to address the issues caused by the large scale recruitment of international students*. This view was mirrored by a participant in WA who stated that *we have become dependent upon the revenue generated from international students but we are not actually delivering what these students most want*.

Within the UK, it was most apparent that the level of cooperation and collaboration between the international offices and the careers departments is that much greater. Further, this dual relationship actually extends to a tripartite relationship given the role which the alumni function also plays.

In over half of the discussions, all three areas participated and it was very evident that there was a mutual consistency in terms of the dialogue between these three areas and the shared commitment to addressing both the recruitment objectives (i.e. incoming students) and careers objectives (i.e. outgoing graduates). Indeed, unlike many of the UK universities visited, only a handful of Australian universities have a dedicated international alumni practitioner located within the international office.

One factor explains why such collaboration exists in the UK. Compared with UK universities, the Australian careers and alumni functions are significantly less resourced even though the international recruitment and marketing functions are much better resourced.

As a broad generalisation, the resources which a UK university can apply to servicing the career and employment aspirations of international students are three to five times greater than evident in Australia. Quite simply, the UK universities have many more dedicated staff to assist international students. This means that engagement can occur much earlier in the student lifecycle.

Every careers representative who participated in the study reported, without prompting, that international students are prolific users of the careers service. Furthermore, these international students consistently undertake multiple return visits to the careers office.

Consequently, most Australian universities try not to overload some of their front end staff through having dedicated case management systems in order to ensure that individual students do not usurp the capacity of individual staff.

Across both Australian and UK universities, participants observed that there has been a growing expectation of late that universities provide a placement service. Indeed, several years ago, the author of this report presented a paper at the AIEC conference which showed that placement was one of the six most frequently used selection criteria for international students in coming to Australia.

Consequently, the over-emphasis upon the term *placement* which by implication means that universities are responsible for securing employment outcomes, has dramatically changed the dialogue of engagement. In the UK, many universities have implemented a policy where the word placement is never used within a careers context.

Within Australia, English language was consistently raised as a major issue by participants. One Careers Director in Queensland specifically noted that compared with the UK *few Australian universities make their English language strategies available on their websites*. This was considered a concern given that many employers allegedly use English language and by implication therefore, poor communication skills, as a reason for not recruiting international graduates.

The above point was reinforced by a participant in Victoria who advocated that whilst employers place so much emphasis upon the language standards of international students, *they clearly overlook the language issues of domestic students which are often many times worse*.

In Australia, many of the employers and careers participants were highly critical of the approach adopted by international students towards employment applications. Many of the careers participants observed that despite efforts to provide appropriate advice, this advice only resonated with a very small proportion of international students. Indeed, whilst most careers participants observed that international students are prolific users of the careers services, typically less than 10% of international students actively participated in events designed to enhance the outcomes of international students and graduates.

When the aforementioned issue was probed, the careers participants in particular referred to the following insights regarding employer attitudes and perceptions in Australia:

- Cultural and language barriers, particularly with regard to how effectively international graduates would integrate within the workplace.
- Uncertainty with regards to how long international graduates will remain within the organisation, particularly once they have obtained residency.
- Applications from international students were consistently reported as arriving too late, often after the recruitment process has been completed.

- Applications that are non-tailored with regard to the organisation, industry and role.
- Poor covering letters to applications, including lack of relevance, lack of recognition of the recipient employer and inadequate use of language (to demonstrate capability).
- Employers consistently refer to the lack of extra-curricular participation among international students compared with their domestic student counterparts, which often has a direct impact upon the lack of soft skills which can be applied within the workplace.

All of these factors clearly influence how employers perceive international students and graduates. Furthermore, with substantial increase in the supply of domestic graduates including a growing cohort who possess appropriate work experience and can demonstrate customer-facing qualities, there is very little motive for employers to prioritise international students above their domestic equivalents. Consequently, this has a direct impact upon graduate employment outcomes with every participating university participant reporting significantly higher levels of domestic student placements when compared with international student placements.

The careers participants typically stated that approximately 20% of employers with whom they work are happy to recruit international graduates, although this was often a qualified response given that these employers consistently set high benchmarks regarding academic performance and English language competencies. Further, most careers participants observed that within Australia, many of the leading recruiting organisations are unable to recruit international graduates given regulatory and legislative constraints and criteria (e.g. Defence).

One of the key issues which the careers participants consistently referred to and a reason why so many international graduates are unable to fulfil their career and employment aspirations, is that international graduates tend to seek employment outcomes with multinationals and large-scale organisations.

A similar pattern was observed amongst the UK participants which explains, in part, why so much emphasis in the UK is based around providing graduates with appropriate insights about career outcomes within small to medium-sized enterprises.

This outcome often led to discussion regarding the management of expectations which for every careers participant, in both Australia and the UK, is the largest challenge in their role.

To assist with the management of international student expectations, every Australian and UK participant reported that their university runs workshops to assist with such activities as resume and application preparation, interview skills, presentation etc. However, whilst in Australia these were often dedicated activities targeted at the university's international cohort, in the UK these activities are run for all students.

All of the careers participants were asked to indicate the most consistently raised questions by international students, a question which elicited the same response in both Australia and the UK. The most frequently asked questions were as follows:

- *How can I get a job in Australia / the UK?*
- *What career can I enter with my current degree?*
- *How do I get a job with one of the Big Four?*

These questions illustrate both the lack of careers knowledge amongst many international students and the fact that their anticipated outcomes are often extremely narrow. As Chapter 12 of this report will demonstrate, a substantial proportion of international students only become aware of potential career outcomes once they are in situ and exposed to academic staff, particularly those students from countries where there is very little careers advice or access to diverse career options.

UK BEST PRACTICE

There are two key outcomes from this study which need to influence the future directions of Australian universities with regards to improving the employment outcomes of international students.

Firstly, Australian universities need to be informed about the key strategies which need to be developed, resourced and implemented in order to enable employability.

Secondly, Australian universities need to be informed about how their operational structures can be improved based upon examples of best practice.

Therefore, this chapter highlights the fundamental differences in the UK and Australian models and illustrates how Australian universities need to adapt their approach in order to ensure that not only is Australia associated with best practice recruitment, but with best practice outcomes.

It became very evident that when compared with Australian institutions, UK universities are much stronger at tracking domestic and international graduate outcomes. Whilst the distinction is made between these two cohorts, the primary objective for the UK universities is to monitor performance and completions, since this has a direct impact upon funding and resourcing.

Most of the Australian university participants reported that the most active engagement with international students occurs in the final year. Whilst many universities would welcome earlier engagement, in Australia there appears to be a very strong focus among students upon concentrating on academic studies (not least to appease parents); whereas in the UK, international students are encouraged to adopt the mindset that they need to engage in careers dialogue much earlier in the student lifecycle.

Consequently and significantly, information regarding employment outcomes and career opportunities in the UK very often occurs soon after international students first enrol at university.

Therefore, by their third or fourth year, international students are fully immersed in the careers lifecycle and, unlike most of their Australian counterparts, they are far less likely to be compromised through late and inappropriate / non-targeted applications.

In both Australia and the UK, there are numerous strategies targeted at international students, ranging from careers seminars and recruitment events, through to mentor schemes, shadow programmes and dedicated international careers staff.

However, whereas in Australia many activities are specifically designed for international students, across the UK these strategies are mostly designed for all students; with additional options for international students given their particular needs and circumstances.

Therefore in the UK, most careers fairs and expos are promoted as university-wide options with additional supplementary events for the international cohort. Further several universities run international events targeted at specific nationalities, with employers from these countries in attendance (refer Chapters 7 and 8).

In the context of this report, it is important to note the different operational and reporting structures which were so clearly evident across the UK universities.

The careers and international office participants consistently reported that their functional areas collaborate most strongly, very often with the alumni function. Further, there has been a gradual shift towards international and careers offices reporting to the same members of the Executive, often in conjunction with their alumni counterparts.

The aforementioned comment regarding the alumni functions participation in collaborative efforts, stimulated much discussion regarding the extent to which international alumni are used for mentoring initiatives, ambassador programmes, the supply of market intelligence and other careers activities. Indeed, in many UK universities the alumni per se are primarily responsible for generating internship opportunities both within the UK and abroad. Oxford University represents a stellar example of this approach.

Several of the UK participants referred to the potential impact of the post-study work rights legislation in Australia.

Whilst clearing the path for international students to work in their chosen destination following their graduation, many of the UK participants highlighted issues associated with managing international student expectations. This was mirrored by their Australian counterparts, many of whom are concerned about how the relatively recent and according to one careers Director *under-informed and underwhelming post-study work rights legislation* can so easily be misinterpreted as a guaranteed pathway to employment within the chosen destination.

The UK participants were clearly aware of political sensitivities with regard to how international students are treated. Several participants referred to recent court cases where international students have taken action against UK providers for incorrect information with regards to employment outcomes and opportunities. This is a major reason why the term placement has been largely removed from the careers dialogue.

One of the most significant distinctions between the Australian and UK careers functions can be attributed to resources.

Relative to the size of the student cohort, the careers operations in UK universities are substantially greater than their Australian equivalents. Even in relatively small institutions, it was not uncommon to learn of careers operations in excess of 20 advisers to service between 10,000 and 20,000 students.

Consequently, the UK careers operations are able to adopt a far more customer-oriented approach.

The vast majority of careers teams in the UK are split between employer-facing staff and student-facing staff. This enables the UK careers operations to focus upon generating employer outcomes through direct dialogue with employers, whilst at the same time, adopting a student-centred approach.

In addition, many of the student-facing staff are segmented by those who manage the needs and expectations of international students; and, those who manage internships and other work placement opportunities, often utilising staff dedicated to servicing particular Faculties.

Consequently, many of the UK participants stressed the benefits of having Faculty staff involved. The responsibilities and demands of coordinating activities are largely removed since this is done centrally, yet the implementation can be directed at activities designed to meet the needs of students within each Faculty.

Most of the universities visited are now investing in developing internship and work placement opportunities abroad, by approaching employers directly in market and by the effective utilisation of existing networks, including alumni.

Whilst the UK universities benefit from substantially greater resources than their Australian counterparts, they are still confronted with many of the same problems. One of the most significant and consistently raised problems was managing the expectations of international students enrolled in one-year Masters programmes. Participants often referred to this cohort as the least integrated within the University, given the intensity of their studies. Yet their expectations of their university are often no less.

Further, the vast majority of one-year Masters students were reported as having negligible work experience, poorer language skills, limited networks and a lack of understanding about the needs and expectations of employers. Consequently, whilst this cohort rarely engage with their careers departments, when such engagement does occur it is invariably too late, a situation which has often resulted in conflict.

Language issues were often voiced as a concern amongst the UK participants. However, it should be noted that when this issue was discussed, most participants clearly distinguished between the high English language competencies of EU students and the language competencies of students of Asian and African origin.

In addition, in keeping with employer observations, several UK university participants referred to the demise of technical language competencies given the over-emphasis upon securing high IELTS scores in order to obtain employment.

An issue which was raised to a much greater extent in the UK when compared with Australia was that different nationalities have very different career expectations. Whilst this can in part be explained by the large EU cohort across most of the UK universities, a mitigating factor is that UK universities tend to recruit from a much greater diversity of countries than their Australian counterparts. And whilst Australian universities have very diverse cohorts in terms of the number of nationalities, there is still an over-emphasis in Australia upon Asia.

The pattern in the UK was much different with some universities indicating a dominance of students from such countries as Nigeria and others reporting significant cohorts from Eastern Europe, Asia, the Indian sub-continent and the Middle East. Whilst empirical data illustrates the diversity of nationalities, it is significant to note that different universities in the UK have more diverse recruitment grounds compared with Australia where the priority A markets tend to be fairly consistent between institutions.

In Australia, universities appear to actively encourage international students to secure part-time employment. One of the main reasons for this can be attributed to the importance of obtaining work experience for securing future employment and to offset escalating living costs due to such factors as exchange rates and ongoing fee increases.

In the UK, it is now much less expensive to study compared with Australia², with most universities reporting very low fee increases, if any, in the wake of the GFC as well as much more affordable living and accommodation costs. Therefore, many international students feel less compelled to work part-time.

In the UK, several participants observed that their institutions actively discourage international students from working part-time (e.g. Imperial College), given the importance which they attribute to students concentrating upon their studies.

In the UK, the term placement is rarely used. By implication, universities have found that the notion of placement gives the impression that universities will accept responsibility for securing employment outcomes. However, several participants did refer to placement in the context of internships and there is very evidently a shift towards guaranteeing industry-based learning and internship placements as a vehicle for differentiating the institution. Examples of universities which are guaranteeing such placements include Bath, Surrey, Coventry and Loughborough.

² A report by HSBC in August 2013 found that Australia is now viewed as the most expensive destination in the world in which to study. The total fees and living costs for Australia were cited as US\$38,516.00 whereas the US (US\$35,705.00) and UK (US\$30,325.00) were both reported as less.

In keeping with their Australian counterparts, most of the UK participants reported that there is an oversupply of international students studying Business and Commerce and that in the UK especially, there is a very high level of interest in securing employment in Banking and Finance. This was particularly evident among participants from the London universities and Russell Group universities. The Russell Group participants were also more inclined to cite Investment Banking, Management Consulting, Engineering and Health.

One of the key features of the Australian proposition has been the shift towards encouraging voluntary work and mobility programmes as a means of differentiating an individual's resume, with voluntary participation often used as a vehicle for building networks and experiences in lieu of employment.

Throughout the UK, participants reported an escalation in the number of international students participating in voluntary programmes, including their participation in formally managed programmes run by the university.

As previously mentioned, the vast majority of UK universities are able to segment their careers operations into employer-facing and student-facing teams. This is undoubtedly a product of resources. For example, UCL reported have 37 careers staff and the London School of Economics as having 25 careers staff. The latter case is significant since the injection of resources was based around a benchmarking exercise conducted in 2013 which investigated the capacity of several similar universities (by profile and by size).

Apart from the division into employer and student-facing teams, many universities have dedicated staff for information distribution, the management of internships and Faculty liaison. Further, for the vast majority of universities, there is a commitment to providing ongoing careers advice and support for all students, for at least two years after these students graduate.

Another benefit which many careers operations are able to offer international students in the UK is the provision of dedicated international relations teams. Some universities reported having between six and eight full-time staff members within the careers area just for international students.

Other universities reported having an individual staff member within the careers operation allocated to students of a specific nationality. This careers member would participate in induction and orientation activities in order to build relations and become a dedicated point of contact, and regularly participate in recruiting events in that country whilst at the same time, visiting employers to determine current and future employment needs.

Another distinguishing feature with several of the UK universities, was that the careers departments are revenue-generating operations. They charge employers for access to students through recruitment events, broadcast emails etc. and at the same time, charge students for specialised and targeted support under the auspices of user-pays services.

By generating additional revenue through such means, many universities are able to invest in specialist resources and staff, and provide dedicated services designed to enhance employment outcomes for all students.

STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES

One of the most significant outcomes from the UK component was the extent to which the careers offices closely cooperate and collaborate with their international office counterparts.

At almost every UK university visited, participants reported that the international office staff meet with the careers teams before recruiting in the field. Furthermore, every international office participant reported that their careers colleagues frequently visit markets to attend and assist with recruitment initiatives, not least to identify new and high demand discipline areas and build links with major graduate employers.

As this report will show, many UK universities have developed co-initiatives between the international office and the careers office to assist with equipping both domestic and international students with *employability attributes*.

Because the UK universities are so much better resourced than their Australian counterparts, these universities are able to conduct tailored and niche services for their international cohort.

Some of the examples cited illustrate the strength of in-country engagement which many UK universities are undertaking. These are ultimately leading to much greater destination and university awareness levels, much stronger employment outcomes and higher levels of affirmation and advocacy:

- Investment in online internship schemes with employers whose operations transcend many countries. These online schemes enable students to engage with numerous people in different positions and occupations in order to build a comprehensive understanding of organisational structures and dynamics.
- Investment to strengthen in-country representation with several universities employing staff dedicated to careers support and recruitment within key markets. Whilst the careers and recruitment staff are independent roles, these universities are reporting a substantial increase in market intelligence vis-a-vis future patterns of employment demand and opportunities, as well as increased market share.
- The development of in-country careers fairs which bring local employers into contact with returning graduates. Some of these fairs are conducted collaboratively (e.g. Oxford and LSE) and extend not just to Europe but also China, India and the US.

- All of the UK participants reported a dramatic increase over recent years in the numbers of international and domestic students engaged in voluntary programmes.

The careers participants affirmed the importance of voluntary participation as an alternative way to participate in projects, build networks, strengthen organisational skills and expand knowledge of different cultures and environments. Voluntary work is promoted as a key vehicle for pro-active extra-curricular participation and is a well-recognised way of supporting a resume.

- Many of the UK participants reported that they have increased the number of internship specialists within their university and in some instances, these specialists have been co-located with representative staff in offices abroad.
- Every UK university that participated in this study has an active alumni mentoring programme. In most instances, the international alumni are used for networking, identifying internships, providing feedback regarding high growth fields, liaising with recruitment staff and generally assisting through events and activities.
- It was significant to note that across all of the Australian and UK universities there are numerous schemes to improve employability skills; however, in the UK these schemes appear to be far more advanced than in Australia and much better resourced.
- In some of the larger UK cities, participants reported that the university has entered into formal relationships with City and local councils to actively promote employment opportunities for international students, given the impact of international students in terms of the local economy.

One of the most significant differences between the approaches adopted by UK universities and their Australian counterparts is that the majority of UK universities have developed a *trigger* strategy. By this, they have invested in a major initiative which acts as a focal point for developing employability attributes and improving employment outcomes, by equipping graduates with avenues for building work experience and obtaining exposure to the workplace.

These are quite different to work integrated learning programmes which the vast majority of universities pursue. And whilst not deliberately targeted at international students, it was clearly evident that many of these trigger strategies are designed to improve outcomes for the international cohort.

Three of the more creative initiatives have been included as case studies. However, to illustrate the breadth and depth of programmes now available, the following examples illustrate the extent to which UK universities are engaged in employment related initiatives:

- Queen Mary runs a graduate placement service in India and hosts an online workplace preparation scheme.
- The London School of Economics runs *Business boot camps* which are intensive business scenario planning and modelling programmes.
- Durham University sponsors careers advisers to travel overseas to develop awareness of employment conditions and prospects in different countries.
- Durham University hosts awards for outstanding contribution to college life and participation in sports, music, outreach and charitable work. The participants from Durham went to great length to stress that these awards are highly coveted by international students as a demonstration of community immersion, integration and participation.
- Imperial College runs a UROP scheme which stands for *Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme*.



UROP is targeted at Final Year and Taught Masters students and provides an opportunity to participate in a *real research environment*. The research experience is often in industry, employers produce testimonials for each participating student and to date, 4,000 students have participated in the scheme. UROP is accessible to all (i.e. domestic and international) students.

- Imperial College also runs a scheme called *The Pimlico Connection* which again is accessible to all students.



Through this scheme, students volunteer as classroom assistants and mentors in local primary and secondary schools. The objective is to inspire pupils in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths and provide the student volunteers with real work and life experience. The scheme is widely considered as one of the best known peer tutoring schemes in the UK.

- Bristol University runs a scheme called *The Bristol PLuS Awards*.



Students have to be nominated to participate in these awards which are designed to recognise and reward students who have gained significant professional and life skills through extra-curricular activities.

- Bristol University runs an employability award based around students participating in workshops designed to improve their employment skills plus 100 days work experience. Once again, this is open to all students.
- The University of West England has a dedicated web page for international students which contains a video designed to assist international students enhance their employability understanding and skills.
- Every UK university visited runs sessions targeted at international students on how to research employers, develop presentation skills and become familiar with interview techniques and interaction.

CASE STUDY: THE SHED

'We stress that students cannot rely on the Oxford name alone and therefore, we encourage students to participate in careers advice early.'

It would be expected that the university which has least difficulty securing graduate outcomes for its students would be Oxford University; however, this was far from the case. In keeping with any other university, many students do not secure employment in their field and industry of choice.

'Our greatest challenge is demonstrating the diversity of career opportunities to students.'

The Oxford University participants reported that many graduates are too narrow in their perspective and therefore, focus upon careers and fields such as investment banking, consulting, government and law. Therefore, a major challenge is to equip graduates with the skills needed to diversify their employability capabilities whilst at the same time, exposing students to a plethora of alternative careers and fields.

The University has 12 careers advisers whose roles are segmented into undergraduates, Taught postgraduates and research. In addition, there is a dedicated employer relations team and four full-time staff who manage over 400 internships per year. Significantly, many of the internships are international and therefore, the domestic and international alumni are extensively utilised for identifying internship opportunities.

Each careers adviser is linked with several colleges and each careers adviser specialises in one or more particular careers streams.

The University conducts several bespoke careers fairs according to market opportunities and often partners with other institutions in hosting events. For example, Oxford University is in partnership with LSE in hosting a European internship fair. The University has very strong connections with other European careers services and regularly conducts such activities as video conferencing and staff exchanges.

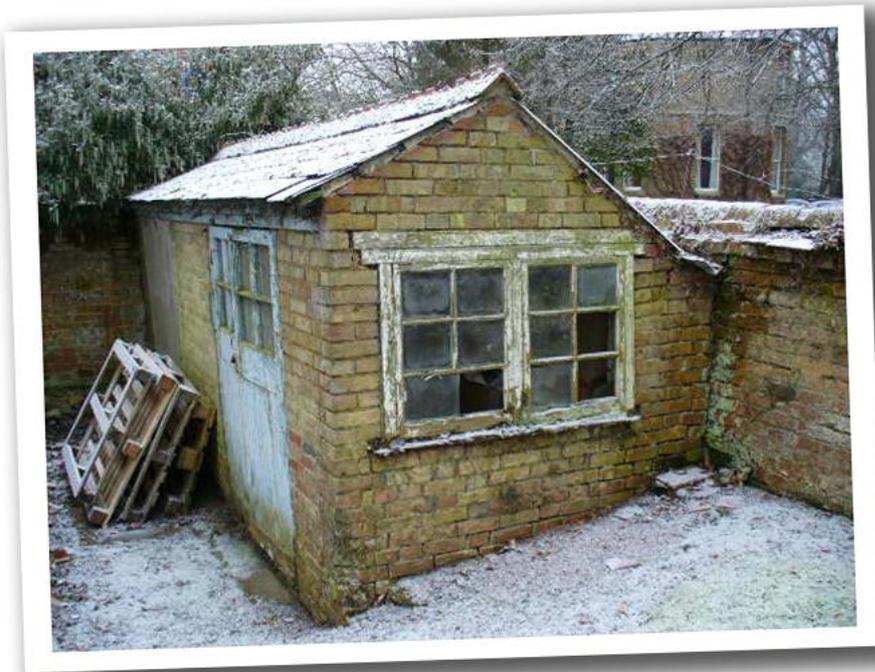
There is no question that Oxford University benefits from its global reputation and extensive resources. However, two initiatives really highlight the importance which the University attaches to trigger strategies. These strategies are stellar examples of how universities have needed to adapt their thinking, particularly towards international students; particularly given the post-GFC world of today where there is no longer a guarantee of outcomes based upon university status and brand.

The first trigger strategy is the international careers day which is actually the biggest careers event in the Oxford University calendar. It is formally opened by the Vice Chancellor and this year, 7,000 students attended, including 1,300 British students who want to work internationally. The event is widely attended by foreign careers advisers and recruiters and is deliberately designed as a festival. There is a strong focus upon promoting mobility and exchange programmes abroad (which is a major reason why many British students attend) and apart from giving exposure to employers, there are numerous support activities available such as CV preparation clinics.

Many of the British students who attend are deliberately accessing international career opportunities.

As an extension of the international careers day, Oxford University has run separate bespoke events for particular countries such as a recruitment fair for German employers.

The second major trigger strategy is The Shed.



The Shed was developed by the Oxford University careers service to boost the employability of graduates through four key streams: Innovation, creativity, collaboration and risk-taking. Activities which are run through The Shed include innovation workshops, enterprise support services and a shed networking scheme.

One of the major activities centres around a *business plan challenge*. This challenge encourages students to launch their own business with the business plan that the students develop critically assessed by enterprise experts.

Perhaps the most integral feature of The Shed however, is the *Shed Resource Centre*. The Shed Resource Centre offers a wide variety of services. Some of the more basic services are a careers hub and Facebook page. However, several other initiatives demonstrate the commitment which the University has embraced towards enterprise, entrepreneurship and start-ups.

For example, The Shed hosts a social enterprise training programme in conjunction with Oxford Brookes University. Another scheme centres around a *Building a business course* which is conducted in association with the SAID Business School.

A strong focus is upon networking and therefore, The Shed coordinates entrepreneur networks, venture labs and a London business mentoring networking event, which the University refers to as *meet-ups*.

The emphasis upon entrepreneurship was reinforced by two entrepreneurship programmes, one of which is called *Entrepreneurfirst* where the emphasis is upon creating high growth start-up businesses / organisations. Another scheme is a free programme accessible to female undergraduates who aspire to be entrepreneurs.

The strategies adopted by Oxford are highly holistic and reflect many of the individual initiatives undertaken across the UK.

CASE STUDY: THE CHOPSTICKS CLUB

Durham University is located 300 miles to the north of London. Whilst a very beautiful city, the University is an integral feature of the landscape and is arguably the largest employer in the region. Whilst Durham itself is a tourism magnet, the surrounding region has experienced several decades of decline following the closure of countless coal mines and little reinvestment to invigorate the local economy. Further, being so far from such major cities as London and Manchester, the University is very aware that it needs to take the University to market rather than relying upon the market coming to the University.

For many international students, Durham can appear a very isolating place. There is limited entertainment and most of the social life occurs within the college network. Therefore, for many students from such crowded countries as China, the Durham experience is the complete antithesis of what they expect or are used to.



In 1993, Durham University in conjunction with a prominent group of alumni established The Chopsticks Club. The focus of this club is to promote understanding between Chinese and British graduates and through such understanding, develop networking opportunities and activities between students and employers. Interestingly, the other focus for The Chopsticks Club is the focus upon food.

Through the Chopsticks Club, the intention is to create employment outcomes for Chinese graduates and create active collaboration opportunities for British graduates who are interested in China.

Many of the activities are conducted in London, including free Mandarin classes. In addition, the Chopsticks Club runs a formal programme where the focus is dialogue with the Chinese ambassador in the UK.

Each year, the Chopsticks Club runs a recruitment fair in June which is targeted at multinationals, British firms engaged with China and Chinese employers. This recruitment fair generally has a theme which in June 2013 was *Skills for the future*, an event where the focus was upon China related skills. The types of organisations who participated included Burberry, Selfridges, Huawei, Dyson, Harrods, Ricardo and Pinsent Masons. Job opportunities are also promoted on the Chopsticks Club website.

CASE STUDY: KINGSTON UNIVERSITY

Kingston is a stellar example of a university which has embedded employability attributes within the core curriculum and as a result, has differentiated the University's position within the highly competitive London space.

As a result of an extensive research study in 2012, the University determined how employers across different countries recruit graduates. Following on from this study, the University adopted a dual approach towards employability by engaging extensively with employers and at the same time, ensuring that students are suitably prepared for the workplace. Therefore, students undertake skills audit to determine both their employability skills and their life skills.

The University established an industry panel consisting of 18 employers. This panel regularly meets and in its inception, identified five key areas as priority attributes for students: Initiative, resilience, problem-solving, intercultural communications and global connectivity.

All of the careers consultants at the university come from a business or corporate background. The international recruitment and career functions are fully integrated and due to competition for internships, the University has invested in a variety of initiatives, including a shadowing programme.

The curriculum has a strong employability focus with the emphasis upon personal development, self-awareness and confidence.

In all programmes, the curriculum embeds such attributes as initiative, proactivity and creativity and to enable students to maximise employment outcomes, the University runs an enterprise scheme which encourages graduates to begin their own start-ups.

BLUE SKY, GREEN FIELDS

'We must better educate employers about the huge pool of international talent in the UK.'

During every discussion, one of the key lines of enquiry centred around ways in which employment opportunities for international students could be dramatically improved. This line of enquiry yielded an enormous breadth and depth of opinion and highlighted the extent to which the provision of employability skills and attributes is widely regarded as a fundamental deliverable.

Participants consistently referred to the importance of employment outcomes as a key measure of value and that such outcomes are essential for perpetuating future growth.

It became very evident that whilst every university has adopted some form of programme and / or invested in initiatives designed to improve employability, the UK Higher Education sector appears much more committed to securing employment outcomes than the Australian sector. This is primarily due to the importance attributed to completions and performance.

Despite some obvious differences, there were several common themes which emerged.

- i. Almost every participant but especially those in Australia, wants to see a campaign targeted at employers to raise their awareness of international students and negate many of the perceived barriers to recruiting international students.
- ii. As part of any employer awareness raising campaign, participants want employers to more proactively identify and recruit for their operations in other countries whether directly or through subsidiaries.
- iii. International students must be far better educated about the different types of employment environments. In particular, the most significant growth in demand and therefore the greatest number and diversity of opportunities for graduates (in source and destination countries) will come from SME's. However, these organisations require a much greater variety of workplace-ready skill-sets than employers who conduct large-scale graduate entry schemes.

- iv. Whilst many UK universities have embedded employability attributes within the curriculum, the general consensus was that the academic communities still need to better understand the importance of employability attributes when planning and developing courses.
- v. Many participants indicated that outcomes would be improved if there was greater collaboration between universities, including a more informed understanding of the different employment environments in different countries.

The general consensus was that one university alone cannot hope to identify all of the market intelligence that is required and that greater cooperation needs to occur between institutions.

- vi. Even for those UK universities which already utilise their international alumni, there was a general level of agreement that universities must more effectively and strategically utilise their alumni in different countries. In particular, participants referred to the ongoing importance of acquiring knowledge about different employment markets and to generate referrals into employment.
- vii. Whilst the language used in the UK and Australia was different based upon the regulatory environments, participants consistently referred to the importance of developing a common recruitment protocol for international students in order to assist with the management of expectations and to negate the perception that employment outcomes are guaranteed.
- viii. Many participants expressed concern about the language competencies of many international students in terms of their engagement with future employers.

Therefore, it was often recommended that systems should be developed to separate international students according to their language competencies when providing careers advice and implementing employability related initiatives.

- ix. Every participating university provides careers advice on their websites. Further, it was widely recognised that these websites are the major conduit between universities and employers.

However, there was a general consensus that in providing careers and employment support on websites, some universities inadvertently appear to be making an employment promise.

- x. There was widespread consensus that there needs to be greater cooperation between universities in terms of providing careers services and support. There was a reluctance to participate in benchmarking exercises given that many universities do not want to admit how under-resourced they are in some areas; however, there was widespread support for the sharing of market intelligence vis-à-vis employment patterns in different countries, curriculum innovations, examples of best practice and even regional / state-wide initiatives (e.g. volunteer programmes).

- xi. Aligned to the aforementioned point on collaboration, many participants referred to the importance of establishing an international network of career professionals in both source and destination countries. When this issue was discussed, the following opportunities, services and concepts arose:
 - International internships
 - Global alumni networks
 - Temporary placement opportunities
 - The monitoring of global trends
 - Better understanding of country and regional needs
 - Greater understanding of technical needs and operating environments
 - Database of experts in different fields
 - Professional development programmes in countries associated with best practice
 - Shadow schemes
 - Webinars
 - Online discussion groups

Within Australia, there were some other notable patterns. The level of engagement between different operational functions is less evident than in the UK and as a result of raising this issue with different institutions, there was an overwhelming acknowledgement that there needs to be greater cooperation and understanding between different operational areas.

Several patterns emerged:

- The recruitment and careers functions need to be more seamlessly integrated. Not only will this help to negate the barrier between recruitment and the subsequent handover of responsibilities to the careers function, but through mutual cooperation it should be possible to leverage growth through a better understanding of recruitment dynamics and conditions in different markets.

- Careers advice for international students needs to occur much earlier in the student lifecycle, as per the UK. It was widely observed that this would reduce the intensity of pressure during the latter stages of study and would enable international students to be much better prepared in terms of preparing resumes, participating in extra-curricular activities and generally acquiring more skills and competencies designed to enable employability.
- Every Australian university participant reported that their alumni functions are severely under-resourced and that the international alumni are not fully utilised for generating opportunities, development networks and assisting with such initiatives as internships and mentoring programmes.
- Many participants acknowledged the benefits of the commonly used UK practice of co-locating the international, careers and alumni functions. However, there was less support for common reporting lines to the Executive.
- Many Australian participants observed that the language used in dialogue with international students needs to change. The emphasis upon placement needs to shift in order to negate any perception that employment outcomes are guaranteed.
- There was a general consensus that strategies are needed to enhance employability and enable the portability of skills and qualifications between different industries, careers and locations.
- Some participants suggested that it should be mandatory to incorporate employability skills into the curriculum, since this could feature as a key attribute of the Australian proposition given the demise of other attributes such as affordability and migration outcomes.
- Every Australian participant from the international office acknowledged the benefit of having careers advisers attend major points of recruitment. Further, most participants acknowledged the importance of engaging more with employers in market in order to ensure the provision of content that is relevant for future national and employer needs.
- Many participants indicated that there is a perception that internships need to be long-term. Consequently, many participants would sooner see a vehicle to guarantee short-term work experience (i.e. one or two weeks) since the general consensus was that these types of experiences are easier to secure.

- Several participants observed that if Federal, State and Local Government entities could be encouraged to offer internships to international students, this would permeate through the wider community and encourage other employers to do the same.
- There was very strong support for the concept of skills audits, as part of the process of helping international students to better select electives and courses and to potentially assist with offshore internship schemes.

LESSONS LEARNED

A primary objective of this study was to determine how best to improve employment outcomes for international students, given the dynamics of the Australian market and evidence of best practice in the UK.

In order to achieve this objective, it became very evident that engagement with international students needs to occur much earlier in the student lifecycle. Further, international students need to be far better educated about the skills, competencies and attributes which employers seek and therefore, students need to take advantage of opportunities both within their own institutions and across the wider community.

For this to occur, there not only needs to be a substantial investment in service provision, every university needs to invest in a trigger strategy designed to facilitate outcomes.

At a national level, employers need to be educated about the potential afforded by international students. And at the same time, many of the perceived barriers to recruiting international students need to be negated.

As a result of the qualitative component of this project, there are some clear lessons to help inform Australian universities:

- i. The huge potential afforded by international alumni for identifying internships and building networks.
- ii. The benefits of planning international recruitment activities in conjunction with the careers offices and to utilise the careers office in helping to identify how employers recruit in different markets.
- iii. There are significant benefits to be enjoyed by aligning the international, careers and alumni functions; not least to more seamlessly narrow the window between recruitment and careers.

In the UK the transition period often occurs early in Year one whereas in Australia it is generally in the final Year, thereby leaving a hiatus which the careers functions cannot easily resolve.

Consequently careers engagement with international students needs to occur from the point of enrolment rather than close to graduation.

- iv. Given the number and proportion of international students in Australia, and the importance of employment outcomes as a key measure of return on investment, universities must employ dedicated careers staff for international students.
- v. At both local and national level, institutions both individually and collectively, need to promote the value of international graduates to employers.
- vi. Due to the abundance of domestic graduates, employers have much higher levels of expectations from international graduates. This is often reflected in their recruitment and screening criteria. Further, because many employers consider international graduates as representing a greater level of risk, as well as a greater administrative burden, setting the benchmark higher provides a higher level of reassurance that any potential recruits will be of a very high standard.

Therefore in promoting the value of international graduates to employers, critical perceptual issues need to be addressed.

For example, rather than focussing upon perceived English language inadequacies, promote the fact that these are very often second or third choice languages which employers can leverage. Similarly, various strengths of international graduates need to be advocated including knowledge of other countries and cultures, proven independence (in living and in learning) and specific competencies based around early education (e.g. numeracy).

- vii. The sector which affords the greatest short to medium-term potential in both Australia and in source countries, are SME's. This requires a consolidated effort in terms of developing the broader employability attributes across the curriculum and promoting the benefits of international graduates to SME employers.
- viii. The focus upon entrepreneurship is indicative of the importance attributed to equipping graduates with the skills and competences needed, not only to enter the workplace but to create self-opportunities. Whilst the majority of international graduates anticipate working for multinationals, larger organisations and government entities, the intensity of competition means that additional avenues must be provided to assist these graduates to secure alternative options.
- ix. Aligned to the above, the UK universities have clearly demonstrated the benefits of embedding employability attributes into the curriculum.

- x. Employability is not just a matter of equipping graduates with individual attributes; it extends to shaping the abilities of graduates through such qualities as innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship.
- xi. Careers engagement needs to occur much earlier in the student lifecycle to ensure that international graduates are adequately prepared for the demands and rigours of securing graduate outcomes. One of the critical observations from this study, one that was highlighted by the systems in place in the UK to negate this barrier, is that international students engage far too late and are largely unaware about the importance of securing employment before graduating.
- xii. The high level of participation in various award schemes in the UK demonstrates the importance of providing recognition through awards. Such awards are a very effective means of differentiating a graduate's resumé.
- xiii. There are enormous benefits to be enjoyed by segmenting careers functions into student-facing teams and employer-facing teams. In some Australian universities, the latter functionality resides within business advisors embedded within Faculties, rather than specialist staff within the careers departments. However, because the careers departments of many Australian universities are under-resourced compared with the UK, few universities are able to make such a distinction.
- xiv. In the UK, the greatest success stories in terms of international graduate outcomes are those universities where there is a dedicated international relations team for providing careers support; and those universities which incorporate work experience and internships for international students as part of the curriculum.
- xv. Aligned to the above, employment outcomes would be strengthened through skills audits soon after enrolment, to enable international students to better select subjects and hone their areas of interest.
- xvi. Whereas in Australia industry advisory boards tend to occur at Faculty level, there are many benefits to be enjoyed in having an employment advisory board for the university per se. This is to ensure that the essence of employability is incorporated within the culture, environment and curriculum; and that securing graduate outcomes for all students becomes part of the university's modus operandi.
- xvii. There is strong evidence to suggest that universities would significantly benefit from in-country careers events, not only as vehicles for generating international graduate outcomes, but as a means of encouraging positive word of mouth affirmation.

- xviii. The Shed case study highlights the importance of having a *trigger* strategy for engaging with and assisting international student in terms of career outcomes.
- xix. Any initiative targeted at employers should include recommendations for employers to identify potential graduates for their international operations.
- xx. Despite the importance which international students attribute to *rankings*, the weight of evidence suggests that the university brand is not sufficient for graduates to secure employment outcomes.
- xxi. In the UK there has been a significant change of dialogue over recent years. Many universities have a policy of avoiding the term *placement* and instead, state to international students that whilst there are no guarantees in terms of outcomes, *they will guarantee equipping students with the attributes needed to secure outcomes*.
- xxii. Aligned to the above, there is strong evidence to suggest that the term *portability* needs to be incorporated within the language of dialogue, meaning that graduates will be equipped with the attributes needed to move between different industries, roles and locations.
- xxiii. International students are becoming increasingly aware of the importance attributed to global connectivity. Even so, universities must ensure that there is sufficient local content and context embedded within any international curriculum, particularly for those students enrolled within TNE programmes.

THE EMPLOYMENT ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND GRADUATES

In order to better understand the attitudes and perceptions of international students towards employment outcomes, Prospect Research undertook a substantial survey. It was agreed to include the results which were not in the public domain into this report.

Sample

The online student survey yielded a sample of 2,163 international students, of which 1,062 were enrolled in 2012 and 1,101 were enrolled between 2008 and 2011.

The online graduate survey yielded a sample of 381 international graduates who were educated in Australia and have since returned home in order to work.

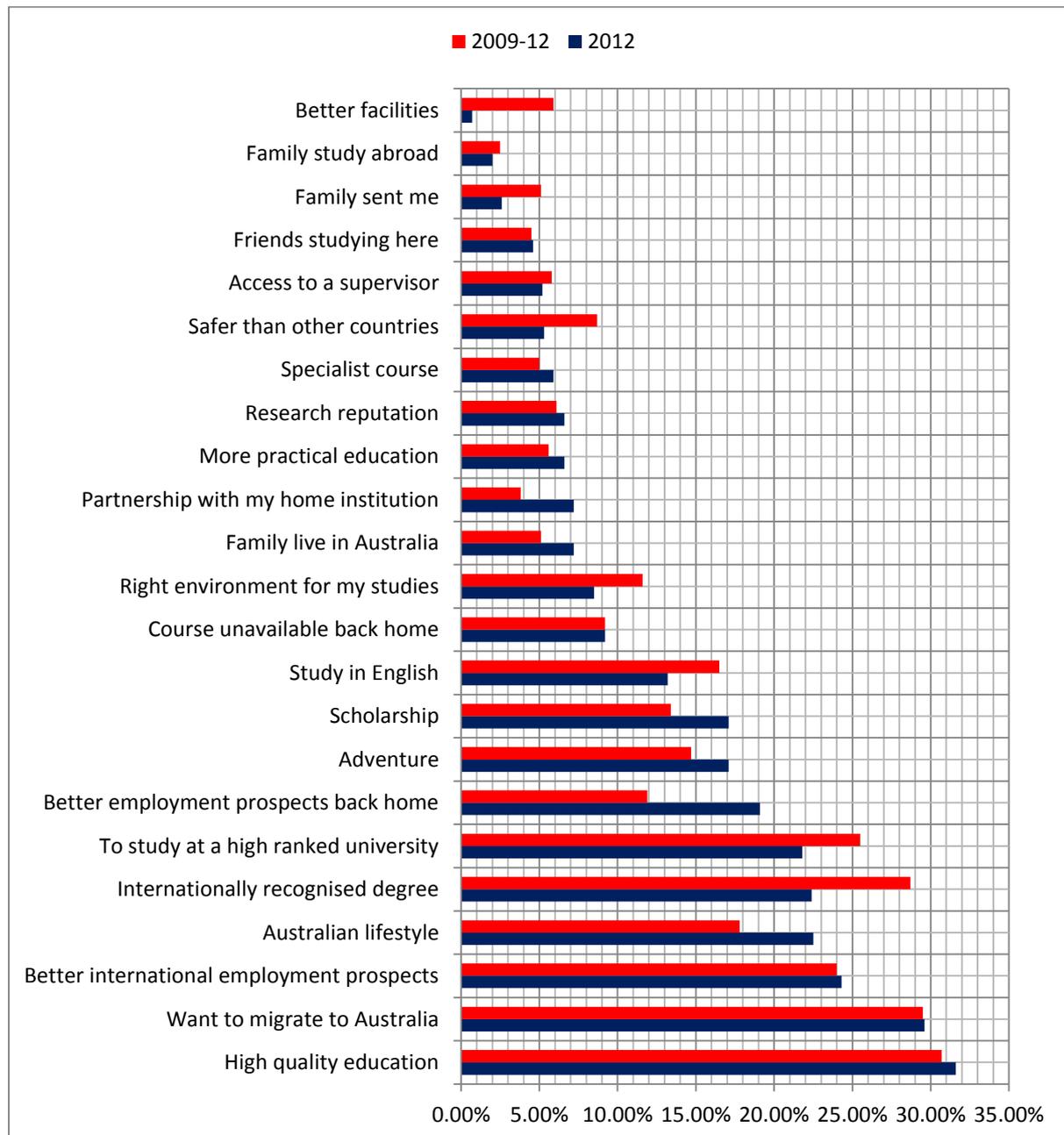
For the student survey, 1,224 respondents were classified as undergraduates and 779 as postgraduate coursework (PGCW) students. In addition, there were 160 postgraduate respondents.

The online student survey generated responses from 93 different nationalities notably China (366), Malaysia (347), Indonesia (223), Singapore (221) and Vietnam (209).

Reasons for choosing to study in Australia

Respondents were presented with a list of 23 variables and asked to select up to three reasons for choosing to study in Australia. This was to determine where two employment variables ranked in importance relative to the other selection criteria.

Graph 11.1: The aggregate of the top three reasons why international students chose to study in Australia, by year of first enrolment

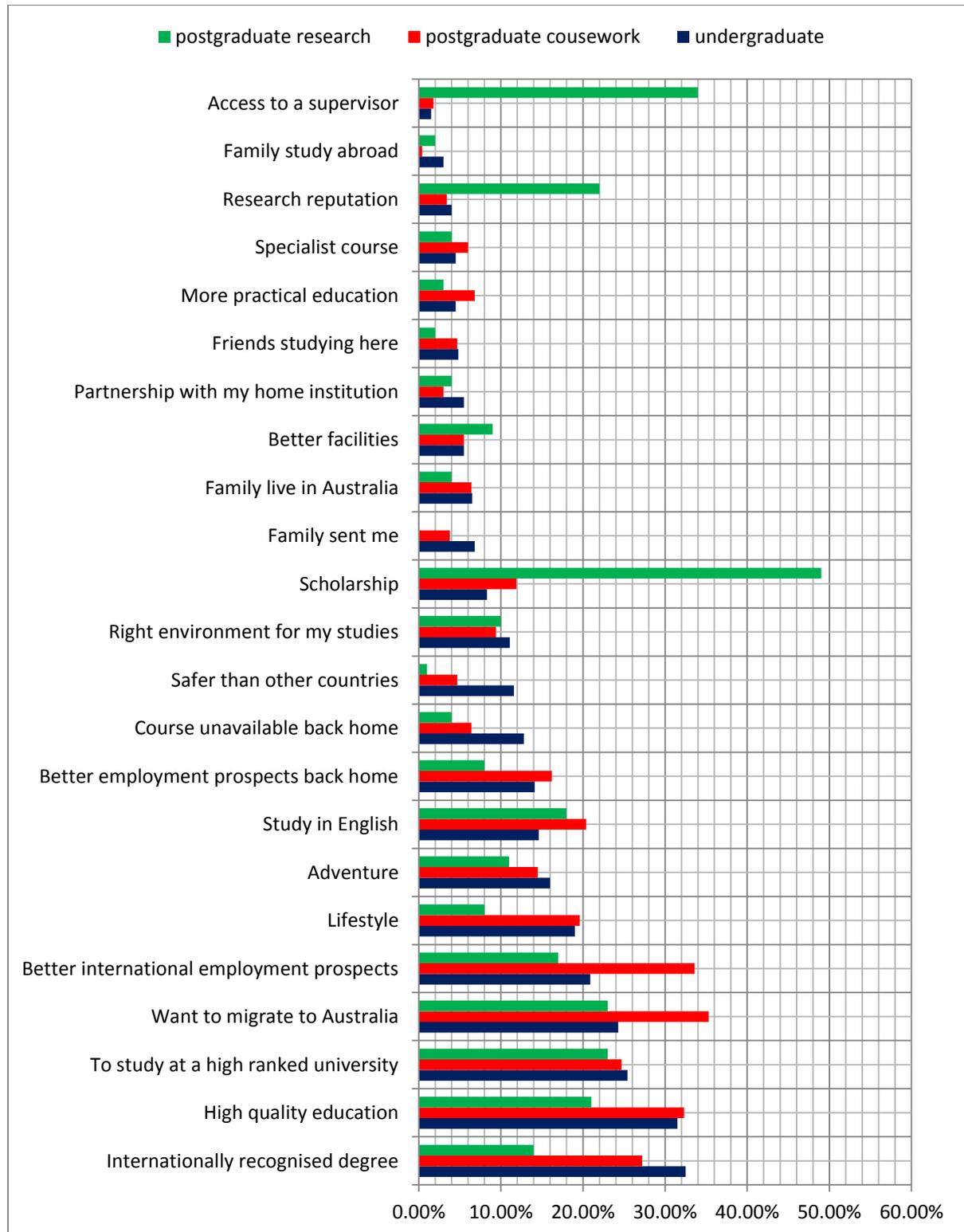


The highest overall response was for the *high quality of education in Australia*. This was selected by 30.9% of respondents overall. The second highest response was for *wanting to migrate to Australia*, at 29.4%, followed by the first of the employment variables, namely *better international employment prospects*.

In total, 24.1% of respondents selected *better international employment prospects*. The second employment variable, *better employment prospects back home* ranked seventh overall, at 15.6%.

The fourth highest response was for *internationally recognised degree*, at 21%, followed by *to study at a high ranked university* (18.8%) and *Australian lifestyle*, at 20.5%.

Graph 11.2: The aggregate of the top three reasons why international students chose to study in Australia, by level of study



Among the PGCW respondents, the variable *better international employment prospects* was the second highest variable overall, at 31.6%. For this segment, the variable *better employment prospects back home* was eighth overall, at 16.2%.

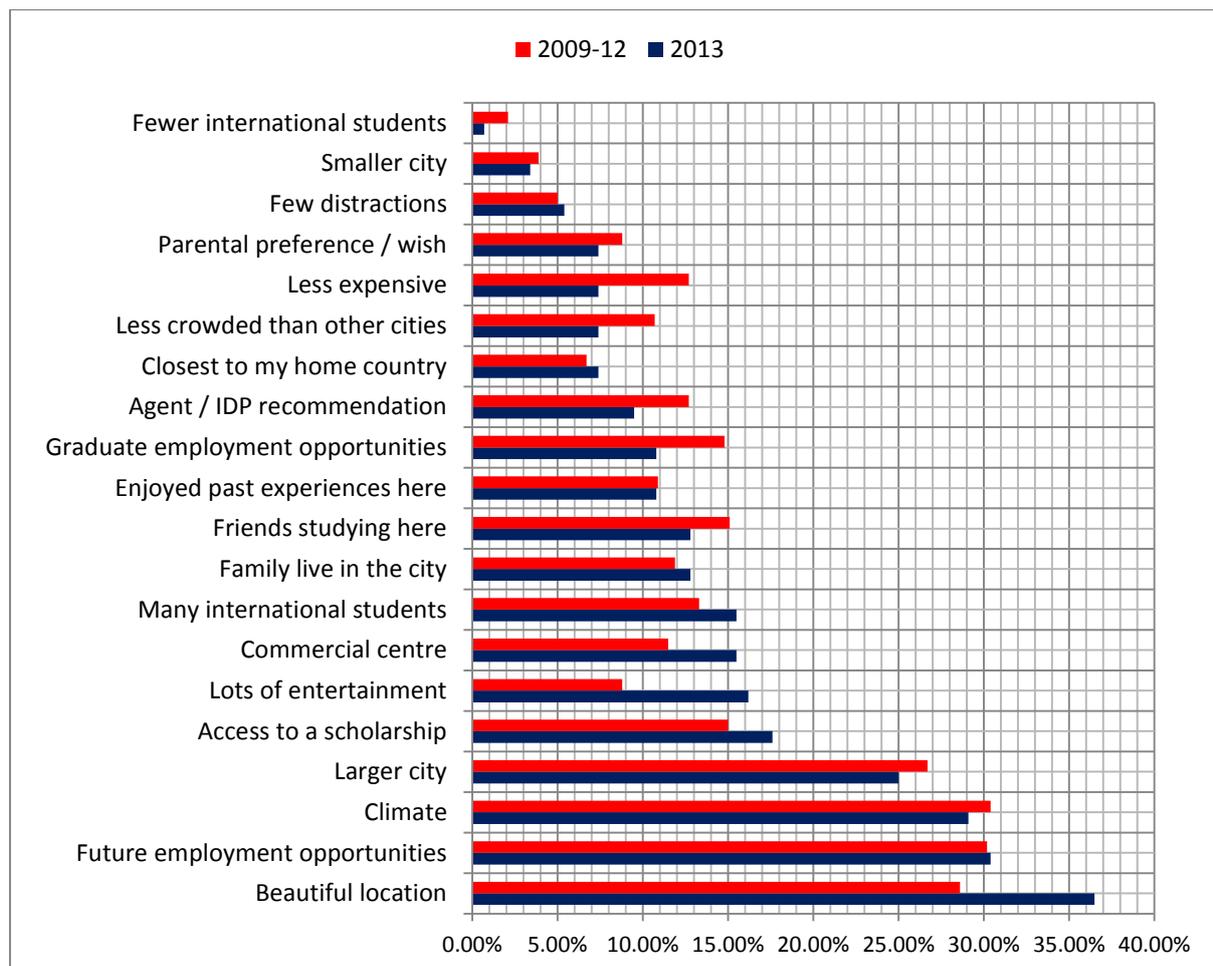
For the undergraduate sample, the variable *better international employment prospects* ranked fifth overall, at 20.9% and the variable *better employment prospects back home* ranked ninth, at 14.2%.

For the postgraduate research sample, the variable *better international employment prospects* ranked eighth overall, at 17.1% and the variable *better employment prospects back home* ranked fourteenth, at 7.9%.

The choice of destination city as a selection factor

Respondents were asked to indicate up to three most important variables for choosing their city in which to study in Australia. Once again, this was to determine where two employment related variables ranked among a list of 20 selection criteria.

Graph 11.3: The aggregate of the top three reasons why international students chose to study in their city in Australia



The highest response was for *beautiful location*, at 32.9% of sample. This was followed by the first of the employment related variables, specifically *future employment opportunities*, at 30.2%.

The second employment variable, namely *graduate employment opportunities* ranked tenth overall, at 12.8%.

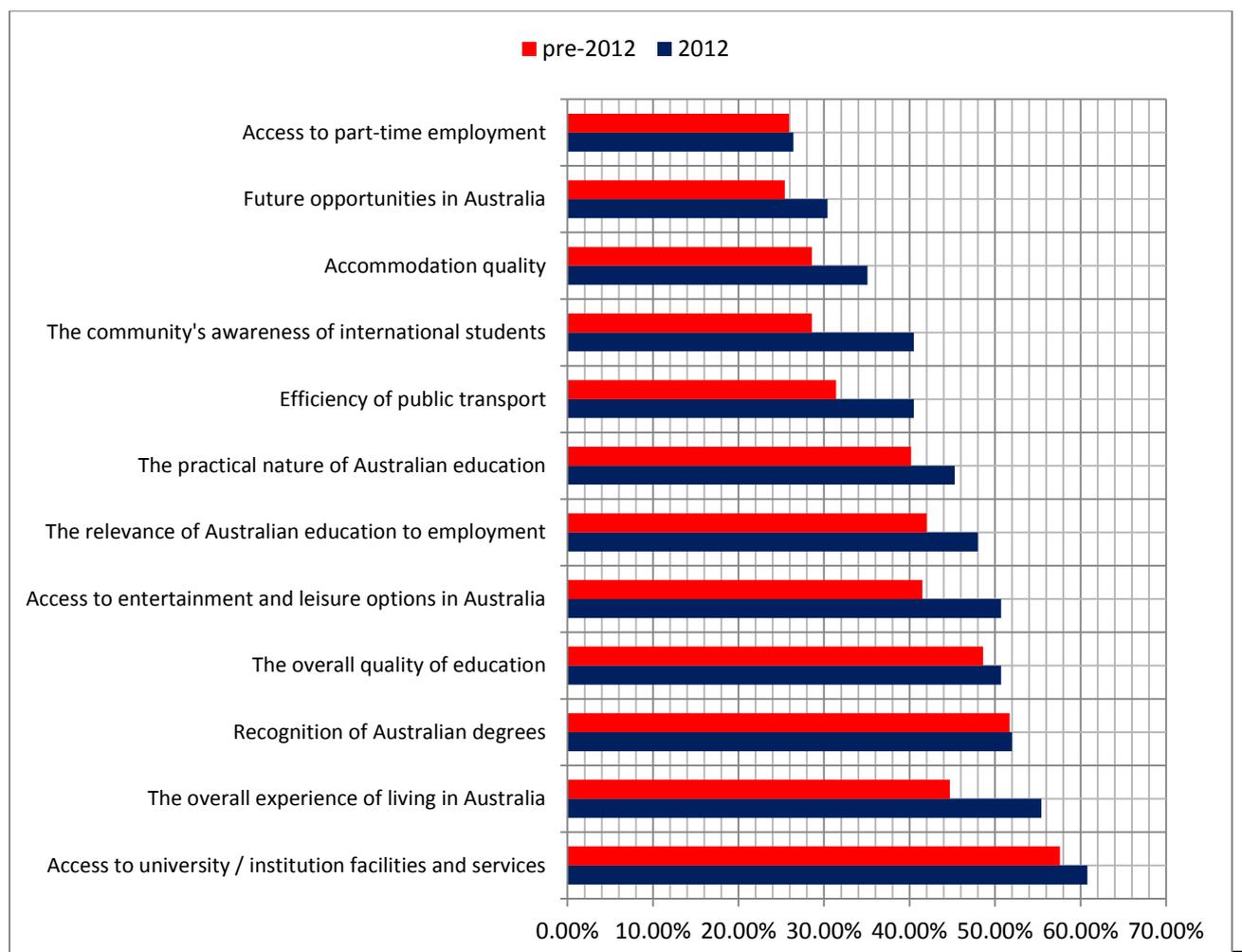
Respondents were asked to indicate the three major advantages of their current city destination. Of the 19 variables tested, the variable *part-time employment opportunities* was second, at 20.3%.

Respondents were asked to indicate the three major disadvantages of their current city destination. Of the 20 variables tested, the variable *lack of part-time employment* was third, at 28.6%.

Satisfaction

Respondents were asked to indicate their levels of satisfaction against 12 key criteria.

Graph 11.4: Very high levels of satisfaction against a range of variables



Overall, the highest levels of satisfaction was for *access to university facilities and services*, at 59.5%, followed by *the recognition of Australian degrees* (50.8%) and *the overall quality of education* (49.6%). This was based on an aggregate of those who awarded a score of 8, 9 or 10 out of 10.

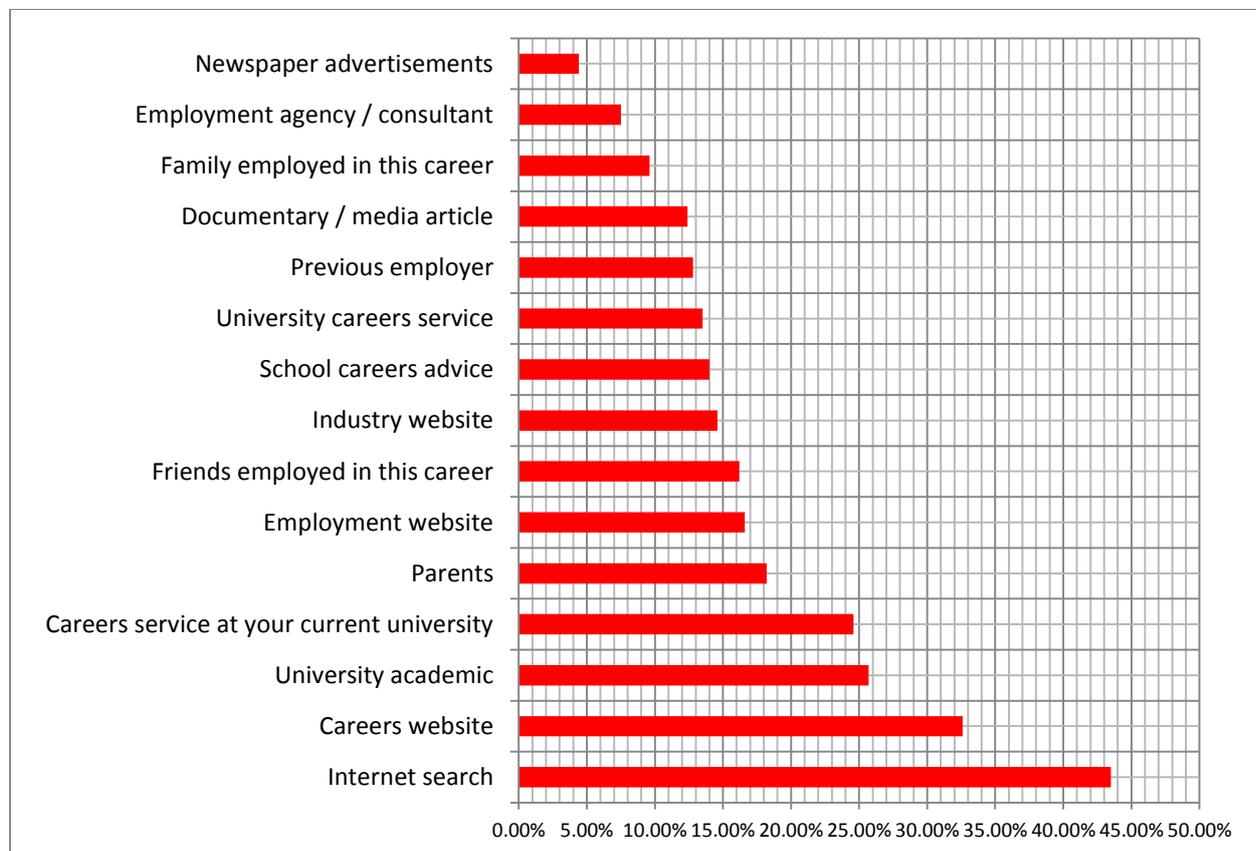
Using the same measure, the variable *the relevance of Australian education to employment* ranked sixth, at 42.4%. The variable *future career opportunities in Australia* ranked eleventh, at 28.8%.

29.6% of respondents indicated a *very low level of satisfaction* against the variable *future career opportunities in Australia*. This was followed by *access to part-time employment* (25.9%). However, just 9% of respondents indicated a *very low level of satisfaction* against the variable *the relevance of Australian education to employment*.

Career selection

Respondents were provided with a list of fifteen potential sources of awareness about where they first learned about the career they intend pursuing. This result highlighted the lack of careers advice which many students receive prior to arriving in Australia. Empirical evidence shows that this often results in students selecting a broad range of subject matter in order to maximise options once in situ.

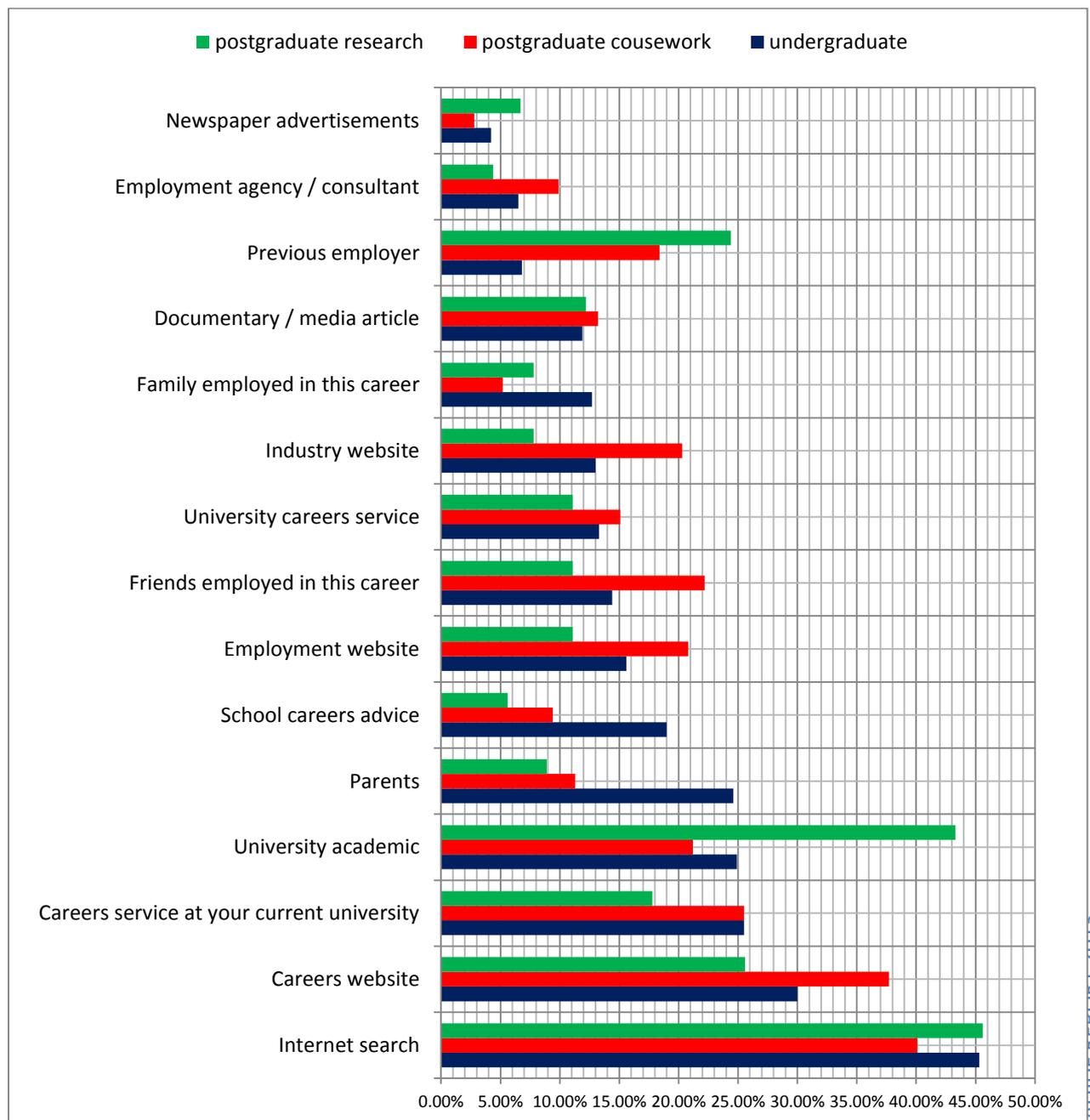
Graph 11.5: Where respondents first learned about the career they intend pursuing



43.3% of respondents indicated *internet search* and 32.5% indicated *careers website*. There was very little duplication in terms of both options being selected by the same respondents and therefore, this illustrates the absolute importance of the internet as an initial source of awareness.

25.7% of respondents indicated *a university academic*, which is a significant result and highlights the importance which international students attribute to academic staff. The fourth highest response was for *careers service at your current university*, at 24.3%.

Graph 11.5: Where respondents first learned about the career they intend pursuing, by level of study

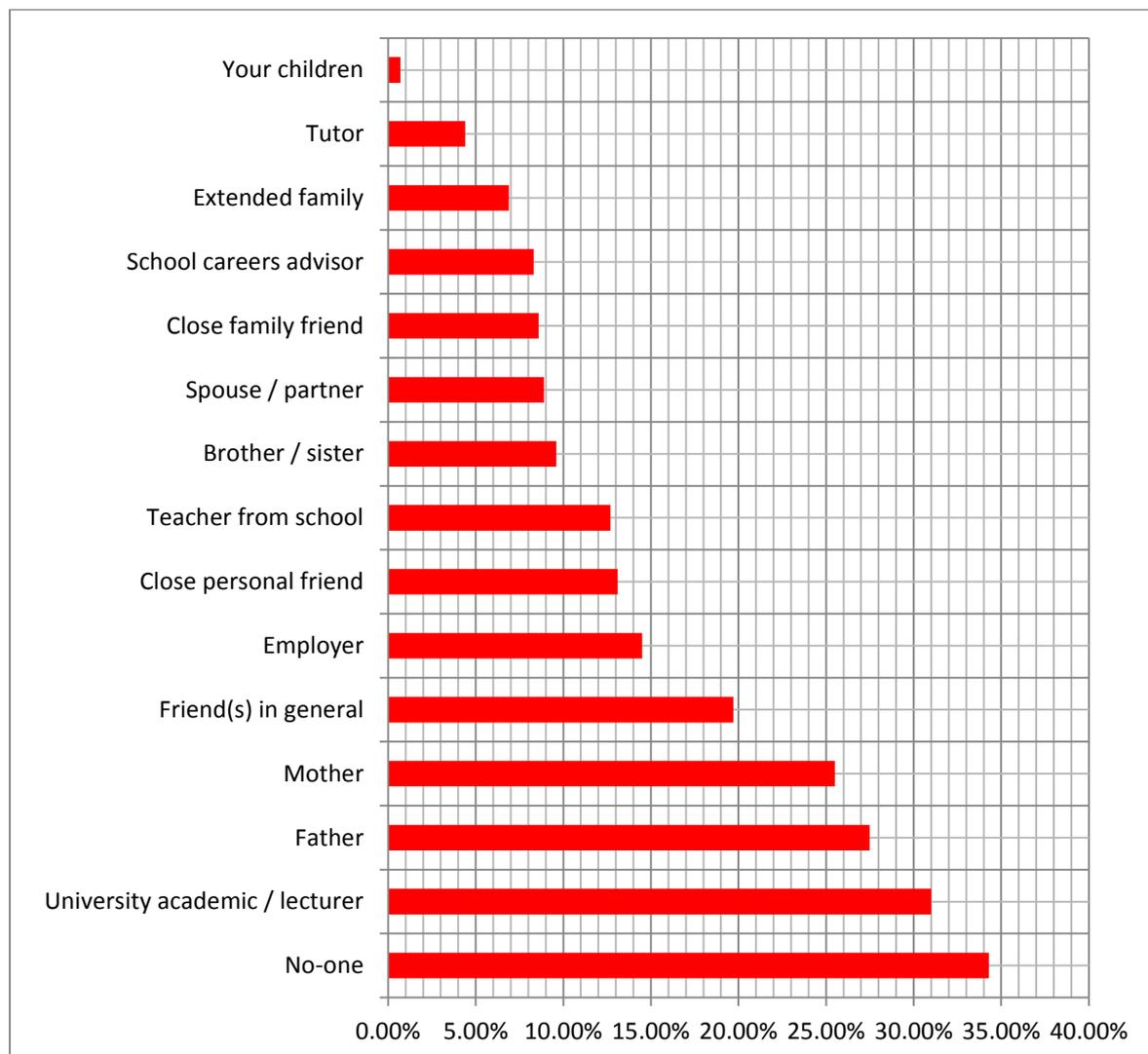


Careers website was particularly popular amongst PGCW respondents, at 33.7%. A university academic was especially popular amongst postgraduate research respondents, at 33.2%.

Sources of careers influence

In addition to the initial source of awareness, respondents were asked to indicate who has most influenced their intended choice of career.

Graph 11.6: Those who have most influenced the intended choice of career of respondents



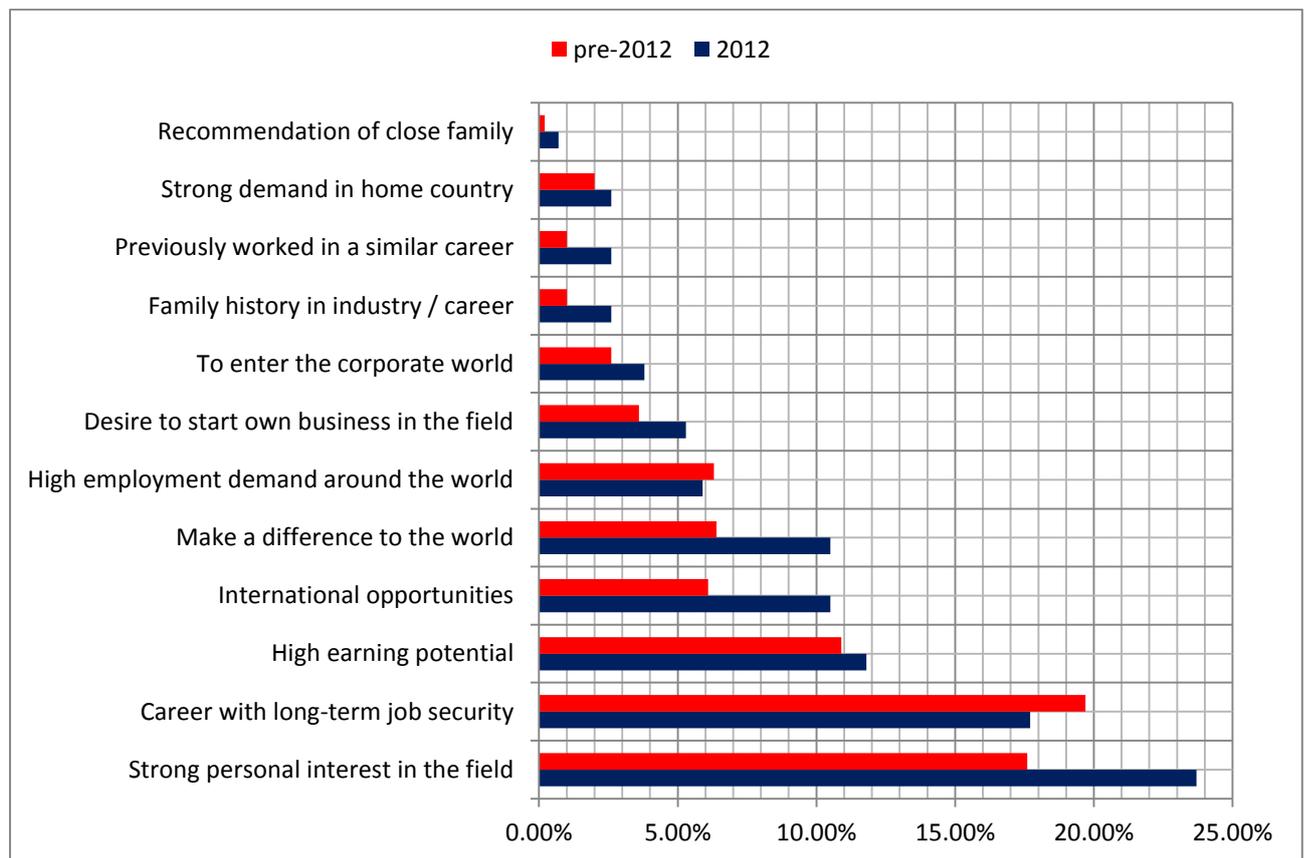
34.3% of respondents indicated *no-one*. This applied to 41.8% of PGCW respondents. The second highest response overall was for *a university academic / lecturer*, a result which again reinforces the importance of university teaching staff as key opinion leaders.

The third highest response was for *father*, at 27.5%, followed by *mother* (25.4%), *friends in general* (19.7%) and *employer* (14.5%). *Employer* was significantly higher amongst the postgraduate research respondents, at 22.8%.

Selecting a future career

Respondents were presented with a list of twelve criteria and asked to select the single most important factor in determining a future career.

Graph 11.7: The single most important factor in determining a future career, by year of first enrolment

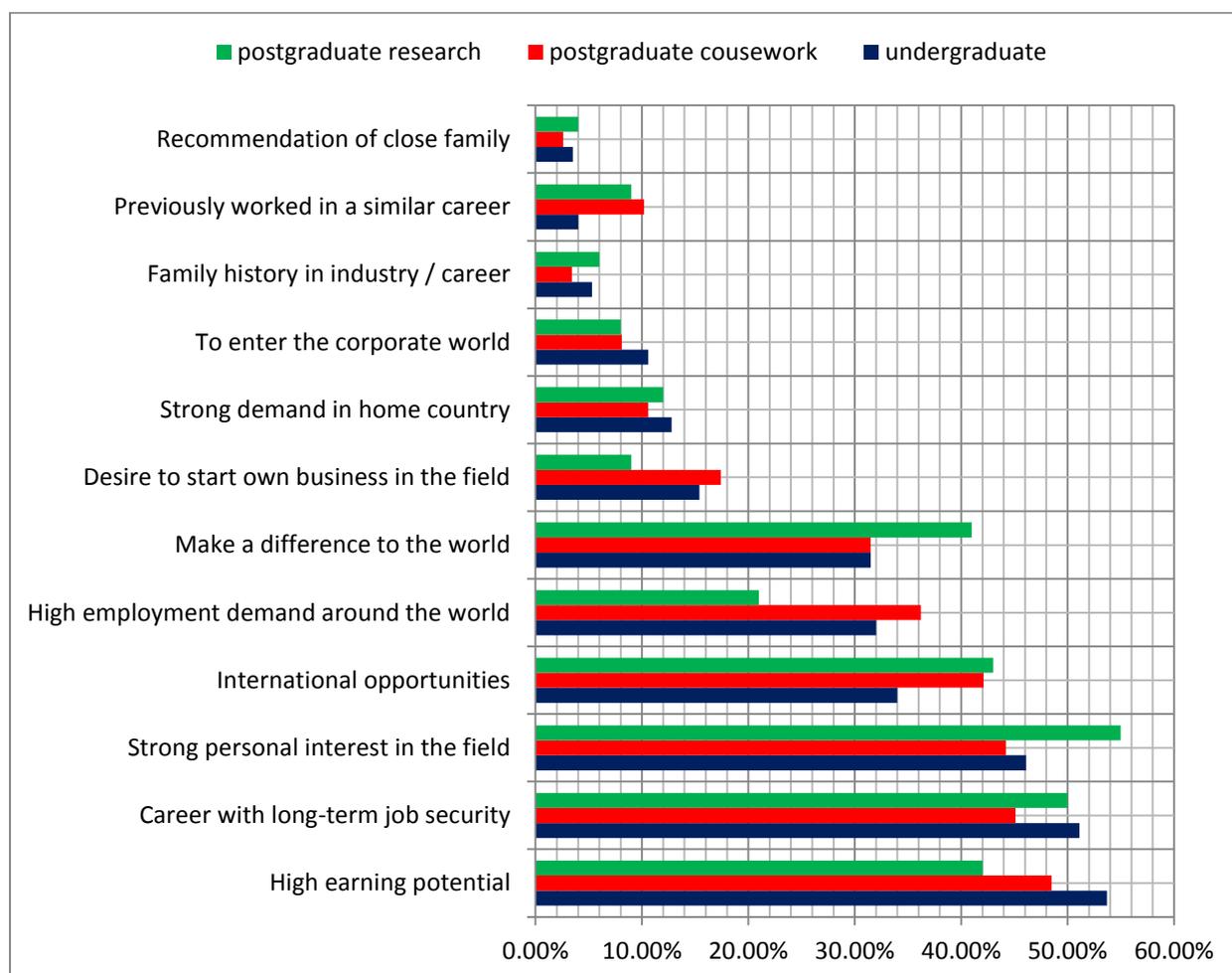


23.7% of respondents who first enrolled in 2012 indicated *strong personal interest in the field*. This was followed by *career with long-term job security* (22.6%), *high earning potential* (11.8%), *international opportunities* (10.4%), *make a difference to the world* (10.3%) and *high employment demand around the world* (5.9%).

The highest response for those who enrolled in pre-2012 was *career with long-term job security*, at 19.6%. This was followed by *strong personal interest in the field* (17.6%), *high earning potential* (10.9%), *make a difference to the world* (6.3%), *high employment demand around the world* (6.2%) and *international opportunities* (6.1%).

There were some notable differences by level of study. After making their initial selection, respondents were asked to indicate their top three criteria in determining a future career.

Graph 11.8: Aggregate of the top three criteria when determining a future career, by level of study



Among the undergraduate cohort, the three stand-out criteria were *high earning potential*, at 53.5%, *career with long-term job security* (50.9%) and *strong personal interest in the field* (46%). For the PGCW respondents, these were also the top three criteria, at 48.3%, 44.8%, and 44.1% respectively. However, for the postgraduate research cohort, the highest figure was for *strong personal interest in the field*, at 54.9%, followed by *career with long-term job security* (49.9%).

Benefits of studying in Australia

Respondents were asked to indicate the three attributes which they most hope to develop by studying in Australia from a list of 17 employability related variables. This line of enquiry was designed to identify the types of priorities which international students hope to acquire and which may therefore positively influence their employability and potential employment outcomes.

Overall, 45% of respondents indicated *global perspective* and 44% indicated *communication skills*. These were the two stand-out variables. Amongst those enrolled in 2012, the variable *global perspective* was selected by 48.3% of respondents and *communication skills* by 42.5%. Amongst those who enrolled pre-2012, *communications skills* was selected by 45.6% of respondents and *global perspective* by 41.7%.

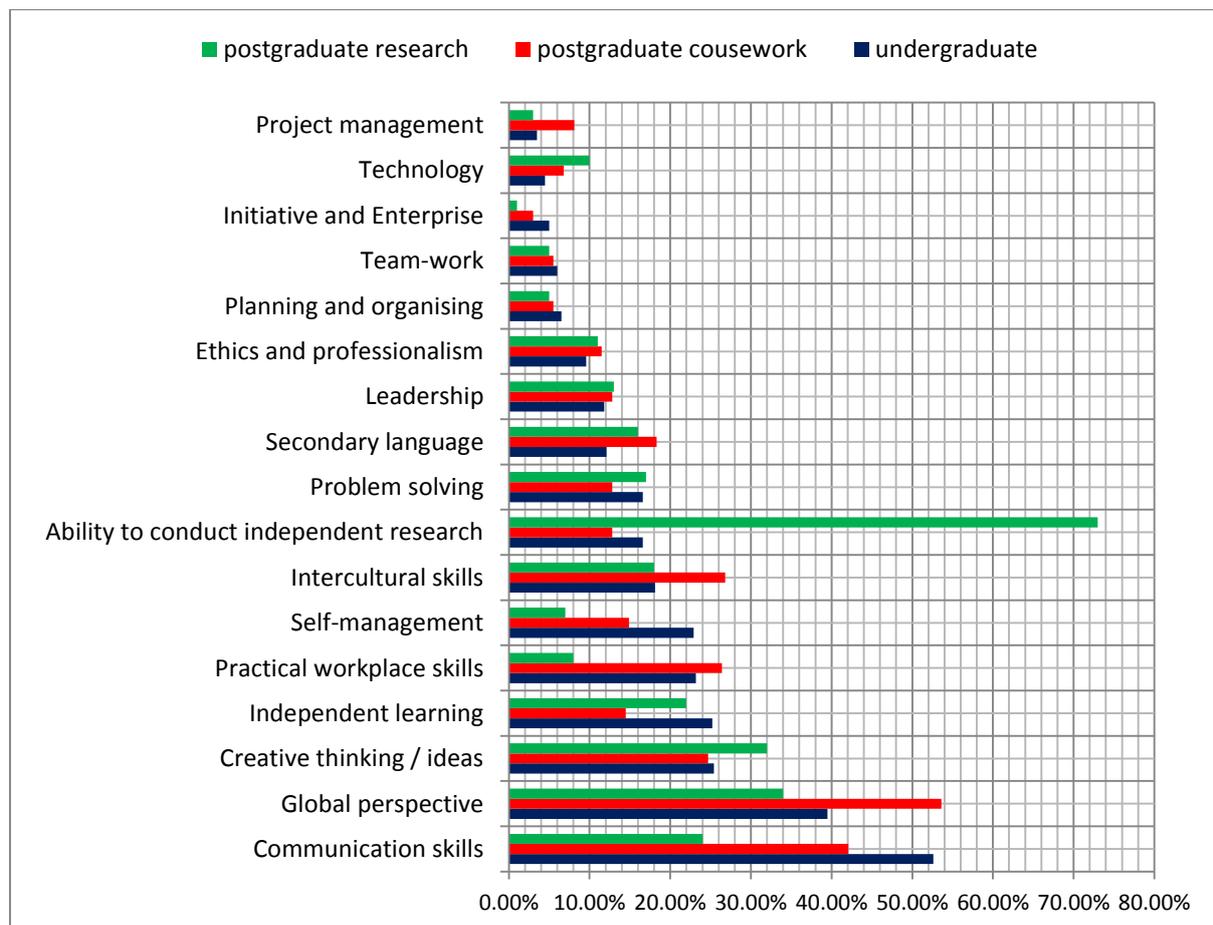
There were some notable variations by year of enrolment against other criteria.

For those who first enrolled in 2012, the third highest response was for *intercultural skills*, at 29.6%, followed by *independent learning* (23.6%), *self-management* (23.6%), *practical workplace skills* (21.7%), *the ability to conduct independent research* (18.8%) and *creative thinking / ideas* (18.7%).

For those who first enrolled pre-2012, the third highest response was for *creative thinking / ideas*, at 28%, followed by *ability to conduct independent research* (23.5%), *practical workplace skills* (22.3%) and *independent learning* (21.2%).

There were some notable variations by level of study.

Graph 11.10: The three attributes which respondents most hope to develop by studying in Australia, by level of study

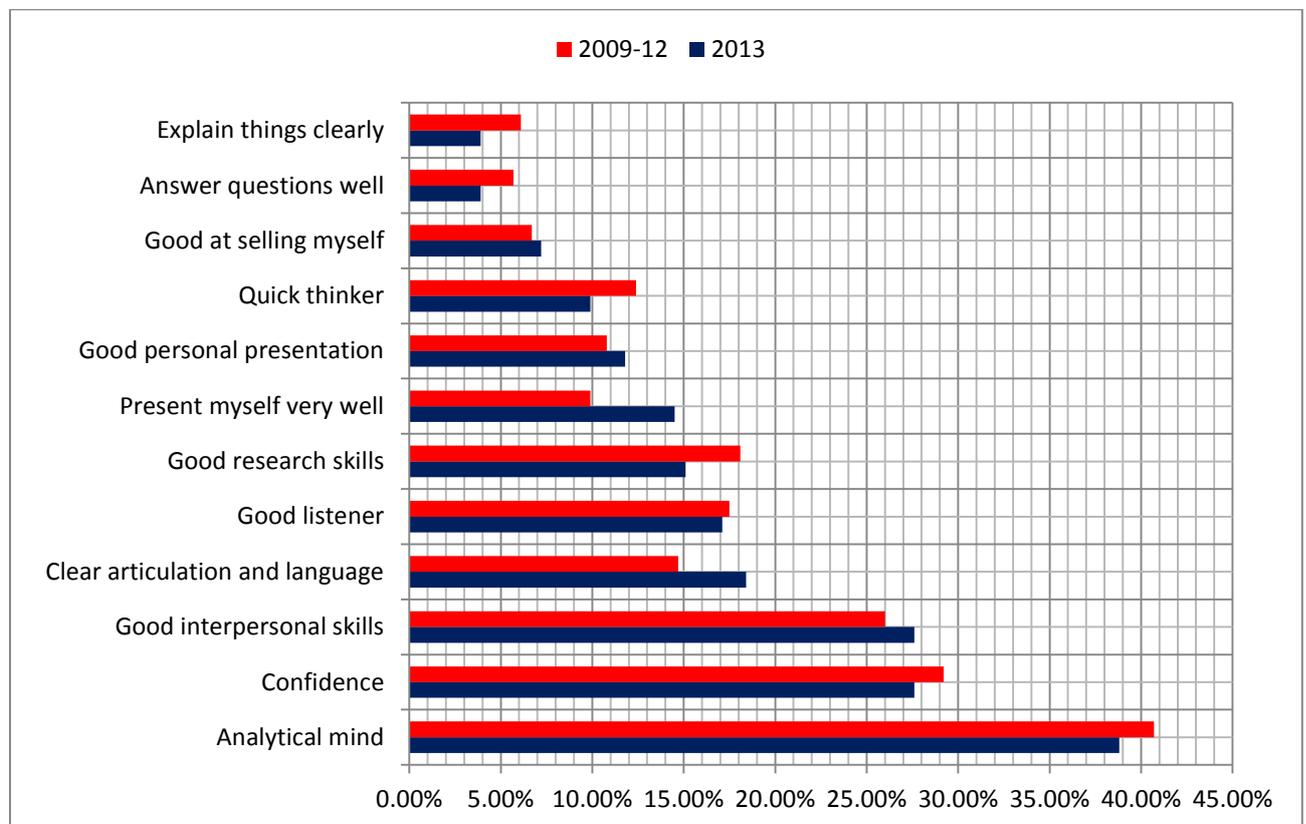


52.3% of undergraduate respondents indicated *communication skills* and 39.2% indicated *global perspectives*. 53.6% of PGCW respondents indicated *global perspectives* and 42% indicated *communication skills*. 72.6% of postgraduate research respondents indicated *ability to conduct independent research*.

Individual strengths and attributes of international students

Respondents were asked to indicate their two greatest individual strengths when applying for future employment, from a list of 12 attributes.

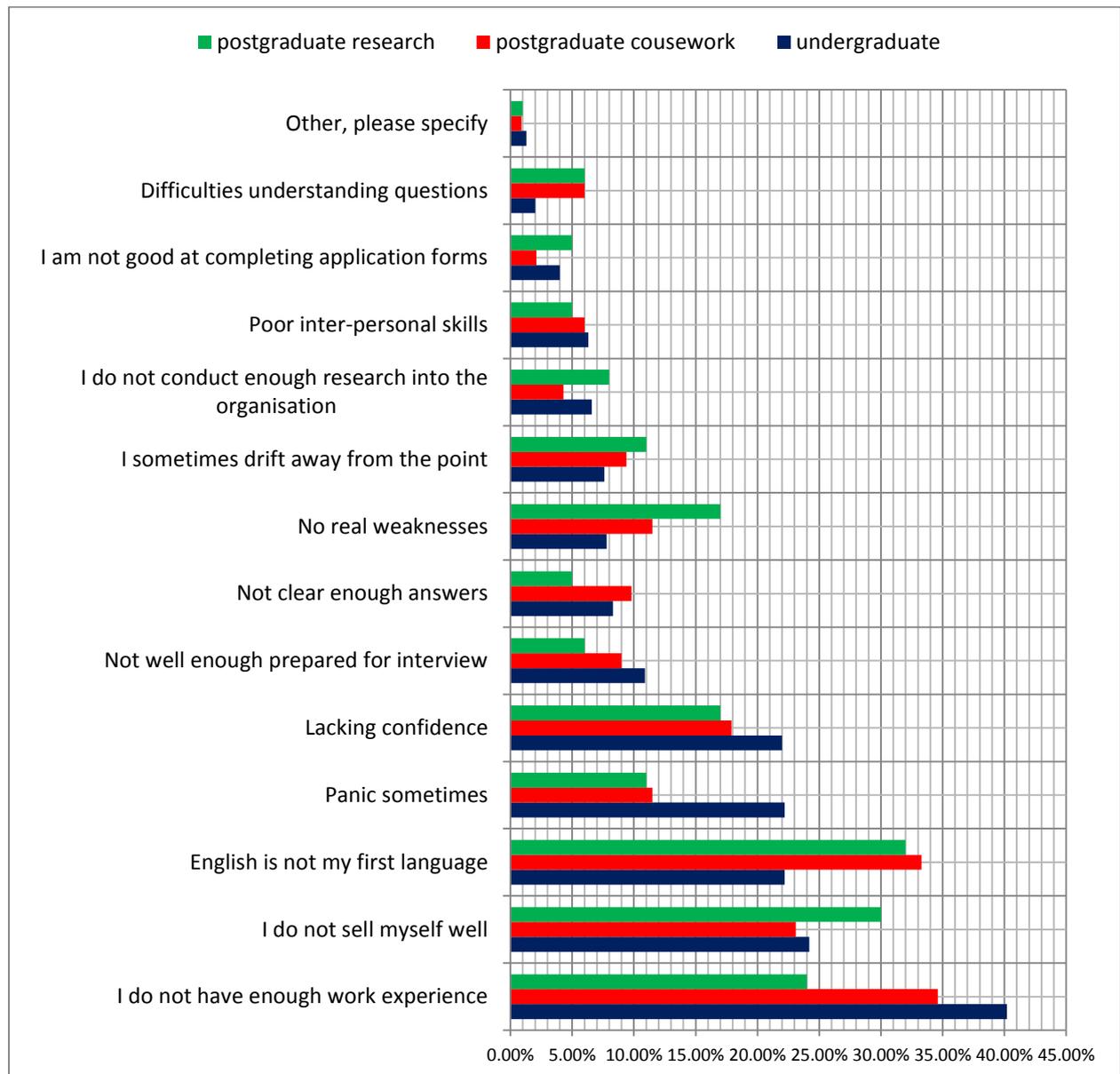
Graph 11.11: The two greatest individual strengths of respondents when applying for future employment



The stand-out factor was *analytical mind*, which was selected by 40.2% of those who first enrolled in 2012 and 43% of those who first enrolled pre-2012. The second highest response across the entire sample was *confidence*, at 28.9% and *good interpersonal skills*, at 26.2%.

Respondents were asked to indicate their two greatest individual weaknesses when applying for future employment, from a list of 14 attributes.

Graph 11.12: The two greatest individual weaknesses of respondents when applying for future employment, by level of study



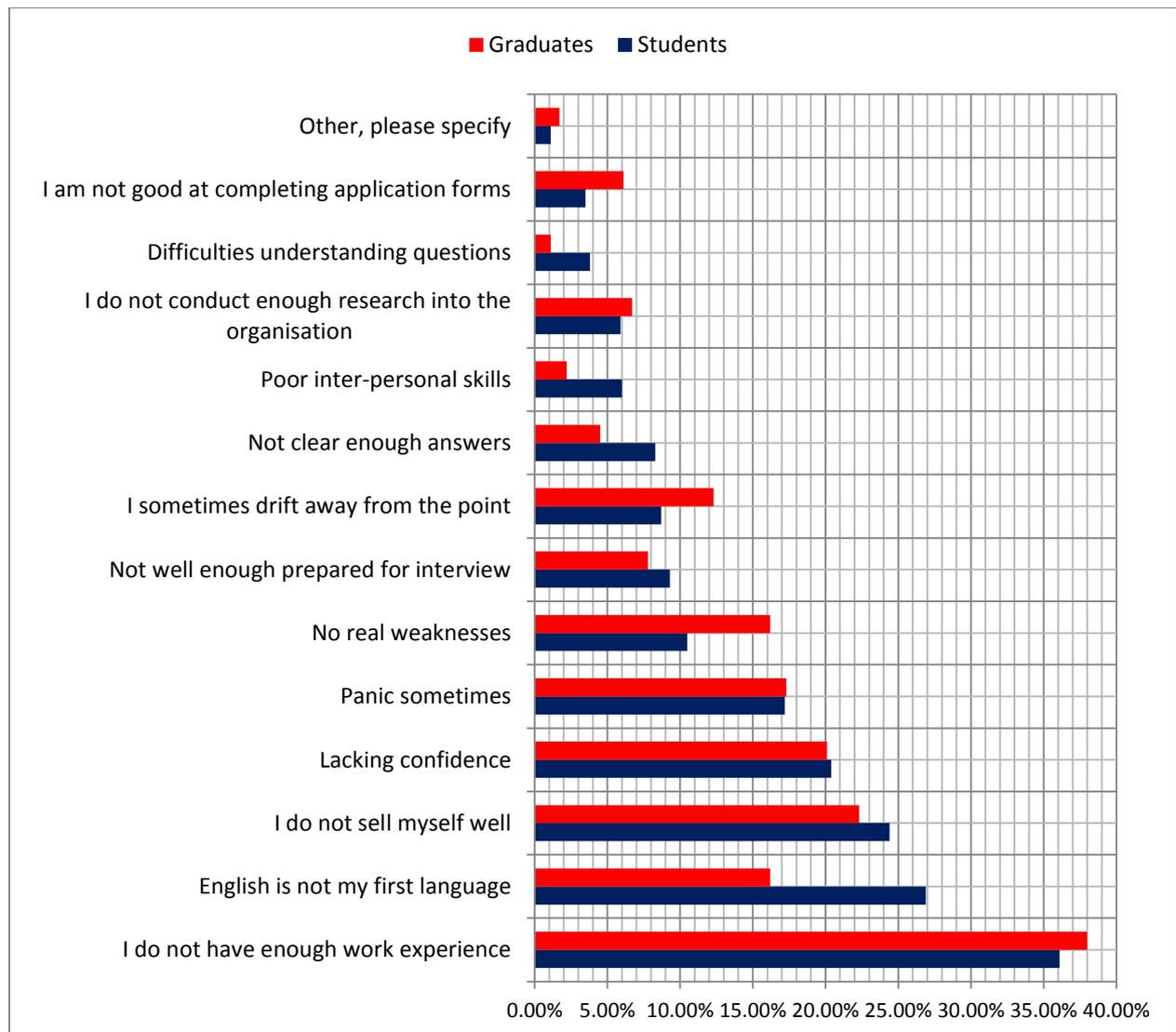
There were some notable variations by level of study. For both the undergraduate respondents and PGCW respondents, the highest response was for *I do not have enough work experience*, at 40.1% and 34.6% respectively.

The second highest response for the undergraduate respondents was *I do not sell myself well*, at 24.1%, followed by *English is not my first language* (22.2%), *panic sometimes* (22.2%) and *lacking confidence* (22%).

The second highest response for the PGCW respondents was *English is not my first language*, at 23.2%, followed by *I do not sell myself well* (23%).

Respondents were asked to indicate their two greatest individual strengths when applying for future employment, from a list of 12 attributes.

Graph 11.13: The two greatest individual weaknesses of respondents when applying for future employment



36.1% of student respondents and 38% of graduate respondents indicated *I do not have enough work experience*. The second highest figure for graduates was *I do not sell myself well*, at 22.2%, followed by *panic sometimes* (17.3%).

16.1% of graduate respondents and 10.5% of student respondents indicated that they have *no real weaknesses*.

The international graduates were asked the extent to which their reasons for studying in Australia had been fulfilled. 18.2% indicated *completely fulfilled* and 50.3% indicated *mostly fulfilled*.

The aggregate of these two options was highest for respondents from Singapore (91%), Indonesia (75%), China (74%) and Malaysia (68%). In total, 8.4% of respondents indicated either *not fulfilled* or *not at all fulfilled*.

The graduates were asked to indicate their current employment status. 40.9% were employed full-time in their career of choice and 9.4% were employed part-time in their career of choice. Of the 40.9% employed full-time, 25.4% were employed by a multinational, 20.9% in a small business, 20.1% in a national organisation and 13.4% in some form of government entity (e.g. Education, Health).

In keeping with the priorities of current students, the graduate respondents indicated similar outcomes when seeking employment. 57.4% indicated that they *sought a career with long-term job security*. 52.2% indicated *high earning potential* whilst *international opportunities* was indicated by 41.6% of the sample.

Qualities sought

All of the graduate respondents were asked to indicate up to three qualities which they developed as a direct result of studying in Australia.

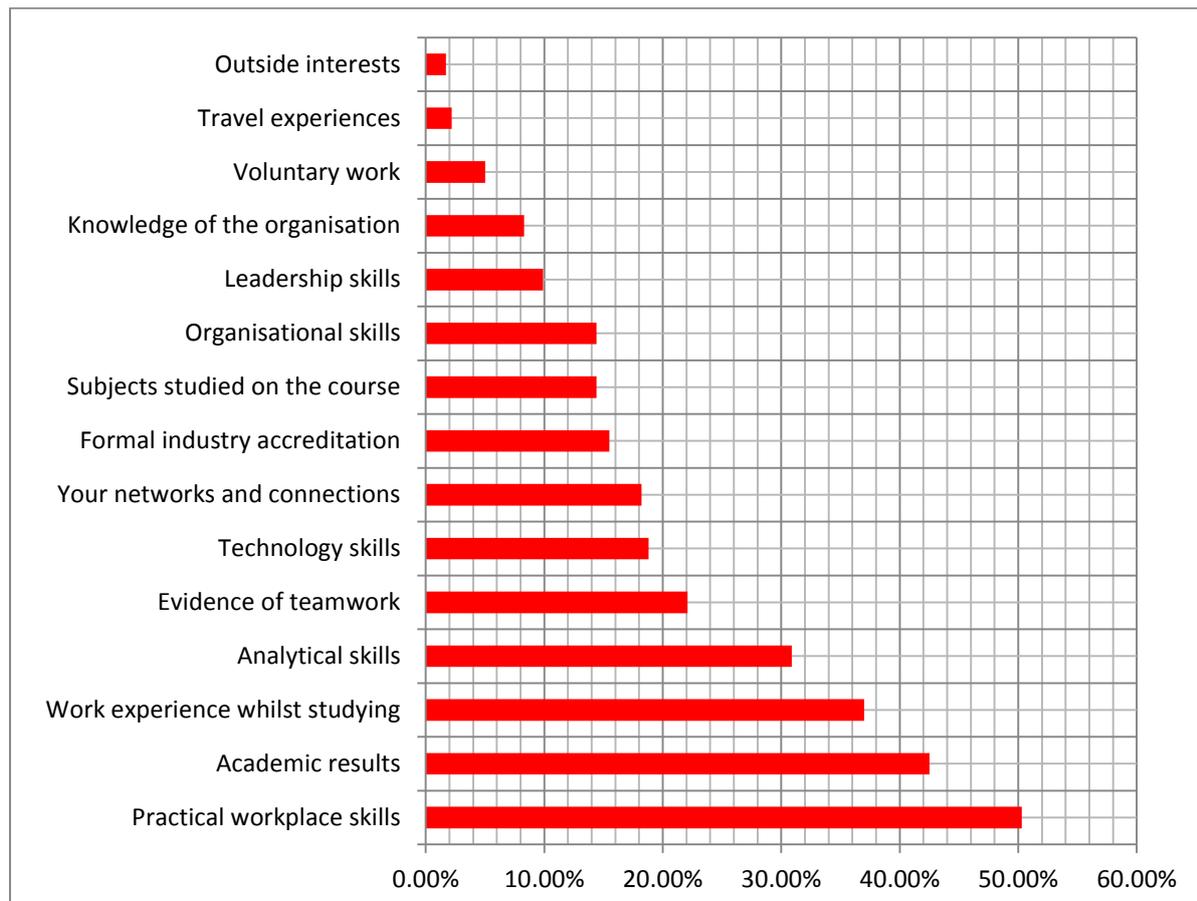
Graph 11.14: The three attributes which graduate respondents most developed as a result of studying in Australia



From a list of 18 attributes, the stand-out response was *communication skills*, at 42.4%. This was followed by *independent learning*, at 32.5%, *self-management* (30.9%), *ability to conduct independent research* (29.7%), *global perspective* (25%) and *problem-solving* (21%).

All of the graduate respondents were asked to indicate up to three qualities which employers have looked for during interviews for full-time roles.

Graph 11.15: Up to three qualities which graduate respondents indicated that employers have looked for during interviews for full-time roles



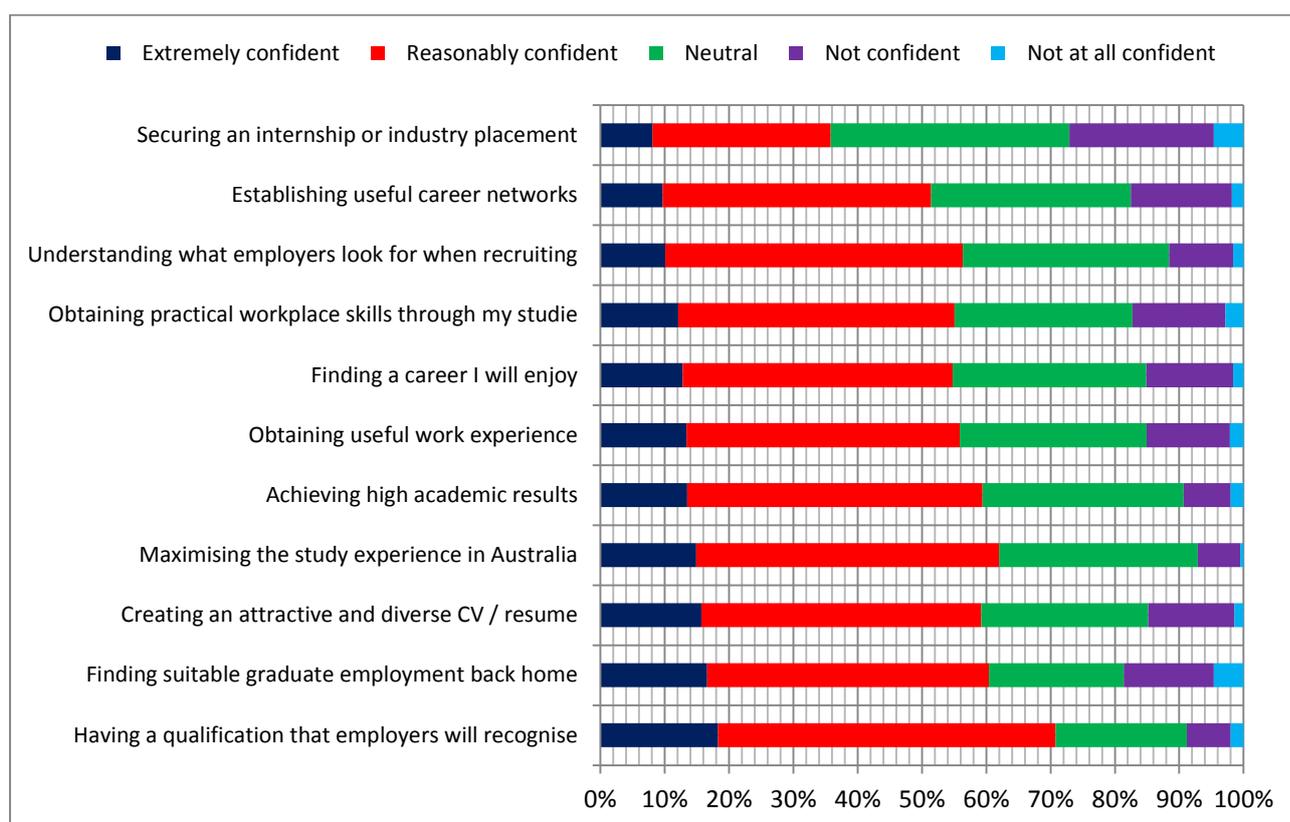
50.3% of graduate respondents indicated *practical workplace skills*, a result which reinforces the absolute importance of equipping international students with employability attributes.

42.5% of respondents indicated *academic results*, followed by *work experience whilst studying* (37%), *analytical skills* (30.9%), *evidence of teamwork* (22.1%) and *technology skills* (18.8%).

Confidence levels

All of the student respondents were asked to indicate their level of confidence in securing various outcomes.

Graph 11.16: Levels of confidence among student respondents in securing various outcomes



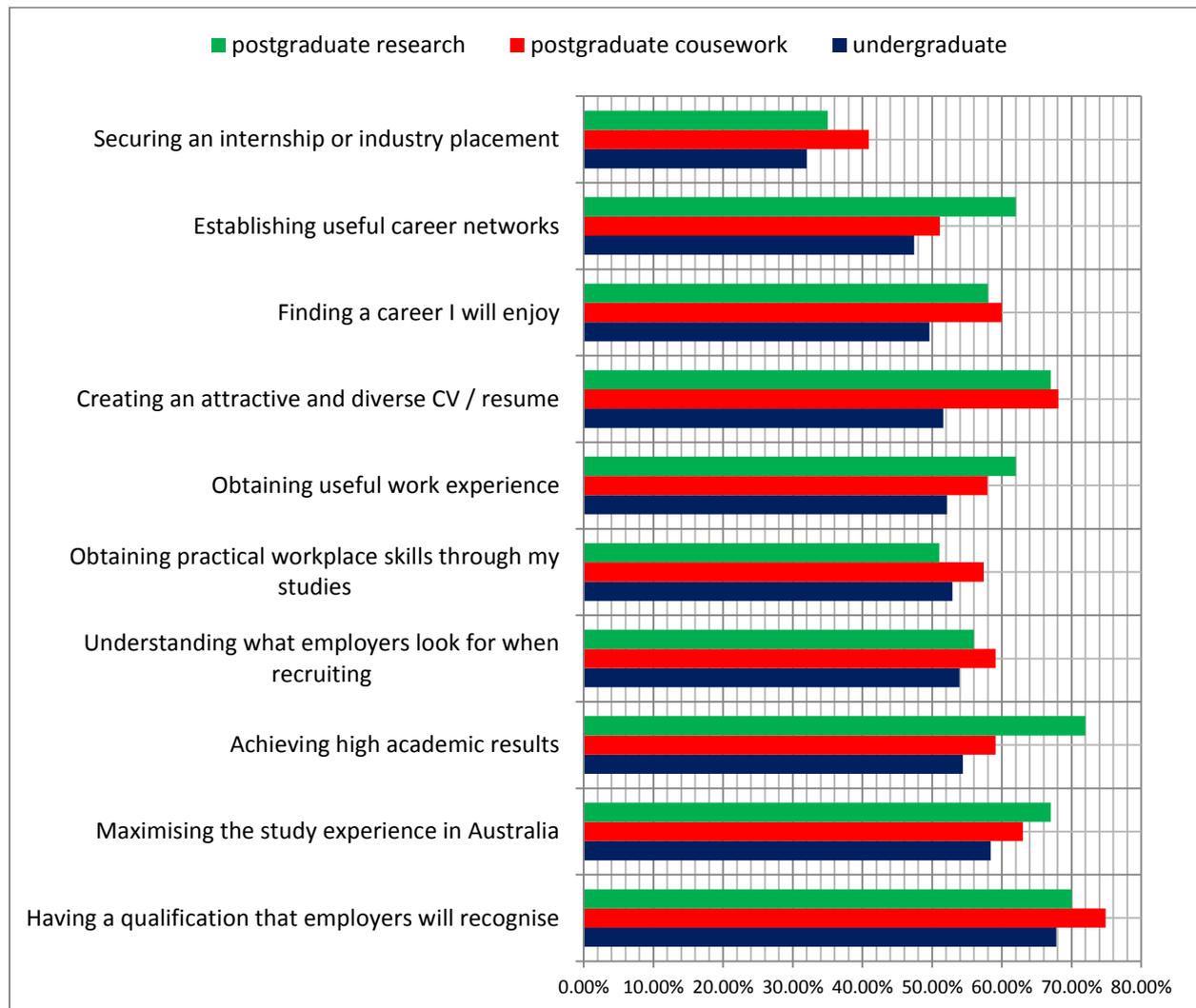
The highest level of confidence was for the variable *having a qualification that employers will recognise*, with an aggregate of 70.3% of respondents indicating either *extremely confident* or *reasonably confident*.

Among the major employment related variables, the aggregate of *extremely confident* or *reasonably confident* was as follows:

- Finding suitable graduate employment back home (60%)
- Creating an attracting and diverse resume (59%)
- Understanding what employers look for when recruiting (56%)
- Obtaining useful work experience (55.3%)
- Obtaining practical workplace skills through my studies (54.6%)
- Finding a career I will enjoy (54.1%)
- Establishing useful career networks (51.1%)
- Securing an internship or industry placement (35.8%)

Significant to note was that 27.1% of respondents indicated that they were *not confident* or *not at all confident* in the variable *securing an internship or industry placement*. 18.9% of respondents indicated that they were *not confident* or *not at all confident* in the variable *finding suitable graduate employment back home*.

Graph 11.16: Levels of confidence among student respondents in securing various outcomes, by level of study

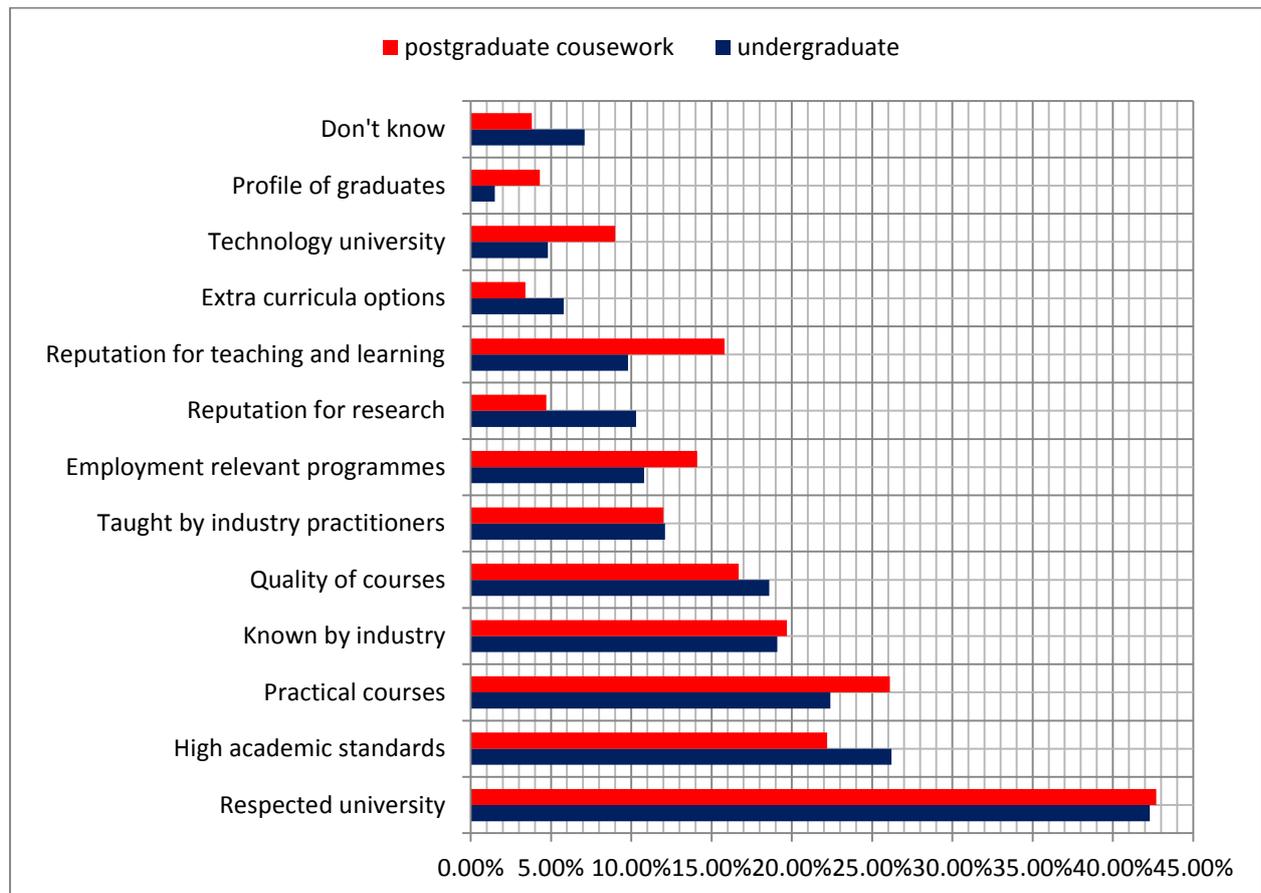


Overall, the PGCW respondents were more confident against all criteria than their undergraduate counterparts. In particular, 74.7% of PGCW respondents were very confident in *having a qualification that employers will recognise* and 68% were very confident in *creating an attractive and diverse resume*.

Respondents were asked where they would most like to work following graduation. 51% of the PGCW respondents and 44.6% of the undergraduate respondents indicated *the city where I am currently studying*. A further 9.1% and 8.7% respectively indicated *another city in Australia but not the city where I am studying*.

Respondents were asked to indicate the two major advantages of their degree when applying for employment.

Graph 11.16: Aggregate of the two main advantages of the degree when applying for employment, by level of study



The overwhelming response was *respected university* which was selected by 42.4% of respondents.

For undergraduate respondents, the second highest response was for *high academic standards*, at 26%, followed by *practical courses* (22.3%), *known by industry* (19%), *quality of courses* (18.5%), *taught by industry practitioners* (12%) and *employment relevant programmes* (10.8%).

For PGCW respondents, the second highest response was for *practical courses* (26.1%), followed by *high academic standards* (22.1%), *known by industry* (19.3%) and *quality of courses* (16.5%).

In light of the Federal Government’s commitment to the New Colombo Plan, respondents in the 2013 *Futurecast* were asked to indicate the single main benefit of participating in a mobility programme. 18.7% indicated *improved employment outcomes*.

The undergraduate and PGCW respondents were asked to indicate the type of organisation which they most aspired to work within upon graduation. 34.2% indicated *multinational*, followed by *a large Australian organisation* (33%) and *an Australian SME* (7%).

CONCLUSIONS

The system appears to be wrong. There needs to be much greater collaboration between universities and within universities regarding employment outcomes for international students. Further, universities would benefit from the sharing of market knowledge and intelligence, and there should be a more holistic approach towards internships, which includes maximising opportunities for all international students through the utilisation of networks and alumni.

Employers must be educated about the value of international graduates and the different perspectives which these graduates bring. Further, employers must be encouraged to source and recruit international students for both their domestic and international operations.

The international, careers and alumni operations within universities must develop integrated initiatives. There needs to be extensive investment in the careers and alumni functions, as well as investment in alumni activities. This includes activities to encourage alumni to engage with careers.

The careers operations must work alongside the international offices, not just to ensure the appropriate language of engagement, but also to understand different market conditions and needs.

The importance of international students to universities and the potential which they afford must be broadly communicated to the wider community via the major sources of information. In particular, government departments and entities must be encouraged to identify and create opportunities for international students and thereby, lead by example.

Careers must feature as an integral part of the total international student experience. This must occur through the incorporation of employability attributes within the curriculum, the creation of opportunities to build a portfolio and early education about the entire employment and careers lifecycle.

The UK case studies demonstrate how entrepreneurship should be viewed as an extension of employability. Further, entrepreneurship is a catalyst for galvanising international students to think about creating their own start-ups and instigate new opportunities.

Employability extends far beyond the acquisition of soft skills. It should also be viewed as a vehicle for encouraging innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship.

Over the next decade the patterns of graduate employment will change dramatically. Australia must *lead from the back*.

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