



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RECENT GRADUATES' CAREER DECISIONS AND OUTCOMES

A report on the second stage of a UKRI project on the employment experiences of Higher Education graduates' during the COVID-19 pandemic

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report follows on from a first wave of survey data published in July 2021 and is a collaboration between the University of Southampton and the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS). The research aims to understand the effect of the pandemic on recent graduates' employment outcomes, their career decisions and the resources they can draw upon to tackle the challenges they face. It intends to highlight the short-term impact of the pandemic on graduates based on their personal characteristics and potential longer term 'scarring' effects. This project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of UK Research and Innovation's rapid response to COVID-19.

This report is based on the second round of a survey which was completed fully by 610 graduates in the summer of 2021 and follow-up interviews between August and October, with 24 of the 56 graduates who had been interviewed during the start of 2021. Over the course of the two periods, a total of 2,767 survey respondents and 80 individual interviews were completed, providing us with a comprehensive overview of the situations of those who have graduated during, or just before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key findings

Impacts on employment

- The pandemic-affected labour market continues to have an adverse impact on graduates' perceived career prospects
- In the 15 months since graduating, over half (59.3%) of graduates perceive that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their employment prospects
- At the time of the second survey, just over half of respondents were in full-time employment, 13.5% in part-time work and 2.6% unemployed
- There is a clear distinction between graduates who have made more seamless and successful transitions and those for whom this process remains protracted and challenging
- The latter are still in the process of finding their feet, working out their longer-term goals and trying to build profiles that boost their employment prospects
- A significant number of graduates who are struggling to find appropriate graduate-level work expressed concern over their longer-term prospects and were worried about a potential decline in the value of their graduate qualifications over time

Impacts on career decisions, perceptions and outcomes

- The majority of graduates believed that COVID-19 had a significant impact on their career prospects
- Many reported a range of challenges in finding employment, most significantly knowing where opportunities lie, knowing what employers are looking for and staying focused and motivated
- Quantitative survey and interview data revealed that graduates continued to perceive significant challenges in the labour market and uncertainty over how their careers will play-out in the longer-term
- Graduates who had experienced smoother transitions into the labour market reported greater optimism and confidence about their careers and the choices they made about their study and career choice
- Graduates who were in full-time employment overall felt they were developing valuable skills that would help their future job prospects
- Graduates who had chosen to pursue further study overall reported perceived benefits including enhancing their employment prospects and using the additional year to further plan their careers
- Interviews revealed that once in targeted employment, graduates perceived being more empowered in terms of developing important career-related capitals and skills that they could draw on for applying for other jobs
- There were signs of early scarring for those struggling to attain their targeted jobs, not just in terms of experiencing unemployment and wage loss, but feelings of lowered confidence, reduced morale, career efficacy, fears of being less attractive to employers, and corrosion to emerging identities that had formed before graduation
- Interviews revealed quite sudden changes in perspectives on finding employment, with a number of interviews reporting much improved recent outcomes and related improved overall prospects once graduates had secured suitable graduate-level employment
- Graduates who were in full-time employment were largely engaged in hybrid working patterns, but the majority had started their initial careers in a homeworking capacity
- Overall, the interviews revealed a number of reported benefits to homeworking, including greater flexibility in the working day, job autonomy, ease of travel and reduction in wider costs of working from a physical location

Impacts based on graduates' personal and social characteristics

- Female graduates reported higher levels of anxiety and were less confident about their future employment prospects, their long-term career prospects and what they could offer future employers in comparison to male graduates
- Non-British White graduates were the most satisfied with their current employment situation and Black British the least satisfied
- Graduates with disabilities were more likely to be unemployed or underemployed than those without a disability, as well as less confident about their prospects
- Graduates with disabilities were also less likely to be in a graduate job, find the recruitment process challenging, and less able to find employment opportunities that matched their skills
- Graduates whose parents attended HE were more likely to be satisfied in their employment outcome and more confident about their future employment
- The COVID-19 pandemic had a greater impact on younger graduates, those aged between 21 to 26
- Graduates from arts & humanities programmes were the least likely to be employed full-time, and they were the most likely to be unemployed or underemployed
- PhD graduates were the most likely group of graduates to be satisfied with their current employment situation as they felt they were making progress towards their career goals
- Bachelor's degree graduates were the group that had the greatest challenge in finding the graduate jobs that they wanted to apply for
- Graduates from more research-intensive universities felt the most confident about what they could achieve in their future employment and were the most likely to feel that they were developing transferrable skills to help in future employment
- Graduates from the year 2020 were much more likely than those who graduated in 2019 to feel the impact of COVID-19
- Graduates from Northern Ireland were the most likely to feel that the pandemic had affected the types of jobs that they had targeted, with English and Scottish graduates the least likely

The role of career-related resources

- The development and maintenance of important forms of career-related capitals, including social networks, cultural knowledge of the labour market, well-formed identity towards future

careers and resilience appear important in how graduates manage their initial transition to the labour market

- Social networks and contacts emerged as significant for enhancing job market opportunities and strategic use of social media was seen to be important in fostering better links with employers
- Graduates acknowledged the importance of maintaining resilience in the face of continued labour market challenges, mainly through continuing to be proactive, adaptable, pragmatically realistic about their options, and maintaining self-belief in what they could offer to employers
- The need to 'keep going' was expressed by many who were having trouble in transitioning to employment
- Valuable, aligned, and career enhancing work experience plays a significant role in facilitating access to targeted employment and those who had done a significant period of work placement or internship reported feeling at an advantage when looking for jobs
- Valuable work experience was viewed to provide a range of benefits, including building up contacts, positively developing professional identity through autonomy, and familiarity with professional environment.
- Many graduates had found employment either directly or indirectly through their earlier work experience suggesting that it might serve as a potentially valuable mode of 'prerecruitment' for early-stage graduates
- Other forms of work experience, including part-time work, were also seen to provide benefits but were often viewed to lose impact the longer graduates were employed in these jobs

Narratives of career development

- In some cases, there were small but notable shifts in graduates' movement towards their targeted employment, but in other cases little progress had been made since the first wave of interviews
- Graduates revealed different accounts and feelings towards these developments, ranging from growing satisfaction to continued frustration and anxiety
- Graduates continued to occupy different transitional spaces based on where they perceived they were in their initial employment trajectories
- Since the first wave of the study, graduates perceived themselves to be making further progress towards realising their goals through additional forms of additional work experience and profile building

- Many graduates wanted to get a good return on their investment and to experience financial security
- Graduates often valued making a decent societal contribution from their work, finding meaning and fulfilment, work as a platform for self-expression, and a good work-life balance

Types of transitional experiences

- Disorientated students continued to feel marginalised by the current labour market and felt that relevant opportunities were passing them by
- Indeterminate graduates were still some way off from achieving the employment goals, but felt they were in the process of gaining meaningful experience that was adding value
- Emerging graduates had started to make some meaningful progress in their employment through gaining initial employment or valuable work experience
- Integrating graduates were continuing to positively build their employment profiles and were forming clearer and more cohesive early career trajectories and identities

Perceptions of how graduates' early careers might be supported

- Graduates reported mixed views on the value of career services during their time at university, ranging from positive experience of being supported with job applications and other career management activities, and raising opportunity awareness
- Interviews revealed a range of important continued career engagement experiences since graduating, including maintaining contact with key staff, either in careers services or from their programmes, as this provided an additional level of support
- Graduates largely reported being insufficiently supported by employers, often with a view that employers needed to provide more in the way of entry pathways, clearer training routes, and expanded opportunities
- Graduates reported being frustrated at the lack of feedback from applications which added to their anxieties about how to tailor their profiles

CONTEXT AND CONTINUED CHALLENGES

Background and context

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect significant areas of society and the economy. It remains that graduates and those entering the labour market for the first time are most impacted by a more precarious and uncertain labour market context. There are immediate and potentially longer-term impacts on those entering a weakened labour market. These centre mainly on the declining volume of vacancies, the reduction in training opportunities for first time employees, the retention of more experienced employees, and the lessening of career-building opportunities such as short-term work experience placements. Moreover, those graduating into a recession are more likely to find work which is not suitable for their qualification level, accepting lower wages, and less attractive working conditions than they might in more favourable economic conditions. These challenges are compounded by growing ambiguity over the concept of the 'graduate' labour market, the specific forms of work this constitutes, and relative levels of entry and progression of graduates into jobs which are viewed either typical or suitable for those with a higher education (HE) qualification.

There have been signs of economic recovery since spring 2021, including the opening of sectors most acutely impacted by the pandemic and this has been accompanied by a gradual increase in job vacancies. However, the situation remains uncertain and unpredictable. Whilst established graduates who have developed relatively strong career profiles over the 10-year period since graduating are better able to endure current challenges¹, recent graduates are likely to experience much greater uncertainty and employment insecurities². Existing evidence indicates that those who graduate during a period of a weakened labour market, experience greater immediate and longer-term adversity in their employment outcomes³. Newly qualified graduates are more likely to experience lowered prospects for earnings, slower career progression opportunities, including promotion, and less favourable future employment. They are more likely to experience a mismatch between their qualifications and job demands, including job quality and satisfaction. These experiences may well improve as the economy improves, but a number of residual effects may continue in shaping job market experience, including potential 'scarring' from an initially adverse outcome that depletes a graduate's earning potential and how they perceive their future career prospects.

The research which this report is based on is significant for enriching our understanding of how graduates manage the transition from HE into the labour market at a critical juncture in the UK economy and society. It provides further insight on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on graduates'

¹ Purcell, K. et al. (2021) Covid and graduate Careers. Warwick: Warwick Institute for Employment Research

² Association for Graduate Careers and Advisory Service (2021) The Impact of COVID-19 on Recent Graduates' Career Decision and Outcomes. Sheffield: AGCAS.

³ Institute for Student Employers (2021) COVID-19: the impact of the crisis on student recruitment and development. London: ISE.

immediate and potentially longer-term employment prospects and how they are adapting to this challenge. In addition to providing insights on the effects on recent graduates' integration into the labour market, including how they draw on different career management behaviours and resources, we wanted to explore the impact on different groups of graduates. We support wider literature that the development of graduates' early careers and employability is processual and significantly shaped by the formation of different forms of career-related capital. During the initial transition into the labour market, graduates must actively negotiate, apply some levels of agency, and develop and present their identities as graduates to a range of important stakeholders, not least employers. Initial experiences of entering the labour market, including the process of transferring knowledge, skills, and forms of career capital are crucial to how successfully graduates can make this transition. This is also shaped by labour market conditions, including a range of personal and contextual factors in graduates' immediate and social milieus.

The study allowed us to understand the interaction between factors of transition and other important dimensions, including well-being, motivation, resilience, and to explore this against the development of other important resources. We were able to glean insights into how early entry graduates' lives have been affected by related forms of social disruption brought about by lengthy periods of social restrictions, increasing digital interaction, and the move towards homeworking. Many of these graduates also experienced the rapid shift towards online learning during the very final stages of their studies, and those who had found employment were likely to be socialised primarily into a homeworking environment.

The two surveys conducted as part of this research offered a significant opportunity to learn more about the employment situations, experiences, and outcomes of graduates entering the labour market during the first stage of the COVID-19 pandemic and up to 15 months following graduation, at a time when the social and economic context for school and university leavers remains uncertain. The longitudinal dimension enabled us to gather important insight into graduates' early employment progression, real or perceived, and was often gleaned through the more qualitative elements of the research, including detailed open code survey responses and the 80 individual interviews done over a nine-month period in 2021. This report details the data from wave 2 of the study and makes links back to the earlier wave, exploring data which was not as extensively discussed in the first report.

Methodology

This report presents findings from a second stage survey which was conducted in the summer of 2021. The survey was open for a three-week period from the last week of June to the middle of July and was part of a longitudinal study, including an earlier survey which had been completed between December 2020 and February 2021. The second survey was open to all the 2,767 graduates whose data had been used for the first survey and the response rate was 760 participants, representing roughly a fifth of respondents who had taken part in the earlier survey. 610 of these responses are

used for the reporting of this survey based on providing complete and useable data. An outline of the questions used for this survey is provided in the appendix.

In addition to the second wave survey, a total of 24 in-depth individual interviews were conducted between August and October 2021 from the 56 respondents who had taken part in the earlier round of interviews between January and April. The follow-up interviews were conducted on average between six to seven months after the first wave. A total of 80 in-depth interviews were therefore conducted over a nine-month period of the project, providing in-depth complementary data to the two surveys. We have sought to triangulate the interview data with the survey data and between the earlier interview waves to get a more nuanced picture of graduates' progression over time. The graduates who were interviewed represent a diverse range of social, educational, and employment-related backgrounds. All the graduates fit somewhere into a transitional experience typology that emerged from the earlier interviews, but the graduates were selected primarily based on their availability and willingness to take part in a further interview. The interviews were coded thematically using an approach of developing both superordinate and ancillary semantic patterns from what were often rich accounts of their post-HE graduation experiences. NVivo software was used to assist for organising the coded data that was based on the thematic analysis.

Analytical approach

The statistical analysis of the survey is still in the early phases however interesting results are already arising. The data was first analysed through bivariate correlations by determining Spearman's rho using SPSS. It was assumed that any two variables would not have a statistically significant relationship as the null hypothesis. However, if after running the bivariate tests, there was a correlation to at least 95% confidence interval then the null hypothesis was rejected. This meant that statically there was a relationship between the two variables that could account for 95% of the variance, $p = .05$.

Only data with at least 95% correlation between the variables has been reported. All analysis reports 95% correlation unless specified otherwise in the footnotes. For more detail on statistical analysis, see Appendix A.

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

Graduates' employment outcomes over a year since graduation

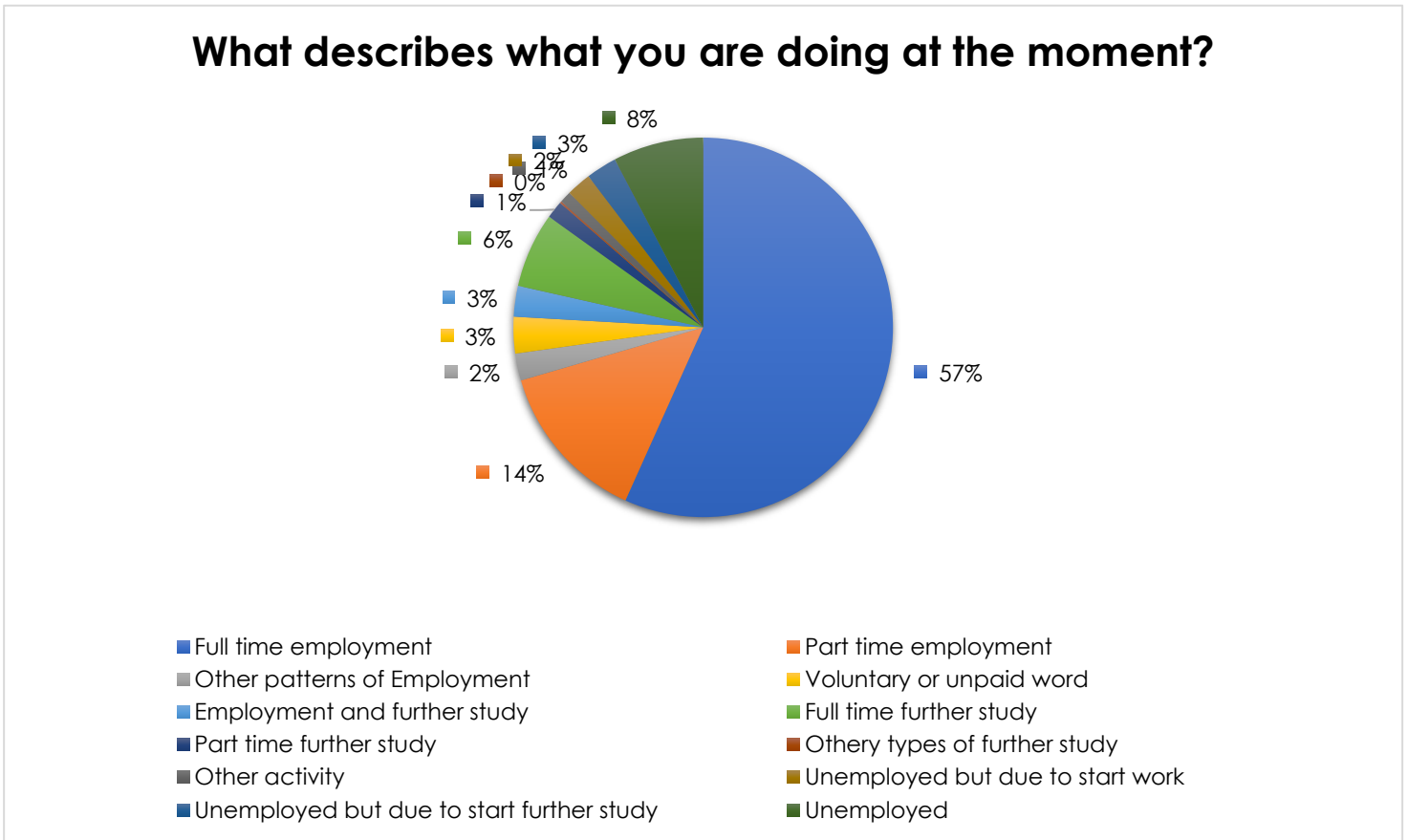
Just over half of the participants⁴ (56.7%) were in full-time employment by the time of the second survey (June to July 2021), which is up from the 44.4% reported from the first survey. The second highest percentage in the survey was participants in part-time employment at 13.8%. 2.3% of participants were in other patterns of employment. This means that 72.8% of those who participated in the second survey were in some form of employment, this is an increase from 63.7% in the first survey.

About 10.7% of the participants were in some form of further study. This broke down into 2.6% in employment and further study, 6.4% in full-time further study, 1.5% in part-time study and 0.2% in other types of further study.

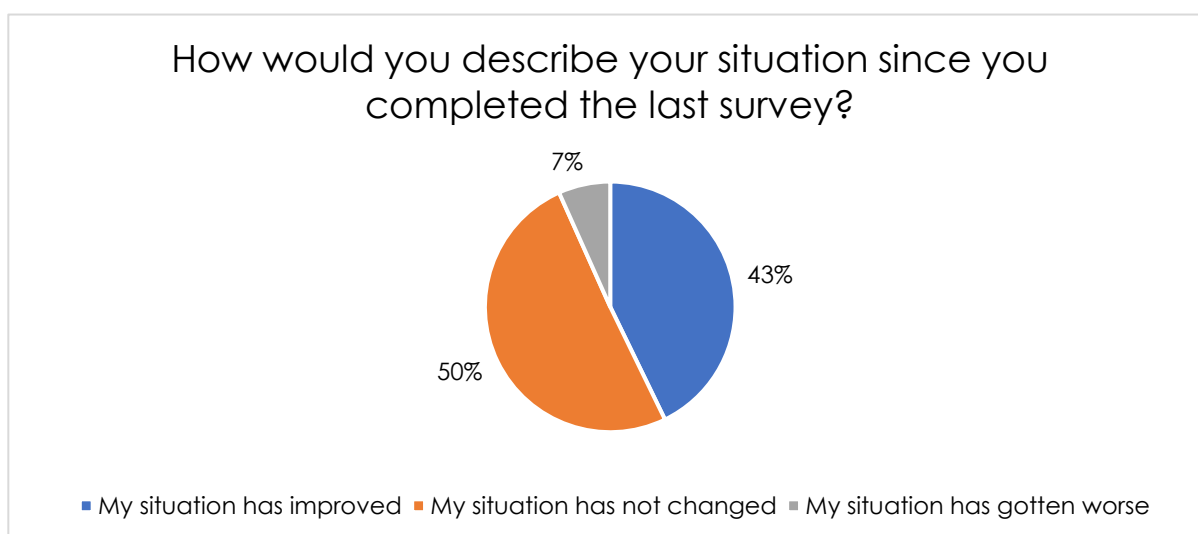
The remaining 16.5% of the participants were in some form of unemployment. This includes those who were doing voluntary or unpaid work (3.1%), unemployed and due to start work (2.1%), unemployed and due to start further study (2.6%), other activities (such as travel or caring for someone) (1.0%), and unemployed (7.7%). The number of unemployed decreased from 16.1% in the first survey but remains the third most likely response by participants.

⁴ N=610

Figure 1 Current Employment



Graduates' perceptions of where they felt they were at in their employment situation varied in the survey. The majority (37.5%) felt they were making some progress towards their employment. Roughly similar proportions of respondents felt they were either more or less where they wanted to be (23.0%), or very far from where they wanted to be (24.4%). The polarisation of perceptions reflects patterns found in the first survey and is supported by the second stage of qualitative data. Just over half (50.5%) reported that their situation had not changed since the time of the first survey, the next highest proportion indicated some improvement in their situation (42.8%), and a minority believed that their situation had gotten worse (6.7%). The interviews confirmed that graduates who were in full-time employment and developing in their roles often reported positive gains and those still actively looking only partial improvements.

Figure 2 Situation change since previous survey

Perceptions of current employment situation for those in current employment

Survey respondents that were currently in employment⁵ at the time of the survey were asked a series of questions about their current employment and what they perceived to be gaining from their role (table 2). The aim of these questions was to understand graduate perceptions of value in their work and included items on whether their employment might be enhancing their career profile, skills, and its suitability for a future targeted job. Over three-quarters (81.9%) of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they were developing valuable skills that would help their future or longer-term employment prospects. Furthermore, over three quarters (85.3%) perceived that these skills would have transferability in other forms of employment, indicating that their current employment was a positive platform to undertake employment in other or related fields. Just under three quarters (73.7%) of respondents reported that at the time of the survey their current work was meaningful to them, although fewer (51%) reported experiencing job satisfaction, or indicated that they were fulfilling their potential since graduating.

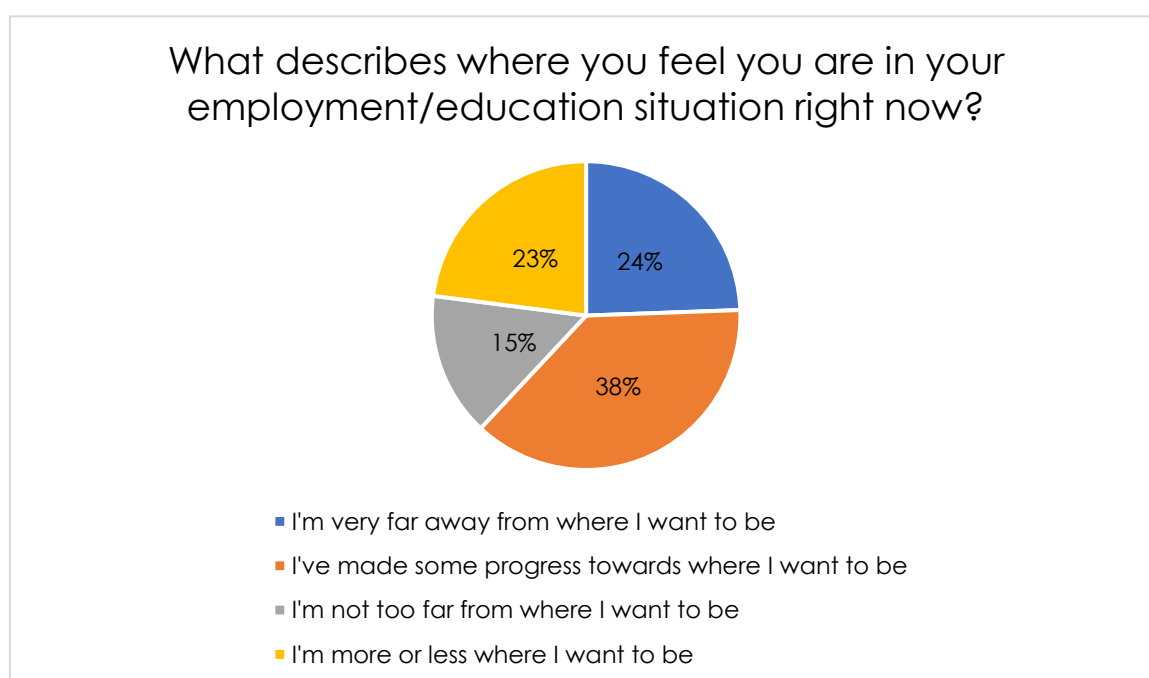
The survey also engaged graduates on how well aligned their employment was to their levels of education and expectations of future employment. Overall, just over half (51%) reported that their current employment was allowing them to fulfil the potential they had developed upon graduating and a slightly higher amount (61.3%) reported that the job they were doing was suitable for a HE graduate. A slightly smaller majority of respondents (56.8%) felt that they were utilising what they had learnt during their studies while in work. The slight mismatch between positive appraisal of their employability development and intrinsic benefits of employment implies that they may have believed their current employment was supporting their progress towards achieving longer-term employment goals.

⁵ N=463

Just under two thirds of the respondents (63.3%) felt that their current work fit with their career plans. This is similar to when employed respondents were asked if they believed that they were currently employed in a job that aligned with their career aspirations: 60% answered yes and 40% answered no. A similar number of respondents (64.4%) felt that their job was giving them confidence about what they could achieve in their future employment. However, a smaller majority (53.8%) of respondents reported that they were experiencing job satisfaction and fulfilment in their current work. These differences may be due to the graduates' understanding that they were in the first part of their career and had not yet reached a stage where they enjoy work, as over two thirds (69.1%) of the respondents reported that they were developing their profile in ways to make themselves more attractive to other employers.

The survey asked graduates how they would describe where they felt they were in their current employment situation at the time of the survey. The majority of respondents who perceived misalignment either felt very far away from where they wanted to be or that they had made some progress towards where they wanted to be (62%). Of those graduates⁶, over two thirds (70.3%) felt that their situation made them question the value of their degree. The second main perceived impact was the devaluation of the skills which graduates could offer, with a similar number (70.9%) of those graduates reporting that they were concerned that their skills were not going to be valued⁷.

Figure 3 Perceptions of current employment/education situations



⁶ N=378

⁷ Both to a 99% correlation.

Graduates who were unemployed⁸ also indicated a range of impacts on their employment prospects. The largest set of concerns centred on longer-term employment prospects. Over three quarters 80.3% of those who were unemployed felt it had negatively affected their employment outlook, with a large majority (81.6%) believing that it had affected their confidence about what they could offer to employers, and even more (89.5%) feeling that their unemployment was affecting their morale and well-being. A small majority of respondents (55.3%) reported that their unemployment had given them the chance to reflect on what they wanted from their careers. However, less than half of the respondents (40.8%) believed that their unemployment was a necessary step to future employment. Over three quarters (77.6%) of the respondents felt that their unemployment could become long-term. These last few points reinforce the concern that respondents that were unemployed had issues with their confidence and well-being.

Again, 81.6% felt that their experience of unemployment had made them concerned that the skills they had acquired through HE were not going to be valued in the future, with more than two thirds of the participants (69.7%) believing that this experience had made them question the value of their degree. However, only about a third of respondents (32.9%) felt that their experience of unemployment had given them a chance to develop new skills. This may be because they felt their confidence or morale had been affected, or it may be that they felt compelled to fill out more applications to compensate.

Graduates who were partaking in further study⁹ were also given a series of questions about how further study fit with their career goals. A large majority (83.3%) reported that their study fit with their future plans, with a slightly larger majority (89.4%) believing that their study was meaningful. A similar number of respondents (86.4%) felt that they were utilising what they had learned in their prior degree study in their further study.

Over three quarters (81.8%) of respondents said that they felt that their further study would help them with their job prospects. This is in part because the vast majority (87.7%) of the respondents reporting that their study level was higher than their previous study. For about two thirds (67.7%), their further study was in the same field or subject as their previous degree.

When asked if they were pleased to be studying rather than having to look for employment, just under half (46.1%) agreed that this was the case. About two thirds (67.7%) of the participants stated that they chose further study because of concerns about their immediate job prospects. However, just over half (55.4%) mentioned that their further study was always a part of their longer-term career plans.

⁸ N=76

⁹ N=60

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CAREER PROSPECTS

All respondents irrespective of their employment situation were asked about their views on the on-going impacts of COVID-19 on their employment prospects. The vast majority continued to believe (80.6%) that COVID-19 had a detrimental impact on graduate employment prospects and a significant, though slightly lesser proportion believed that it had a negative impact on their short-term (59.4%) and longer-term prospects (42.4%). A majority of respondents (58%) also felt that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected the types of jobs they had targeted. Responses also revealed a continued belief that there are greater challenges to finding employment (70.1%) and that the recruitment process is challenging (62.8%). Furthermore, a majority of graduates (56.4%) also felt less confident about their future employment prospects.

All graduates who had been actively looking for employment since the time of the last survey also expressed concerns about the current graduate labour market context. Just over two thirds (68.9%) found it challenging to find a job they wanted to apply for, and another significant proportion (66.3%) noticed a fall in the number of job vacancies. Just under three quarters also reported finding the recruitment process to be challenging (73%) with a large minority (45.9%) reporting that they were not being sufficiently supported by employers. Just under half of the respondents (43.6%) reported that they did not feel able to access different types of opportunities. This may be due to a lack of networking opportunities once the pandemic set in and forced people to remain home. However, a large minority of respondents (42.9%) felt that they had sufficient experience that employers required. Thus, many respondents felt that they were unable to begin their careers.

Despite these challenges and concerns, respondents also reported feeling that they were moving in the right direction (53.1%) and a large minority (43.2%) said that they were sufficiently empowered to make their own career decisions. These views indicate some continued positive career assessment despite the recognised challenges of the current labour market context. However, roughly equal numbers felt optimistic (31%) and pessimistic (36.4%) about their employment prospects. In addition, over half (54.4%) of respondents admitted to being anxious about their employment prospects. Thus, while there were signs of positivity, there were also lingering doubts amongst the respondents.

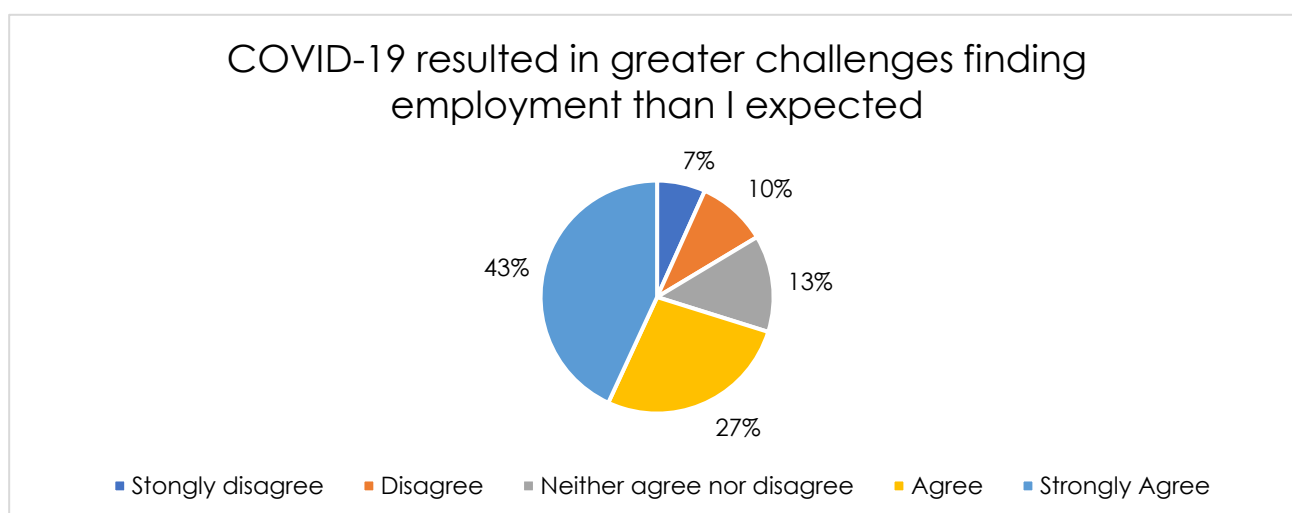
When thinking about the impact of COVID-19 on longer-term career prospects, the majority of respondents in the second survey believed that they would be able to find employment that matched their skills and qualification and just under two-thirds (61.6%) felt they would be able to pursue a fulfilling future career. However, just over half the respondents felt less confident about their longer-term career prospects (50.8%), whilst a similar number (53.7%) felt they were making some progress towards their longer-term goals. This is shown in that just under two thirds (62.6%) of respondents felt they would be able to find future employment that matched their skills and qualifications. However, just under half (48.4%) of respondents reported that they felt able to pursue a

fulfilling future career. Thus, while there were signs of optimism, many respondents were still unsure about finding careers that matched their hopes.

When asked how COVID-19 impacted their career planning, over half (59.4%) felt that the pandemic significantly damaged their short-term prospects. Slightly under half (42.4%) of respondents reported that the pandemic had significantly damaged their long-term job prospects. There was a feeling amongst the respondents that the pandemic's impact may be felt longer-term. In this regard, nearly three quarters (71.7%) of the respondents felt that the pandemic had made them think differently about their futures. In addition, the pandemic had affected the types of jobs that over half (58%) had targeted, with a similar number of respondents (56.4%) reporting feeling less confident about their future employment. These numbers show that the pandemic, while only lasting a short time in the scale of a lifetime, is resulting in significant scarring effects on graduates.

Over two thirds (70.1%) of participants reported that the pandemic had resulted in greater challenges in finding employment than expected. In addition, over three quarters (80.6%) felt that the pandemic had a detrimental impact on graduates' employment prospects. This corresponds with the data above, that respondents were having a more difficult time finding opportunities and felt that there were fewer graduate jobs on offer. Despite this, however, a large minority (42.8%) felt that their situation had improved since completing the first survey in the spring of 2021, with a further 50.5% feeling that their situation had not changed since the spring. Thus, the short-term impacts of COVID-19 were not increasing for most survey participants.

Figure 4 Covid-19 and challenges finding employment



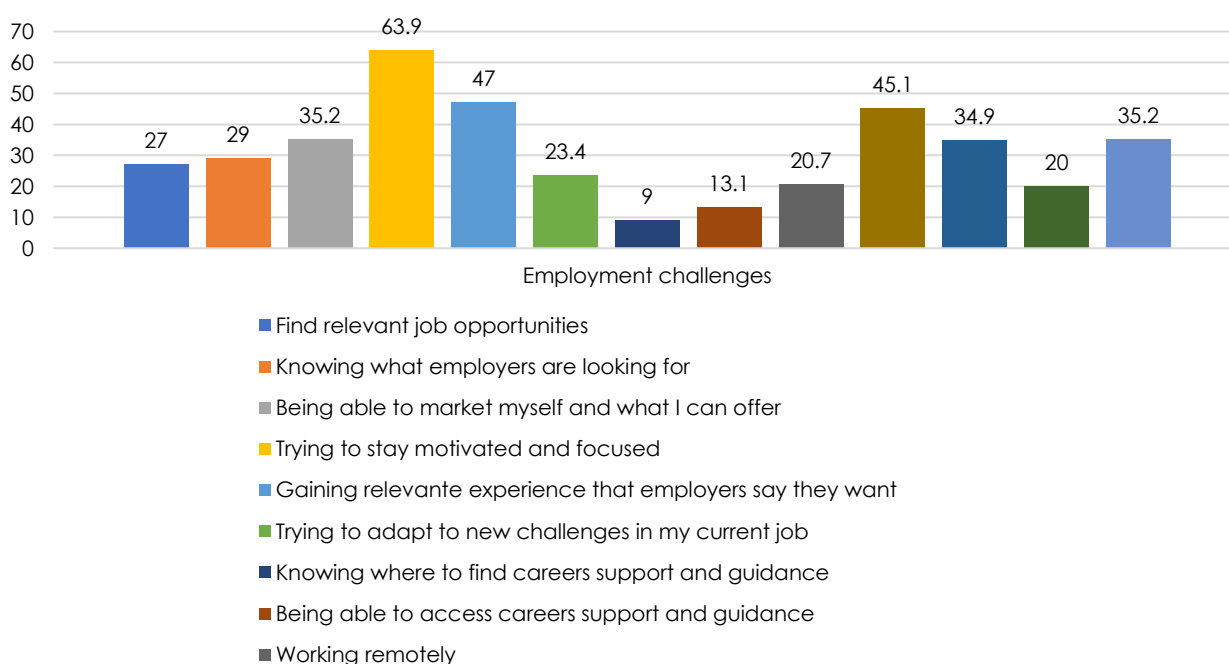
Challenges in finding employment

Graduates were also asked to consider the main challenges they had experienced in looking for and attaining their targeted employment. The most prominent challenge indicated by around two-thirds

(63.9%) of respondents was staying focused and motivated, indicating that some of the above challenges may be impacting graduates' ability to maintain their career goals. The second main challenge reported by under half of respondents (47%) was gaining the relevant work experience that employers require, a concern which those who were interviewed perceived to have been compounded by the decline in aligned work experience opportunities during the pandemic. Another significant concern indicated by a similar number of respondents (45.1%) was the ability to develop meaningful and sustained social networks due to continued social restrictions. This was a perceived early career barrier for those who might not have been able to form significant career-enhancing relationships during HE or build upon initial contacts just before graduating. The next significant challenge reported by a similar percentage of graduates was being able to market themselves and what they can offer (35.2%), again indicating perceived shortfalls in accessing early career opportunities that may serve to enhance their marketability.

A related concern reported by around a third of graduates was knowing what employers were looking for (29%), which could include relevant work experience or other forms of experience that may be used to recruit graduates. Around a third of respondents reported progressing in their career and salary as challenges (35.2%), which are likely to be salient issues for those reporting to be in non-aligned employment. Less significant concerns were expressed over finding help in making decisions about careers (20%) and knowing where to find support and guidance (9%). A relatively small percentage of graduates felt that working remotely presented a challenge (20.7%).

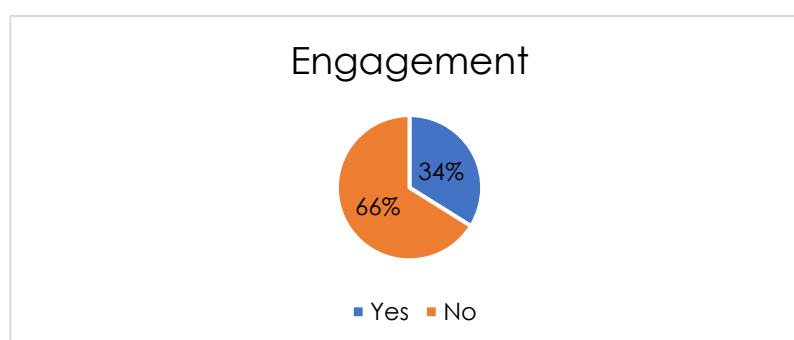
Table 1 What have you found most challenging? (%)



Careers services

The survey asked participants if they had engaged with their university careers service since they completed their most recent degree. Just over a third (34%) of participants reported that they had engaged with careers services. When asked why they did not engage, the most frequent answers were that they did not need to (24.4%) and that they already had a job (25.1%), indicating that the graduates that were in employment were no longer seeking support.

Figure 5 Engagement with careers services



However, the other most common answers for not engaging were that they did not know that their careers service would support them after graduation (15.4%), that they did not know what support was available (14.8%), that they did not know how to access the support that they needed (10.3%), and that they did not think that careers services could help them because of the type of jobs they were interested in (9%). This indicates a need for improved engagement with graduates by careers services, and the managing of student expectations of support beyond graduation.

Other common answers for not seeking support from careers services were not having the motivation (11.1%), not seeing it as a priority for them (10.3%), and not knowing what they were wanting from a career (6.6%). This indicates that many graduates in the survey are still trying to understand what they would like to do going forward.

For those who had engaged with careers services, there was a wide range of support that the graduates in the survey had sought. One of the most common areas was support for career options, with 19% seeking careers service support for career options, 26.9% for support to identify and evaluate possible career options, and to help to clarify career preferences/goals (21.3%). These numbers show that graduates in the survey found careers services a good place to seek help in starting their career search.

Another motivation for engaging with careers services was for support with job skills. The most common response in this category was to receive support to help them understand their skills (20.7%).

However, other popular responses were for guidance on how to develop different skills (15.1%) and help with identifying opportunities to develop skills (17.2%).

The third area that graduates in the survey sought careers services help for was job searching. The most common reason for seeking support for job searching was wanting advice on how to market themselves to employers (27%). However, other common reasons that the respondent's requested help were support to look for jobs (13.3%) and advice on how to approach the recruitment process (11.3%).

Another area that the respondents pursued careers services help for was application materials. The most common response in this category was help with CV, cover letter, or application (26.7%). However, help with interviews or assessment centres was also common (20.8%). The least common service that the respondents sought was for guidance on completing psychometric tests (8.4%).

The most common reason that the survey participants asked for careers services help was on advice on how to progress in their career (29.8%). Other responses sought advice on working remotely in a graduate job (11%), navigating challenges at work (10.7%), guidance on changing careers/jobs (12.8%), and help with finding a mentor (11.3%). This indicates that many graduates do not only seek careers services for early career needs, but they seek careers services for mid-career advice as well.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

This section is an analysis of the second survey data that demonstrates differences in graduates' experiences of employment up to July 2021 based on their personal characteristics.

Job Situation

When graduates were asked if they felt they were where they wanted to be at the time of the survey in their employment or education situation, those that were in any type of unemployment were much less likely (3.9%) than either those in any type of further study (26.1%), or those in any form of employment (26.8%) to say that they were more or less where they wanted to be. In fact, every respondent in the unemployed group that mentioned that they were more or less where they wanted to be were in the subgroup that was unemployed but due to start work. Those that were in any form of unemployment (22.7%) were also least likely to report that their employment situation had improved since the first study. This is in comparison to those in any form of further education (26.2%) and those in any form of employment (49.8%)¹⁰. These figures indicate the levels of career unhappiness among those that are unemployed.

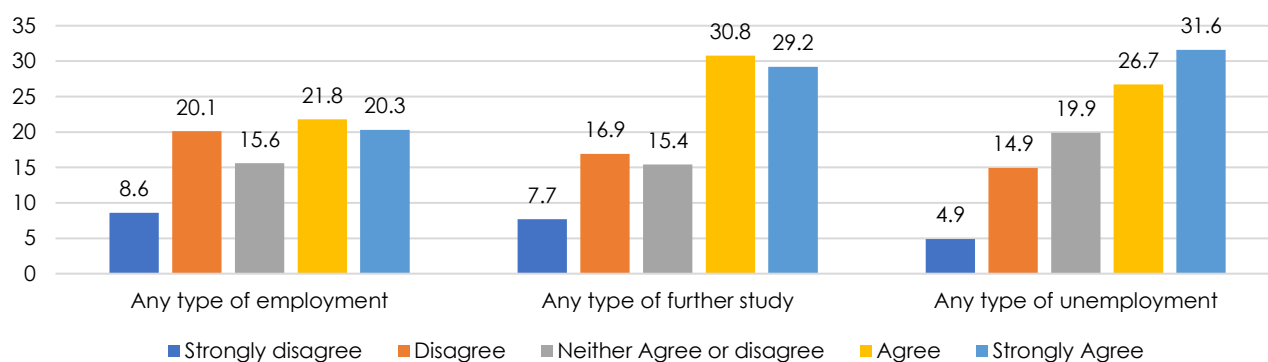
The second survey showed differences between graduates that were in any type of employment, any type of further study, and any type of unemployment in regards to whether they believed COVID-19 had impacted their employment. When asked if the pandemic significantly damaged their short-term job prospects those in unemployment situations were more likely to agree (79.2%) compared with those in further study (60%), and graduates in employment (54.7%). Similarly, those that were unemployed (65.3%) also were the most likely to report that the pandemic had significantly damaged their long-term job prospects, in comparison to those in further study (44.6%), and those in employment (36.9%). Those that were unemployed (82.2%) were more likely to report that the pandemic had made them think differently about their future than graduates in further study (72.3%), and in employment (69.1%). Unemployed graduates were also the most likely to agree that the pandemic had made them less confident about their employment future (78.2%), than those in further education (66.1%), and in employment (50%). When asked if the pandemic had resulted in greater challenges to finding employment than they expected, the unemployed were the most likely to agree (87.1%), in comparison to about two thirds of those in further study (69.2%), and in employment (87.1%). Unemployed graduates were also more likely to agree that the pandemic had a detrimental impact on graduates' employment prospects (89.1%), than those in further study (84.6%), and in employment (78.1%)¹¹. When asked if the pandemic affected the types of jobs that they targeted, there was a slight, but statistically significant, difference with unemployed graduates (60.4%) and graduates in further study (60%), more likely to agree than those in employment

¹⁰ Both to a 99% correlation.

¹¹ All of these to a 99% correlation.

(57.2%)¹².

Table 2 COVID affected the types of jobs I have targeted (%)



When asked if they had found it a challenge to find graduate jobs that they wanted to apply for, unemployed graduates (75.2%) were the most likely to agree, followed by those in further study (66.1%), and those in employment (55.4%). Similarly, unemployed graduates (74.3%) were more likely to have noticed a fall in the number of available opportunities, more so than those in further study (60%), and those in employment (53.4%). Graduates in employment (23.6%) were the most likely to agree that they felt supported by employers during the recruitment process, more than those in unemployment (12.9%), or those in further study (10.7%). Graduates in employment (46.6%) were more likely to report that they had sufficient experience that employers require than those in unemployment (33.7%), or those in further study (32.3%). Thus, it is not surprising unemployed graduates (77.2%) found the recruitment process challenging compared to those in further study (60%), or in employment (59.9%). When asked if they felt more optimistic about their employment prospects, graduates in employment (33.8%) were the most likely to agree, compared to those in unemployment (23.8%), and those in further study (23.1%). Unemployed graduates (35.6%) were the least likely to report that they felt they were moving in the right direction, compared with those in further study (55.4%), and those in employment (56.8%). Consequently, unemployed graduates (76.2%) were much more anxious about their employment prospects than those in further study (63.1%) and those in employment (48.2%). Unemployed graduates (27.7%) also were the least likely to have felt empowered to make their own career decisions, compared with those in further study (43.1%), and those in employment (46.8%). Graduates that were in further study (18.5%) were the least likely group to have felt that they were able to access different types of opportunities, compared with those in unemployment (22.8%), and those in employment (48.2%)¹³.

¹² To a 95% correlation.

¹³ All of these to a 99% correlation.

When asked if they were confident with their longer-term career prospects, graduates that were in employment (56.3%) were the most likely to agree, in comparison with those in further study (47.7%), and those in unemployment (28.7%). Thus, graduates in employment (65.8%) were also the most likely to believe they would be able to find future employment that matched their skills and qualifications, compared to those in further education (58.5%), and those in unemployment (45.5%). In addition, graduates that were in employment were the most likely to report that they felt they would be able to pursue a fulfilling career (67.8%), compared with those in further study (56.9%) and those in unemployment (43.6%). Unemployed graduates (70.3%) were much more likely to report that they felt less certain about their longer-term career prospects than those in employment (44.1%) and those in further study (43.1%). Subsequently, unemployed graduates were also much less likely (27.7%) to feel that they were making good progress towards their long-term goals, compared with those in employment (58.8%), and those in further study (60%)¹⁴.

For those graduates that were in any form of employment¹⁵, the survey asked a series of questions about their employment and careers¹⁶. The results showed a contrast between those in full-time employment and those that were not. When asked if their current work fit in with their future plans, graduates in full time employment (70.5%) were the group most likely to agree, compared with those in other patterns of employment (57.1%), and part-time employment (29.8%). Graduates in full-time employment were the group that most often reported that their current work was meaningful (80.1%), compared to those in other patterns of employment (78.6%), and those in part-time employment (44.1%). When asked if they were utilising what they learnt during their studies in their current work, graduates in full-time employment (63.6%) were the most likely to agree, compared with those in other patterns of employment (50%), and those in part-time employment (28.6%). Graduates that were employed full-time (73.1%) were the most likely to state that they were doing a job that is suitable for a graduate, with those in other patterns of employment (57.1%), and part-time employment (21.4%) less likely to agree. Similarly, graduates in full-time employment (87%) were the group most likely to agree that they were developing relevant skills that will be valuable for future employment, more than those in part-time employment (63.1%), and other patterns of employment. Subsequently, graduates in full-time employment (61.3%) were also the most likely group to believe that they were fulfilling the potential they had when they graduated, compared with those in other patterns of employment (28.6%), and those in part-time employment (16.7%). Graduates in full-time employment (88.4%) were also the most likely to claim to be developing transferrable skills that will help them in the future, compared with those in part-time employment (76.2%), and those in other patterns of employment (64.3%). When asked if their employment was giving them confidence about

¹⁴ All of these to a 99% correlation.

¹⁵ This includes graduates that are in full time employment, in part time employment and those in other patterns of employment. Graduates that are in any form of further study includes those in full time further study, part time further study and other types of further study. Those that are in any form of unemployment include voluntary or unpaid work, other such as travel or caring, unemployed but due to start employment, unemployed but due to start further study and employed.

¹⁶ N=463

what they could potentially achieve in their future employment, graduates in full-time employment (74%) were the most likely to agree, with those in other patterns of employment (42.9%), and part-time employment (30.1%) much less likely to agree. Full-time graduates (61.8%) were the most likely to state that they were experiencing job satisfaction and fulfilment in their current work, with those in other patterns of employment (35.7%), and part-time employment (25%) less likely to agree. When asked if they were developing their profiles in ways that may make them more attractive to other employers, graduates in full-time employment (76.6%) were the most likely to agree, compared with those in part-time employment (44.1%), and in other patterns of employment (42.9%). Graduates that were in full-time employment (69.1%) were the most likely group to report that they believed they were currently employed in a job that aligned with their career aspirations, with those in other patterns of employment (50%), and those in part time employment (26.2%), much less likely to agree¹⁷.

For those graduates in further study¹⁸, the survey asked if their study fit with their future plans. Graduates could report that they are in full time further study, in part time further study or in a combination of further study and employment. Graduates that were in part-time further study (66.7%) were the least likely to agree, compared to those in employment and further study (87.5%), and those in full-time study (84.6%)¹⁹. When asked if they felt that their further study would help with their job prospects, graduates that were currently in employment and further study (100%) were the most likely group to agree, followed by those in full-time further study (79.5%), and those in part-time further study (55.6%)²⁰.

For those graduates in any type of unemployment²¹, the survey asked if their unemployment affected their wellbeing and/or morale. Unemployed graduates (93.6%) were the group most likely to agree, compared with those unemployed but due to start work (84.6%), and those that were unemployed but due to start further study (81.2%)²². When asked if their unemployment made them question the value of their degree, graduates that were unemployed but due to start further study (68.8%) were the most likely to agree, compared with those unemployed (57.4%), and those unemployed but due to start work (38.6%)²³.

Gender

The survey shows that there were some differences between graduates that identified as male and those that identified as female on how the pandemic impacted their employment situation. Many of these differences related to confidence. When asked if COVID-19 had made them less confident

¹⁷ All of these to a 99% correlation.

¹⁸ N=66

¹⁹ To a 95% correlation.

²⁰ To a 99% correlation.

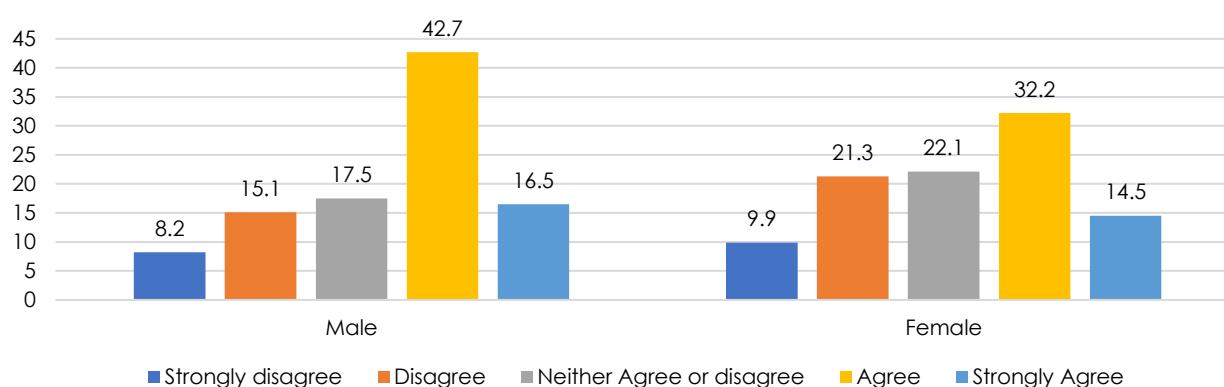
²¹ N=76

²² To a 95% correlation.

²³ To a 99% correlation.

about their future employment, male graduates (51.5%) reported that they were less confident. However, more female graduates (58.3%) stated that they were less confident²⁴. A further question asked respondents if they were confident about their longer-term career prospects. Male graduates (59.2%) reported more confidence than female graduates (46.7%)²⁵. Similarly, when asked if the pandemic had significantly damaged their long-term job prospects, female graduates (45.4%) were more likely than male graduates (35.9%) to agree²⁶. Amongst graduates in some form of unemployment²⁷, female graduates (89.3%) were more likely than male graduates (67.8%) to agree that their unemployment affected their confidence about what they could offer to employers²⁸. This added confidence is demonstrated in that male graduates (47.6%) believed that they had sufficient experience that employers require. Whereas fewer female graduates (41.6%) believed that they had sufficient experience that employers require²⁹.

Table 3 I am confident about my longer-term career prospects. (%)



Another theme that highlighted the differences between male and female graduates, relating to confidence, was experience of anxiety. When asked if they were anxious about their employment prospects, female graduates (58.3%) were more likely than male graduates (46.1%) to agree³⁰. In a similar vein, when asked if they felt empowered to make their own career decisions, male graduates (48.5%) were more likely to agree than female graduates (40.9%)³¹.

Another difference between the male and female graduates that did not fit a theme, was whether graduates felt that they were able to access different types of opportunities. More male graduates

²⁴ To a 95% correlation.

²⁵ To a 95% correlation.

²⁶ To a 99% correlation.

²⁷ N=76

²⁸ To a 95% correlation.

²⁹ To a 99% correlation.

³⁰ To a 99% correlation.

³¹ To a 95% correlation.

(34.5%) than female graduates (23.6%) reported that they felt able to access opportunities³². This may be related to a finding from the first survey where male graduates reported having good contacts with relevant people in their targeted careers, more so than female graduates.

This section focused on male and female graduates. Graduates that do not identify into a binary category have been included in the survey data. However, the number of non-binary graduates was too small to make statistically significant findings³³. A small percentage of non-binary graduates (28.6%) were in full-time employment, compared to male (61.1%), and female (54.8%) graduates. Non-binary graduates were also more likely to be unemployed (14.3%), as opposed to male (9.7%), and female (6.6%) graduates. Nevertheless, it should be stressed to regard these findings with caution due to the low number of non-binary respondents.

Ethnicity

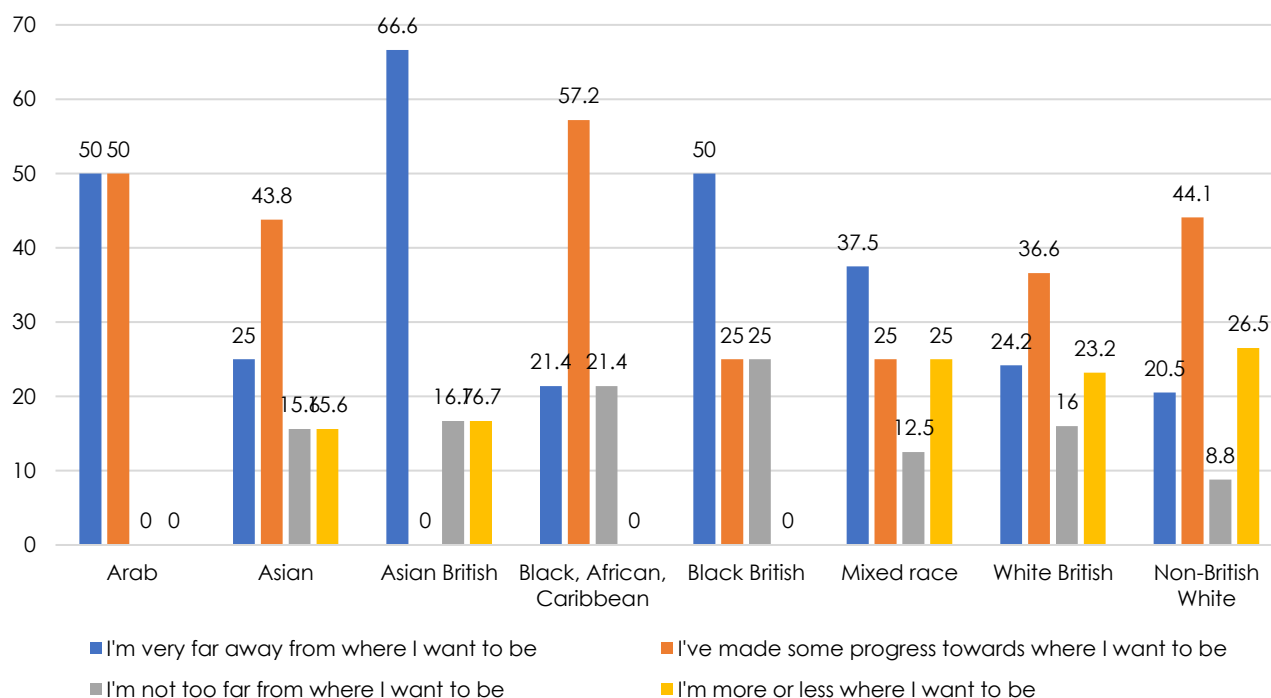
Unlike the first survey, the second survey data showed that respondents reported ethnic background had little statistical significance when correlated with many other questions. This indicates that graduates of different racial groups responded somewhat similarly to each other. There were, however, a few exceptions. One was when asked where they felt that they were in their employment/education situation at the time of the survey³⁴. Graduates of non-British White backgrounds (26.5%) were the most likely to feel like there were more or less where they would like to be. This is followed by mixed race (25%), and White British graduates (23.2%). Conversely, non-British White graduates (20.6%) and Black, African, and Caribbean graduates (21.4%) were the least likely to report that they were very far away from where they want to be in their career.

³² To a 95% correlation.

³³ Non-binary graduates were 7 out the 610 respondents (1.1%).

³⁴ To a 99% correlation.

Table 4 What best describes where you feel you are in your employment/education situation right now? (%)



A second question that showed correlation³⁵ to ethnicity was when graduates were asked if COVID-19 had significantly damaged their long-term job prospects. Arab (75%) and Asian graduates (62.5%) were the most likely groups to believe that COVID-19 had significantly damaged their long-term prospects. Whereas non-British White (32.3%) and Black, African, and Caribbean graduates (35.6%) were the least likely to report this.

The third question that showed correlation³⁶ was when graduates were asked if they were confident about their longer-term career prospects. Black, African, and Caribbean (61.4%) and non-British White graduates (60.3%) reported to be the most confident. However, Arab (0%) and Asian British (33.3%) were the least confident. However, it should be noted for this entire section, that there was a low number of responses to the survey from Arab (4 respondents) and Black British (4 respondents) graduates that may have impacted the results.

Disability

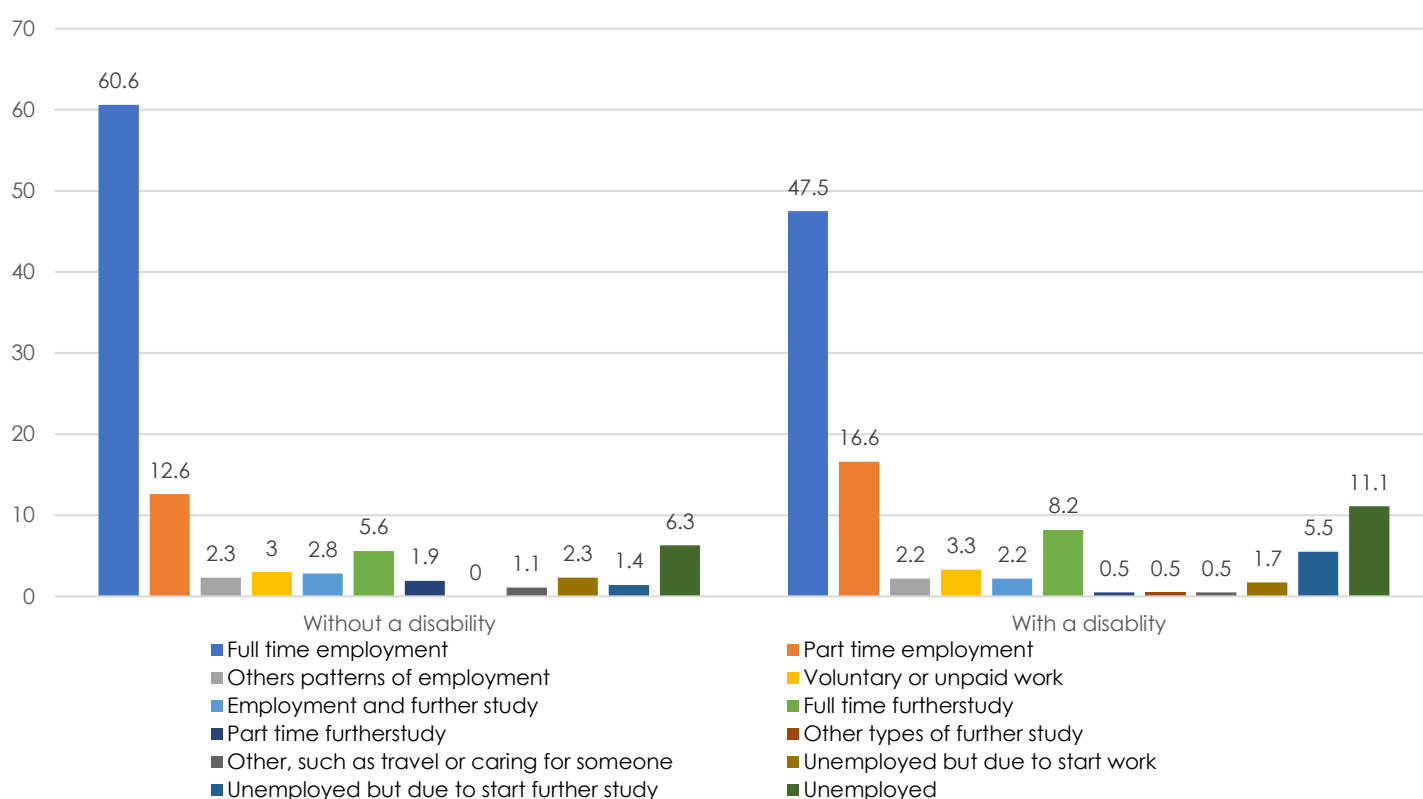
The second survey data showed that graduates with a disability were less likely to be in any form of employment than graduates without a disability (66.3% vs 75.5%). Those with a disability were less likely to be in full-time employment (47.5% vs 60.1%). These findings are consistent with those found in the first survey. However, those with a disability were more likely to be in part-time employment

³⁵ To a 95% correlation.

³⁶ To a 95% correlation.

(16.6% vs 12.6%). Graduates with disabilities were more likely to be underemployed. Graduates with a disability were more likely to be in some form of unemployment (22.1% vs 14.2%), and to be unemployed (11.1% vs 6.2%), than those without a disability. Graduates with a disability were also less likely to report that they were more or less where they wanted to be in their current employment or education situation (26.6% vs 14.4%)³⁷. However, graduates with a disability were more likely to have engaged with their university's career services since they had earned their most recent degree (39.8% vs 31%)³⁸.

Table 5 What are you doing at the moment? (%)



The survey asked a series of questions regarding the impact of COVID-19 on graduates' employment situations. When asked if the pandemic had significantly damaged their long-term job prospects, graduates with a disability were much more likely to agree (53% vs 38%). The pandemic had made graduates with a disability more likely to think differently about their future (81.2% vs 67.6%) and had affected the types of jobs that they targeted (65.2% vs 55%). Graduates with a disability were also more likely to feel that the pandemic had a detrimental impact on graduates' employment

³⁷ Both to a 99% correlation.

³⁸ To a 95% correlation.

prospects (86.2% vs 78.3%)³⁹. The pandemic also made more graduates with a disability less confident about their employment future (61.9% vs 54.1%) and resulted in greater challenges finding employment than they expected (74% vs 68.5%)⁴⁰. These figures show that the pandemic has had a greater impact on graduates with a disability than those without a disability.

Graduates with a disability were more likely to report that they found it a challenge to find graduate jobs that they wanted to apply for (69.1% vs 55.9%) and were more likely to have noticed a fall in the number of available opportunities (63.5% vs 55%). While graduates on the whole did not feel supported by employers during the recruitment process (20.5%), those with disabilities felt this problem more than graduates without disabilities (17.1% vs 21.9%). Graduates with a disability were less likely to feel able to access different types of opportunities (23.2% vs 28.7%) and found the recruitment process more challenging (70.2% vs 59.7%). When asked if they were anxious about their employment prospects, graduates with a disability were more likely to agree than those without disabilities (61.9% vs 51.3%)⁴¹. Graduates with a disability were less likely to feel optimistic about their employment prospects (23.8% vs 34%) than those without a disability, and they felt less likely to agree that they were moving in the right direction (44.8% vs 56.6%)⁴². In addition, graduates with a disability were less likely to describe their situation as having improved, than those without a disability (38.7% vs 44.5%)⁴³.

When asked if graduates felt they would be able to find future employment that matched their skills and qualifications, graduates with a disability were less likely to agree (52.5% vs 65.5%). Graduates with disabilities felt less likely that they would be able to pursue a fulfilling future career (51.3% vs 67.4%) and felt less certain about their longer-term career prospects (45.7% vs 54.7%). In addition, graduates with a disability were less likely to feel like they were making good progress towards their long-term goals, than those without a disability (44.8% vs 57.6%). Thus, graduates with a disability were less confident about their longer-term career prospects (42% vs 54.5%)⁴⁴.

For those graduates that were employed⁴⁵, graduates with a disability were least likely to report that their work fit in with their future plans (54.8% vs 66.5%) and that they were fulfilling the potential that they had when they graduated (38.9% vs 55.4%). When asked if they were utilising what they learnt during their studies in their current work, graduates with a disability were less likely to agree (50% vs 59.3%). Graduates with a disability were also less likely to report that they were doing a job suitable for a graduate (53.9% vs 64.1%), and that they were developing their profiles in a way that may make them attractive to other employers (59.5% vs 72.7%)⁴⁶. When asked if they were developing relevant

³⁹ All of these to a 99% correlation.

⁴⁰ Both to a 95% correlation.

⁴¹ All of these to a 95% correlation.

⁴² Both to a 99% correlation.

⁴³ To a 95% correlation.

⁴⁴ All of these to a 99% correlation.

⁴⁵ N=463

⁴⁶ All of these to a 99% correlation.

skills that will be valuable for future employment, graduates with a disability were less likely to agree (77.8% vs 83.8%). Graduates with disabilities reported feeling less confident about what they could achieve in their future employment (57.9% vs 66.8%) and were experiencing less job satisfaction and fulfilment in their current work (46.8% vs 56.4%). They were less likely to report that their current work was meaningful (65.1% vs 76.9%)⁴⁷. When asked if they believed that they were employed in a job that aligned with their career aspirations, those with disabilities were much less likely to agree (49.2% vs 64.1%) than those without a disability⁴⁸.

Graduates that moved on to further study⁴⁹, were asked if their current study was meaningful. For graduates with a disability, they were less likely to agree than those without a disability (80.9% vs 93.3%)⁵⁰.

First generation

As with the first survey, this survey analysis showed that there were differences between graduates whose parents have university degrees and those whose parents do not have university degrees. Those graduates whose parents do not have university degrees have been labelled here as first-generation graduates.

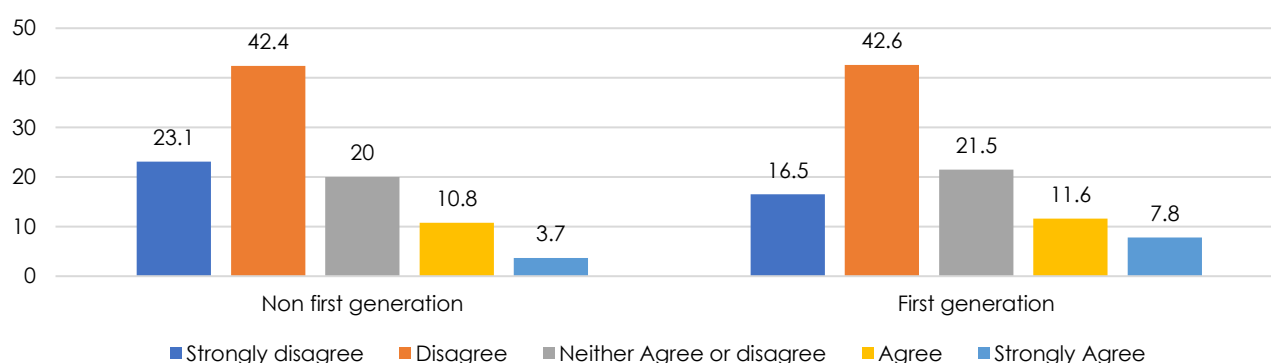
Similar to the first survey there was not a statistically significant difference in employment outcomes between the two groups of graduates. However, when asked to describe their current employment or education situation, non-first-generation graduates were more likely than first-generation graduates (25.8 % vs 19.7%) to feel that they were more or less where they wanted to be. Non-first-generation graduates were also more optimistic than first-generation graduates (32.5% vs 29.5%). They were also more confident than first-generation graduates (53.5% vs 47.9%) about their longer-term career prospects. In addition, non-first-generation graduates were more likely to feel that they would be able to pursue a fulfilling future career than their first-generation colleagues (65.4% vs 59.1%). They were more likely to report that they were making good progress towards their long-term goals than first-generation graduates (56.3% vs 50.7%). Thus, it should not be surprising that first-generation graduates were more anxious than non-first-generation graduates (58.4% vs 50.2%). First-generation graduates were also more likely to believe that COVID-19 had significantly damaged their long-term goals (45.7% vs 38.6%).

⁴⁷ All of these to a 95% correlation.

⁴⁸ To a 99% correlation.

⁴⁹ N=66

⁵⁰ To a 95% correlation.

Table 6 I feel I will be able to pursue a fulfilling career (%)

For those graduates that were employed⁵¹, first-generation graduates were less likely to be developing relevant skills for future employment than non-first-generation graduates (78.2% vs 85.4%), and less likely to be developing transferrable skills to help them in the future (81.8% vs 88.6%). Also, first-generation graduates were less likely to feel that they were fulfilling the potential they had when they graduated (43.2% vs 58.2%).

For graduates that were underemployed or unemployed⁵², first-generation graduates were more likely to believe that their situation negatively affected their employment outlook (48.9% vs 39.2%). First-generation graduates also felt concerned that their skills were not going to be valued, more so than non-first-generation graduates (74.5% vs 58.2%)⁵³.

Age

The survey asked a few questions on how graduates felt about the impact that COVID-19 on their careers. There was often a divide between the younger and older graduates. When asked if it significantly damaged their short-term job prospects, graduates aged between 21 to 25 were the most likely to agree (65.3%), with graduates aged 51 to 60 (40%) the least likely.⁵⁴ Graduates were asked if the pandemic made them think differently about their futures. Again, the younger graduates were the most likely to agree, including 26- to 30-year-olds (75%) and 21- to 25-year-old (74%). Over 60-year-olds (50%) and those aged 51 to 60 (60%) were the least likely to agree⁵⁵. When asked if the pandemic affected the types of jobs that they targeted, graduates aged 21 to 25 (62.2%) and those aged 31 to 40 (60%) were most likely to agree, and those aged 51 to 60 (40%) the least likely⁵⁶. When asked if the pandemic made them less confident about their future employment, graduates aged

⁵¹ N=463

⁵² N=185

⁵³ All of the correlations for this section are to a 95% correlation.

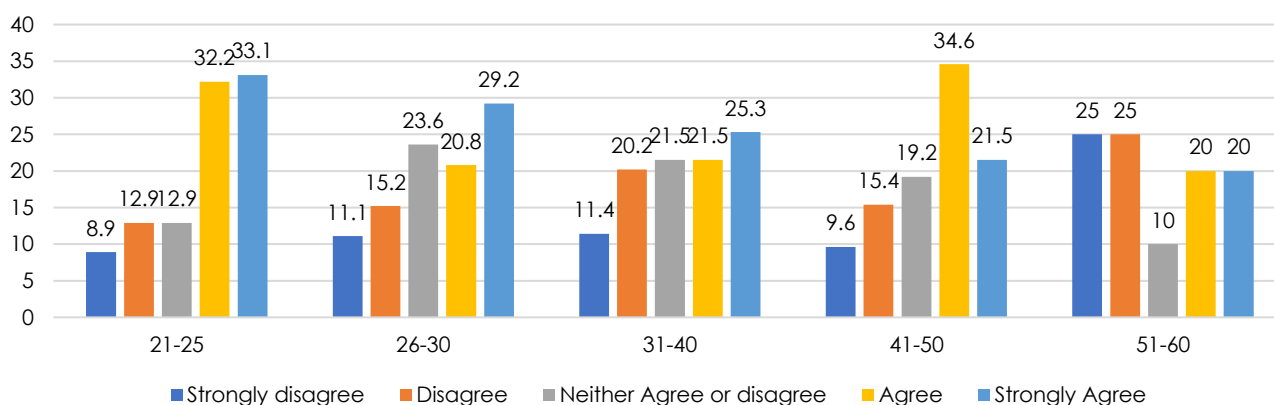
⁵⁴ To a 99% correlation.

⁵⁵ To a 95% correlation.

⁵⁶ To a 95% correlation.

between 41 and 50 years were the most likely to agree (67%) and those over 60 (25%) the least likely⁵⁷. Graduates were asked if the pandemic resulted in greater challenges in finding employment than they expected. Those aged 21 to 25 (76.6%) were the most likely to agree, with those over 60 (25%), and those aged 51 to 60 (40%) the least likely⁵⁸. When asked if the pandemic had a detrimental impact on graduates' employment prospects, those aged 21 to 25 years were the most likely to agree (86.9%) and those over 60 (50%) the least likely⁵⁹. These results show that while improvements were made since the previous study, the pandemic has had a larger impact on graduates aged 21 to 25 years old.

Table 7 COVID-19 has significantly damaged my short-term prospects (%)



When asked if graduates found it a challenge to find graduate jobs that they wanted to apply for, those aged 21 to 25 years old (66.9%) were the most likely to agree, with those over 60 years old (25%) the least likely⁶⁰. The survey asked if the participants had noticed a fall in the number of available opportunities and those aged 21 to 25 years (62.5%) and 26 to 30 years (59.7%) were the most likely to agree, and those aged from 51 to 60 years (35%) and 31 to 40 (41.8%) the least likely⁶¹. When asked if they had the sufficient experience that employers required, those aged 41 to 50 (55.8%) were the most likely to agree, with those over 60 (25%) the least likely⁶². Graduates were asked if they found the recruitment process challenging. Those aged 21 to 25 (66.9%) were the most likely to agree, with the least likely those over 60 (25%)⁶³. When asked if they felt that they were moving in the right direction, those aged 26 to 30 (56.9%) and those 21 to 25 (55.6%) were the most likely to agree, with those over 60 (25%) and those aged 51 to 60 (35%) the least likely⁶⁴. The survey

⁵⁷ To a 99% correlation.
⁵⁸ To a 99% correlation.
⁵⁹ To a 99% correlation.
⁶⁰ To a 95% correlation.
⁶¹ To a 99% correlation.
⁶² To a 99% correlation.
⁶³ To a 95% correlation.
⁶⁴ To a 95% correlation.

also asked graduates if they were anxious about their employment prospects. Those aged 26 to 30 (58.3%) and aged 21 to 25 (58%) were the most anxious, with those over 60 (25%) and aged 51 to 60 (40%) the least anxious⁶⁵.

The survey asked whether graduates used careers services since their graduation. Graduates aged 21 to 25 years old (37.3%) and those aged 26 to 31 years old (33.3%) reported that they were the most likely, while those aged 51 to 60 (20%) and aged 31 to 40 (21.5%) were the least likely⁶⁶.

Degree subject

The second survey showed the degree subject that a graduate studied correlated with current job status. Graduates that completed their most recent degree in the arts and humanities were the least likely to be in full-time employment (38.5%) and the most likely to be unemployed (14.5%). This is consistent with the first survey. However, different from the previous survey, the arts and humanities graduates were the most likely to be in part-time employment (22.2%) and the most likely to be in other patterns of employment (4.2%). This underemployment means that graduates that earned combined degrees, or those from multiple disciplines, are the least likely to be in any form of employment⁶⁷ (53.1%). Graduates with a combined degree were also the most likely to be in any form of unemployment⁶⁸ (25%) and any form of further study (21.9%). Graduates with business and law degrees were the most likely to be in full-time employment (70%) and any form of employment (77.8%). However, graduates in medical sciences were the least likely to be unemployed (3%) or to be in any type of unemployment (12%). Social science graduates were the least likely to be in further study (6.7%). Graduates in the science, technology, engineering, and medical (STEM) fields were the most likely (30.6) to have felt that they are more or less where they want to be in their careers, with combined degree graduates (9.3%) the least likely⁶⁹.

Table 8 What are you doing at the moment? (%)

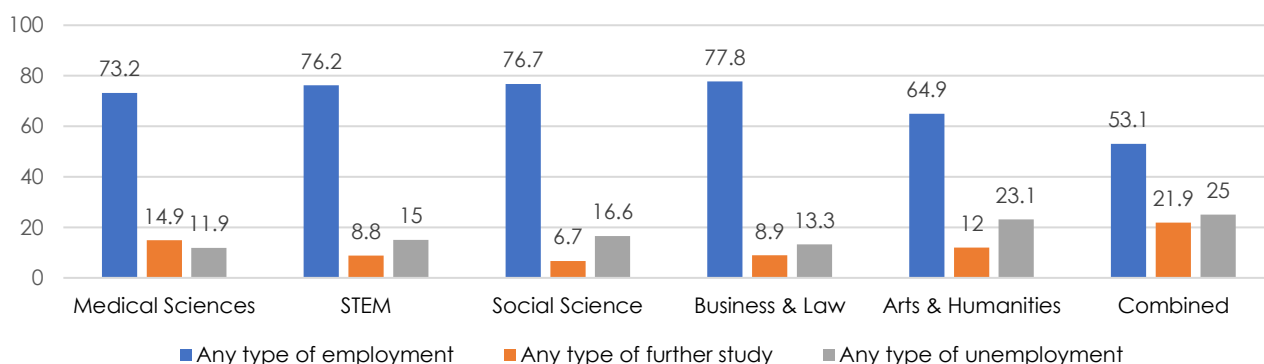
⁶⁵ To a 95% correlation.

⁶⁶ To a 99% correlation.

⁶⁷ Any form of employment is a combination of full-time employment, part-time employment and other patterns of employment.

⁶⁸ Any form of unemployment is a combination of unemployment, unemployed but due to start work, unemployed but due to start further study, voluntary work and other (such as travel or caring for someone).

⁶⁹ To a 99% correlation.



At the individual subject level⁷⁰, medical and dentistry (80%) and computer science graduates (75%) were the most likely to be in full-time employment. Historical and philosophical studies (29.6%) and creative arts and design graduates (35.6%) were the least likely to be in full-time employment. Creative arts and design (18.6%) and historical and philosophical studies graduates (11.1%) were also the most likely to be unemployed⁷¹.

The survey asked a series of questions about the impact of COVID-19 on graduate employment and careers. When asked if the pandemic significantly damaged their short-term job prospects, combined graduates (75%) and arts and humanities (65.8%) graduates were the most likely to agree, with medical science (54.4%) and STEM graduates (56.5%) the least likely. Similarly, combined (56.3%) and arts and humanities graduates (48.7%) were the most likely to report that the pandemic significantly damaged their long-term job prospects, with medical science (33.7%) and business and law graduates (38.9%) the least likely to report this. This has led to combined (68.8%) and arts and humanities graduates (65%) being most likely to believe that the pandemic had made them less confident about their future employment, with medical science (49.5%) and STEM graduates (50.3%) the least likely to agree⁷². In addition, when asked if the pandemic had impacted the types of jobs that they targeted, arts and humanities graduates (64.9%) were the most likely to agree, with medical science graduates (54.4%) the least likely. When asked if the pandemic had resulted in greater challenges in finding employment, combined degree (78.1%) and business and law (74.4%) graduates were the most likely to agree, with medical sciences graduates (62.4%) the least likely⁷³.

Combined degree (81.3%) and arts and humanities (64.1%) graduates were the most likely to state that they found it a challenge to find graduate jobs that they wanted to apply for, with medical science graduates (53.5%) the least likely. Similarly, combined degree (68.8%) and arts & humanities graduates (66.7%) found that they noticed a fall in the number of available opportunities, with medical science graduates (43.6%) the least likely to agree. STEM (25.1%) and business and law graduates (24.4%) felt the most supported by employers during the recruitment process, while arts

⁷⁰ It should be noted that the number of graduates from some subject areas were too few to be considered significant.

⁷¹ To a 99% correlation.

⁷² All of these to a 99% correlation.

⁷³ Both to a 95% correlation.

and humanities graduates (14.5%) felt the least supported. Combined degree graduates (78.1%) found the recruiting process the most challenging, with medical science graduates (54.4%) the least likely to agree⁷⁴. In addition, STEM graduates (33.3%) felt the most able to access different types of job opportunities, with combined degree (21.9%) and arts and humanities (22.2%) the least likely⁷⁵. Business and law (40%) felt the most optimistic about their employment prospects, with the arts and humanities graduates (20.5%) the least optimistic. As a result, the arts and humanities (43.6%) and the combined degree graduates (43.8%) were the least likely to feel like they were moving in the right direction with their careers, with STEM and business and law graduates (each 57.8%) the most likely to feel that they were moving in the right direction. Thus, combined degree (68.8%) and arts and humanities (68.3%) were the most anxious about their employment prospects, with business and law (42.2%) and STEM graduates (46.3%) the least anxious. The arts and humanities (29.9%) and combined degree graduates (34.3%) were the least likely to feel empowered to make their own career decisions, with business and law graduates (53.3%) the most likely⁷⁶.

When asked if they were confident about their longer-term career, business and law (61.1%) and STEM graduates reported to be the most confident, but combined degree (34.3%) and arts and humanities graduates (39.3%) felt the least confident. Medical science (70.3%) and business and law (68.9%) graduates felt they would be able to find future employment that matches their skills and qualification, but arts and humanities (46.2%) and combined degree graduates (50%) were the least likely to feel this way. Similarly, medical science (68.3%) and business and law graduates (67.7%) were the most likely to feel that they will be able to pursue a fulfilling future career, but combined degree (43.8%) and arts and humanities (52.1%) felt the least likely to be able to pursue a fulfilling career⁷⁷. Business and law graduates (64.4%) were most likely to feel that they were making good progress towards their long-term goals. In contrast, arts and humanities graduates (39.3%) were the least likely to feel that they were making good progress⁷⁸. Subsequently, business and law graduates (31.1%) felt they were more or less where they wanted to be in their careers, with combined degree (9.4%) and arts and humanities graduates (15.4%) the least likely groups to feel this way⁷⁹.

Among the graduates that were in employment⁸⁰, STEM (71.3%) and business and law graduates (71.2%) were the most likely to report that their current work fits with their future plans, with arts and humanities graduates (48.8%) the least likely to agree. When asked if they were utilising what they learnt during their studies in their current work, medical science (69.7%) and STEM graduates (66.1%) were the most likely to agree, but combined degree (26.3%) and arts and humanities graduates (36.2%) the least likely to agree. STEM graduates (66.1%) were the group that most likely felt that they

⁷⁴ All of these to a 99% correlation.

⁷⁵ To a 95% correlation.

⁷⁶ All of these to a 99% correlation.

⁷⁷ All of these to a 99% correlation.

⁷⁸ To a 95% correlation.

⁷⁹ To a 99% correlation.

⁸⁰ N=463

were fulfilling the potential they had when they graduated, but combined degree (10.5%) and arts and humanities graduates (33.8%) were the least likely. Medical science (90.8%) and social science graduates (89.7%) were the most likely to feel that they were developing transferable skills that will help them in the future, with arts and humanities (77.5%) the least likely to agree. STEM (61.7%) and business and law graduates (61.6%) were the most likely groups to report that they were experiencing job satisfaction and fulfilment in their career, but combined degree (26.3%) and arts and humanities graduates (42.5%) were the least likely groups to feel fulfilled⁸¹. Business and law (87.7%) and social science graduates (86.6%) believe they were developing relevant skills that will be valuable for future employment, but combined degree (73.7%) and arts and humanities graduates (73.7%) were less likely to believe that. When asked if they were developing their profiles in ways that may make them attractive to other employers, business and law graduates (80.8%) were the most likely to agree, with arts and humanities (57.5%) the least likely. Business and law graduates (78.1%) were the most likely to report that their jobs were giving them confidence about what they could achieve in their future employment, but arts and humanities (51.3%) and combined degree graduates (52.6%) were the least likely to feel this way. Combined degree (31.6%) and arts and humanities graduates (45%) were the least likely to believe that they were doing a job suitable for a graduate, but business and law (72.6%) and STEM graduates (71.3%) were the most likely to agree. Subsequently, arts and humanities (48.8%) and combined degree graduates (52.6%) were the least likely to feel that their current work was meaningful, but STEM (71.3%) and business and law graduates (71.2%) were the most likely to feel their work was meaningful⁸². When asked if they believed that they were currently employed in a job that aligned with their career aspirations, medical science graduates (67.1%) were the most likely to agree, but combined degree (42.1%) and arts and humanities graduates (42.5%) were the least likely⁸³.

For the graduates that were in further study⁸⁴, social science graduates (87.5%) were the most likely to say that they chose their further study because of concerns about their immediate job prospects, with medical science graduates (53.3%) the least likely to agree. When asked if their current study was in the same field or subject as their previous degree, social science graduates (87.5%) were the most likely to agree, but combined degree (42.8%), and arts and humanities graduates (42.9%) were the least likely to agree⁸⁵.

Degree levels

The survey shows that PhD graduates (50%) were the most likely to describe where they are feeling in their current employment or education situation as more or less where they would like to be, with bachelor's degree graduates the least likely. In fact, over a quarter of bachelor's degree graduates

⁸¹ All of these to a 99% correlation.

⁸² All of these to a 95% correlation.

⁸³ To a 99% correlation.

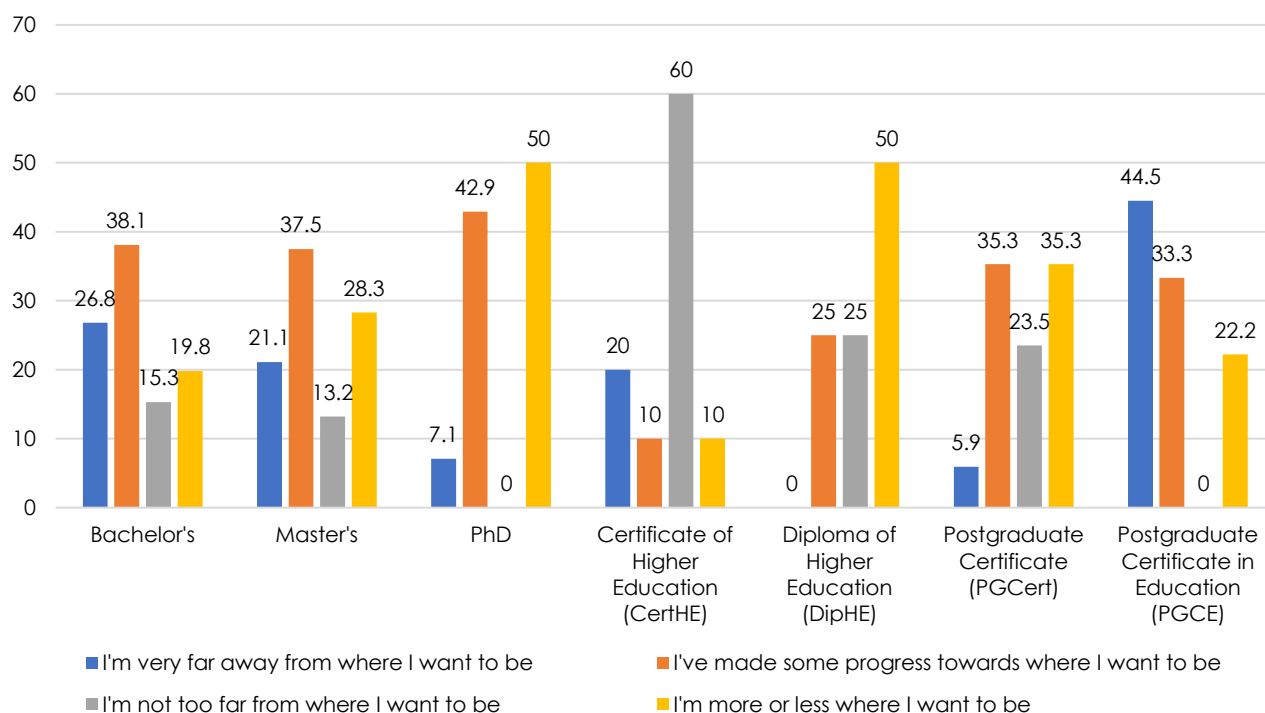
⁸⁴ N=65

⁸⁵ Both of these to a 95% correlation.

(26.8%) felt very far away from where they would like to be⁸⁶. However, there was not a statistically significant correlation between degree level and employment status.

⁸⁶ To a 99% correlation.

Table 9 What best describes where you feel you are in your employment/education situation right now? (%)



When asked about their longer-term career prospects, those with master's degrees (57.9%) and PhD graduates (57.1%) were the most likely to feel confident. Those with Postgraduate Certificates (PGCert) (47.1%) and bachelor's degrees (47.6%) were the least likely to feel confident. Similarly, PhD graduates (71.4%) were the most likely to report that they were making good progress towards their long-term career goals, and bachelor's degree graduates (49.1%) were the least likely to report this⁸⁷.

When asked if COVID-19 significantly damaged their short-term job prospects, bachelor's degree graduates (63.4%) were the most likely to agree, with PhD graduates (42.8%) the least likely⁸⁸. Similarly, bachelor's degree graduates (46.1%) were the most likely to report that the pandemic significantly damaged their long-term prospects, and PhD graduates (21.4%) were the least likely⁸⁹. PGCert graduates (76.4%) and bachelor's degree graduates (73.4%) were the most likely to report that the pandemic resulted in greater challenges finding employment than they expected. However, PhD graduates (42.8%) were the least likely to report this. Similarly, PGCert (82.4%) and bachelor's graduates (82.2%) were the most likely to feel that the pandemic had a detrimental impact on graduates' employment prospects, with PhD (78.5%) and master's degree graduates (79.5%) the least likely to believe this⁹⁰.

⁸⁷ Both to a 99% correlation.

⁸⁸ To a 95% correlation.

⁸⁹ To a 99% correlation.

⁹⁰ Both to a 99% correlation.

Bachelor's degree graduates (62.6%) were the most likely to report that they found it a challenge to find a graduate job that they wanted to apply for. However, those earning their master's degrees (30.2%) were the least likely to find it difficult⁹¹. PhD graduates (64.3%) were the most confident that they had the sufficient experience that employers required, but bachelor's degree graduates (44.1%) were the least likely to agree⁹². Thus, bachelor's degree graduates (65.9%) were most likely to have found the recruitment process challenging, whereas PGCert (47.1%) and PhD (50%) graduates felt this to a lesser degree⁹³. It is not surprising that bachelor's degree graduates (58.9%) were the most anxious about their employment prospects with PGCert graduates (29.4%) the least anxious⁹⁴.

Among the graduates that were in employment,⁹⁵ those that completed courses designed for specific careers, Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE), Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE), Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) (88% combined) were the most likely to report that their work fit in with their future plans, but bachelor's degree graduates were the least likely (58.7%) to agree with that statement⁹⁶. PhD graduates (78.6%) were the most likely to believe that their work was meaningful, with bachelor's degree graduates (69.1%) the least likely⁹⁷. When asked if they were utilising what they learnt during their studies in their current work, PhD graduates (78.6%) were the most likely to agree, with bachelor's degree graduates (52%) the least likely⁹⁸. PGCert graduates (86.6%) were the group that most believed that they were currently doing a job that was suitable for a graduate, whereas bachelor's degree graduates (53.7%) were the least likely⁹⁹. PhD graduates (64.3%) were the most likely to believe that they were fulfilling the potential that they had when they graduated, but bachelor's degree graduates (45.3%) were the least likely to believe this¹⁰⁰. PGCert (73.3%) and master's degree graduates (73%) most believed that their job was giving them confidence about what they could achieve in their future employment, but PhD graduates (57.1%) were the least likely to feel confidence in their future careers¹⁰¹. PGCert graduates (80%) were the most likely to be experiencing job satisfaction and fulfilment in their current work, with bachelor's degree (49.3%) and PhD graduates (57.1%) the least likely¹⁰². The majority of PGCert graduates (80%) felt that they were developing their profiles in a way that made them attractive to other employers, but PhD graduates (57.1%) were the least likely to believe this¹⁰³. When asked if they believed that they were currently employed in a job that aligned with their career

⁹¹ To a 95% correlation.

⁹² To a 99% correlation.

⁹³ To a 95% correlation.

⁹⁴ To a 95% correlation.

⁹⁵ N=463

⁹⁶ To a 99% correlation.

⁹⁷ To a 99% correlation.

⁹⁸ To a 99% correlation.

⁹⁹ To a 99% correlation.

¹⁰⁰ To a 99% correlation.

¹⁰¹ To a 95% correlation.

¹⁰² To a 99% correlation.

¹⁰³ To a 99% correlation.

aspirations, PGCert (80%) and PhD graduates (71.4%) were the most likely to agree, with bachelor's graduates (54.7%) the least likely¹⁰⁴.

Graduation Institution

The second survey showed some correlation based on the type of institution that the graduate had graduated from. For this, the institutions in the UK were categorised based on Bolivar's (2015) classification cluster classification system¹⁰⁵. In this system universities are grouped based on their research output and the economic activity that this creates, with cluster 1 institutions being the most research intense and those in cluster 4 the least. Cluster 5 is reserved for speciality institutions that focus on a certain subject or discipline, but they do not have significant research output.

There was no correlation when looking at the survey population as a whole, but there was correlation amongst graduates that were in employment¹⁰⁶. When asked if they were developing their profiles in a way that made them more attractive to other employers, graduates from cluster 5 institutions (55.4%) were the least likely to agree, but those from research-intensive institutions, cluster 2 (75%) and cluster 1 (71.4%) were the most likely to agree. Graduates from cluster 2 (72.4%) and cluster 1 (71.4%) institutions were more likely to report that their employment was giving them confidence about what they could achieve in their future employment, but those from cluster 5 (52.5%) and cluster 3 institutions (58.3%) were the least likely to agree. Graduates from cluster 1 institutions (95.2%) were the most likely to state that they were developing transferrable skills that will help them in the future, but those from cluster 3 institutions (80.6%) were the least likely. Similarly, graduates from cluster 1 institutions (90.4%) were the most likely to believe they were developing relevant skills that will be valuable for future employment, with those from clusters 3 and 5 (both 76.2%) the least likely. When asked if they were currently doing a job that is suitable for a graduate, graduates from cluster 2 (69.8%) and cluster 1 institutions (66.7%) were the most likely to agree, with those from cluster 5 (50.5%) the least likely. Graduates from cluster 2 institutions (62.5%) were the most likely group to report that they were utilising what they learnt during their studies in their current work, but somewhat surprisingly those from cluster 1 institutions (47.6%) the least likely. Graduates from cluster 2 institutions (69.2%) were the most likely to report that they were currently employed in a job that aligned with their career aspirations, but those from cluster 1 institutions (47.6%) were the least likely¹⁰⁷. When asked if they were fulfilling the potential that they had when they graduated, graduates from cluster 2 institutions (61.5%) were the most likely to agree, but those from cluster 4 (30%), cluster 1 (33.3%), and cluster 5 institutions (39.6%) were much less likely to agree. Similarly, graduates from cluster 2 institutions, were the most likely to believe that their current work fit in with their future plans, but those

¹⁰⁴ To a 99% correlation.

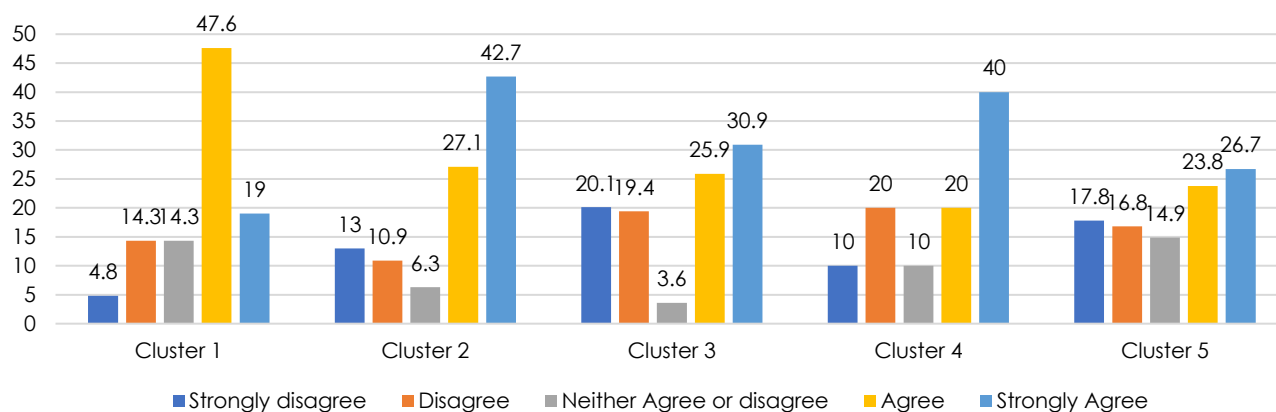
¹⁰⁵ Bolivar, V. (2005). "Are there distinctive clusters of higher and lower status universities in the UK?" *Oxford Review of Education*. 41(5): p. 608-627.

¹⁰⁶ N=463

¹⁰⁷ All of these to a 99% correlation.

from cluster 5 institutions (52.4%) were the least likely to believe this¹⁰⁸.

Table 10 I am currently doing a job that is suitable for a graduate (%)



For those unemployed graduates¹⁰⁹, graduates from cluster 5 institutions (48.1%) were the least likely to believe that their unemployment affected their wellbeing and/or morale, but those from cluster 3 universities (69.5%) were the most impacted¹¹⁰. Graduates from cluster 1 institutions (90.1%) were the most likely to state that their unemployment gave them the chance to reflect on what they want from their career, with those from cluster 3 institutions (54.2%) the least likely¹¹¹.

For graduates in further study¹¹², graduates from cluster 1 institutions (100%) were the most likely to report that their further study was at a higher level than their previous degree, but those from cluster 4 institutions (50%) were the least likely to agree¹¹³.

Graduation Year

The second survey included graduates that completed their degrees in 2019, 2020 and 2021. However, it should be noted that there were too few respondents that graduated in 2021 to make the data statistically significant⁹⁹.

The survey asked respondents a series of questions about the impact that COVID-19 had on their employment. When asked if the pandemic had significantly damaged their short-term job prospects, those who graduated in 2020 (61.3%) were more likely to agree than those who graduated in 2019 (42.5%). 2020 graduates were more likely to feel that the pandemic resulted in greater challenges in finding employment (71.8% vs 56.2%), and they also were more likely than the 2019 graduates to feel that the pandemic had a detrimental impact on graduates' employment

¹⁰⁸ Both of these to a 95% correlation.

¹⁰⁹ N=185

¹¹⁰ To a 95% correlation.

¹¹¹ To a 99% correlation.

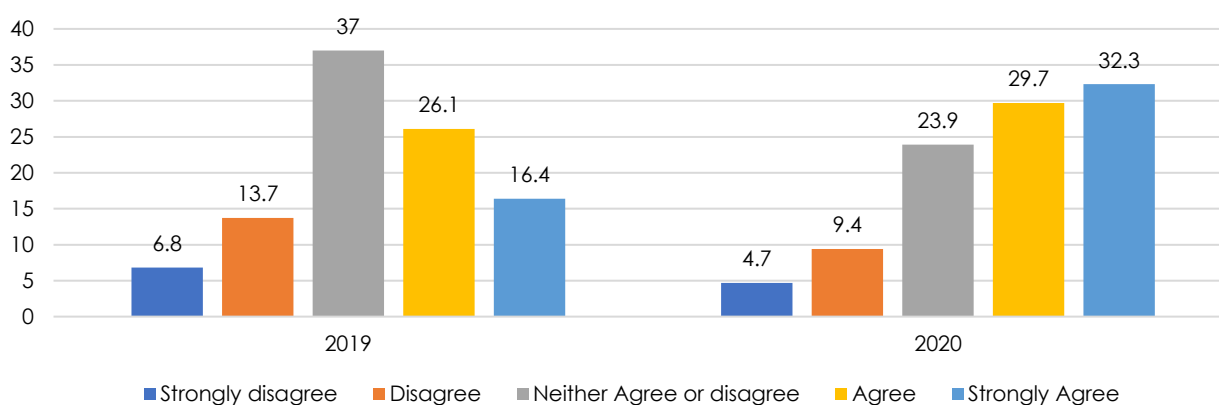
¹¹² N=65

¹¹³ To a 95% correlation.

prospects (81.6% vs 72.6%)¹⁰⁰. In addition, 2020 graduates were more likely than their 2019 counterparts to believe that the pandemic significantly damaged their long-term job prospects (43.4% vs 35.6%). This may have been why 2020 graduates were more likely to believe that the pandemic made them think differently about their future (72.9% vs 63%)¹⁰¹.

When asked if they had found it a challenge to find graduate jobs that they wanted to apply for, 2020 graduates were much more likely to agree than their 2019 counterparts (62% vs 42.5%)¹⁰². Similarly, 2020 graduates were more likely to report that they had noticed a fall in the number of available opportunities (59.6% vs 41.1%)¹⁰³.

Table 11 I have found it a challenge to find graduate jobs I want to apply for (%)



For those graduates in employment, there were also some differences between 2020 and 2019 graduates. When asked if they were currently doing a job that suitable for a graduate, 2019 graduates (75.4% vs 59.4%) were more likely to agree. Similarly, 2019 graduates were more likely to report that they were fulfilling the potential that they had when they graduated (63.2% vs 49.1%). 2019 graduates were also more likely to say that they were developing transferrable skills that will help them in the future (89.5% vs 85%). In addition, 2019 graduates were also more likely to state that their jobs were giving them confidence about what they could achieve in their future employment (77.2% vs 62.6%)¹⁰⁵.

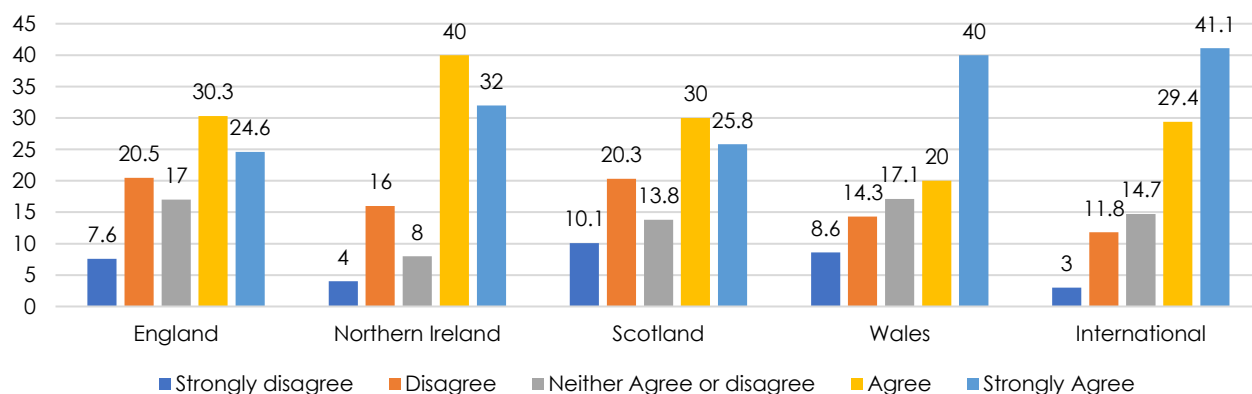
For those graduates that were in further study, 2020 graduates were more likely to state that they chose their further study because of concerns about their immediate job prospects (70.9% vs 50%)¹⁰⁷.

Country of Residence

The survey showed a slight correlation based on a respondent's country of residence before their studies. When asked if COVID-19 had affected the types of jobs that they targeted, the English

(54.9%) and Scottish (55.7%) graduates were the least likely to agree. Whereas the Northern Irish (72%) graduates were the most likely to agree¹¹⁴.

Table 12 COVID-19 has affected the types of jobs I have targeted (%)



There was also some correlation amongst employed graduates¹¹⁵ when asked if they were developing their profile in ways to make themselves more attractive to other employers. International (73.4%) and Scottish (71.9%) were the most likely to agree, with English graduates (65.7%) the least likely.

¹¹⁴ To a 95% correlation.

¹¹⁵ N=463

NARRATIVES OF EARLY EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES

The survey invited respondents to openly respond to their experience of the job market since the time of the first survey. Around a third of graduates provided open-coded summaries of their views of their current employment and these offered important insights on graduates' appraisals of their job prospects since the period of their graduation.

Open code responses indicated variability in how graduates appraised their current employment situations, including relative levels of satisfaction and perceived job alignment. These suggested marked differences in where graduates felt they were at in their career development and how they viewed the potential relationship between their current employment and future outcomes.

While responses indicated that a good proportion had found what they perceived to be suitable graduate-level employment, others continued to feel disenfranchised and were either in employment that was perceived unsuitable or unemployed. Responses also suggested that graduates had to shift career management approaches and either re-orientate towards different areas of employment, undertake further study, or gain additional work experience in order to enhance their profiles. Further study was either perceived as a way of building additional human capital through additional specialist qualifications that would have future value or providing time for further evaluation of employment options whilst labour market conditions improved.

The most positive responses highlighted positive alignment and integration in graduates' current employment, with graduates attaining targeted employment and establishing a meaningful early career platform. These responses also indicated minimal adverse impacts from the COVID-19 context and in some cases a graduate had been offered a job soon after or before graduation in sectors not adversely impacted by the pandemic.

I already had a job throughout my studies which I enjoy very much (Female, England; social science graduate)

I have since been offered a new role, building upon what I have learnt in a role since leaving university in my chosen subject. (Female, England; STEM graduate)

Related responses also indicated that graduates had expanded the scope of their job interest and identified employment niches which they had not considered either during their degree or during the initial periods of their graduation. Other responses revealed a discernible shift in perspective after securing sought-after employment from feeling disillusioned and disconnected from suitable graduate opportunities towards perceiving expanded employment scope.

Since the last time I filled in this survey things have improved greatly. At the time job prospects were extremely low and it was hard to find somewhere that was looking for my level of experience.

Thankfully things picked up and through the use of recruitment agency's on LinkedIn I was able to secure a great position with my current company as a software developer! (Male, Northern Ireland; STEM graduate)

In the last couple of months, I have managed to gain a full-time job within my chosen field, this is a short-term contract, with still carrying on my job in hospitality. I am very grateful for this opportunity, as I know many people I graduated with have not managed to gain opportunities like I have. I am hoping this job will open new doors to me, it has allowed for me to gain relevant experience and to be able to network with people in my industry. (Female, Scotland; Arts & Humanities graduate)

A significant proportion of responses indicated a more mixed picture of having to bide time and re-evaluate career options, including being in short-term employment or more contingent employment as a way of building experience. Work experience that was perceived to have value for improving longer-term career prospects was either seen to help build a respondent's profile and work-related skills within a targeted employment field or have wider purchase in the external job market. In the cases where shorter-term work experience was perceived to enhance longer-term prospects, respondents tended to view it as providing recognisable skills and future job performance potential. In most cases, this was viewed as a temporary situation before securing more sustainable targeted employment. These graduates appeared to be holding out for what were commonly referred to in the interviews as 'professional', 'graduate' or 'career' posts.

Since last completing the survey, I had really struggled to find employment within the field I had studied in. I had carried on my job in hospitality at university into a full-time employment since leaving university. I was very thankful to still have a job during the pandemic, however this was not my long-term career. (Female, Scotland; arts & humanities graduate)

Overall, graduates who reported being in non-graduate jobs or jobs not aligned to their degrees relayed concerns about potentially determinantal impacts on their longer-term prospects. This was often perceived as not gaining the correct experience and work-related knowledge that they could present to employers or build their profiles in ways that made them more attractive to prospective employers. In some cases, part-time employment in a non-aligned job for some provided a way of allowing time to pursue career development activities, including unpaid experiences, or building social contacts, although overall the perception was that its experiential value would decline if undertaken for a significant period.

I enjoy my job but it's not in the career I'd like to go into long-term. However, I'm scared that I won't be able to go into that career now as I'm in the wrong sector and won't be building up the right kind of experience. (Female, England; arts & humanities graduate)

I've had to pivot to skills that aren't directly related to my degree and I'm afraid of staying stuck in a career I never wanted. Trying to get out is hard now as the job market is awful and it took me months to even find this job that I didn't want. (Female; International; arts & humanities master's graduate)

The least positive responses revealed frustrations and anxieties around respondents' current employment situation, particularly amongst those who reported being unemployed or working in non-aligned or lower skilled employment that had minimal bearing on future career goals. Being in such employment was felt to be a waste of HE study and a mismatch between what graduates had been primed for when choosing to pursue HE study and the realities of their current circumstances. Such frustration was sometimes directed at both employers for not providing sufficient training, opportunities, or meaningful feedback or HE institutions for not providing valuable qualifications.

Been working customer support for a year, the degree is a joke, no employers take it seriously, to be honest I would like a refund and take my degree away, the whole concept of university was an entire scam, "oh you'll make so much once you graduate" last time I checked £30,000 a year is UK average salary, I don't think £19,000 a year with a computer science degree reflects what the university advertises. (Male; England; STEM graduate)

Concerns about being 'stuck' and 'trapped' in a continuous period of unemployment or under-employment extended to anxieties over the consequences for longer-term career prospects. Working in non-graduate or lower-skilled job sectors was seen to place further distance from aspired targeted employment if it did not engender the right forms of experience that could enhance their profiles.

I'm still stuck working in hospitality and it feels like I'm never going to get anywhere else. I've had so many interviews for some really interesting jobs that I would have loved to have got but the feedback is always just that someone else had more experience. And each job I've applied for has been very different so I can't possibly gain experience in all of these things. (female; England; STEM graduate)

I have been unemployed for over a year now having lost my first graduate job at the beginning of the pandemic. I have been applying to jobs for the past 6 months, had a few interviews and am currently due to start working as a freelancer for a company abroad. I want to have a job, progress in my career and gain experience so I am choosing to do this job even though freelancing was never part of my career plan and is something I would not otherwise do but I am forced to do it by the Covid situation as it is my only good option right now. (Female; international; arts & humanities graduate)

My confidence has gone down as I have not been using my languages in the job, I am currently in. I am scared about my future prospects and that I will not find a job that I will enjoy. (Female; England; arts & humanities graduate)

A related issue was the direct sector impacts of COVID-19 on vacancies and recruitment, intensifying the level of competition for suitable employment. In a number of cases, graduates reported being withdrawn an offer which had been made to them, whilst others suggesting COVID-19 hit sectors such as hospitality and creative industries and this had direct bearing on their immediate prospects through a shortfall in vacancies or training opportunities.

Other responses indicated some of the measures that graduates took to mitigate sector-specific job shortages, including voluntary work experience alongside contingent part-time work, or looking to carve out self-employment through freelance consultancy or business start-up. These options were viewed as a way of taking control and exercising agency in the face of an unaccommodating labour market and seen as a necessary measure to maintain their profile.

I find the field of my career aspiration (Heritage and Museum sector) is still very competitive even with more jobs being advertised. Apply and constantly being rejected makes me frustrated and it gives me the feeling of not making any progress towards an employment in that field. However, with the easing of restrictions I am able to volunteer which allows me to get some experience. My main job is in hospitality, and I hope I can gain some transferable skills here. (Female; international; arts & humanities master's graduate)

I started a collective with my fellow graduates who were struggling to find employment within the field. We won a consultancy project contract abroad.... Depending how it goes we are thinking to transform the collective into a start-up company, but we don't know if we got lucky again to get commissions in the future too, so everybody is doing some part-time menial job next to the graduate ambitions. (Male; Scotland; social science master's degree)

Relating early career narratives to transitional experiences

The second wave interviews confirmed the early stage of the research and identified similar transitional experiences. In a number of cases, graduates' employment situations had changed over the course of the six-month period and positive developments in their career development were reported. Overall, this had moved in a positive direction, although in some cases initial positive experiences at the time of the first interview had shifted when graduates' early expectations had not become fully realised.

Disorientated graduates continued to be discouraged and disenchanted about their immediate employment prospects. They felt that the current graduate labour market was not able to accommodate what they felt they could offer and that related opportunities to realise their graduate potential were closed off. Disorientated graduates were feeling relatively powerless in finding suitable employment or not in control of their current situations. This often meant that they felt they could not channel their agency effectively towards realising their career goals and that there was a mismatch between the goals they had formed and their realisation in the labour market. These graduates were starting to believe that their current graduate profiles were not as strong as they had envisaged before or at the point of graduation. The evidence from this study suggests that graduates continued to feel marginalised from current opportunities within the labour market:

I'd say it's incredibly depressing. I'm already beating the dead horse with it saying it's demoralising and all that stuff. I've had moments I've questioned if I'm going to actually progress professionally. It's just tough. And also, I think that there is one experience I've had in the last six months that encapsulates everything that is wrong with the current job market and with the whole. (Male,

Engineering Graduate, Scottish HE)

Indeterminate graduates were also experiencing 'limbo' and uncertainty, but felt they were making some positive steps in realising their future employment. These graduates often perceived themselves to be making some progress towards their targeted jobs and thought they would be able to develop a meaningful career platform within time. They remained orientated towards the employment they had sought during their studies and felt more confident that improved job market outcomes would eventuate when the appropriate circumstance emerged. The challenges they had experienced in finding their ideal employment were met with some frustration but were not significantly rupturing their sense of moving in the right direction.

I feel I'm still trying to break in. I've had this opportunity. I'm hopefully going to get the next one (Male, Urban Planning, Scottish HE)

I've been told that I'm wanted for it. It's just that it's delayed, and they don't quite know when. That should have been starting mid-September. I haven't heard any more. Again, it could be last minute, okay, right, do your COVID test, do your form filling and we'll see you Monday. It may be exactly the same thing (Female, Stage Production graduate, English HE)

I essentially just need one person to say, yes, come and volunteer for us or work for us. I need that first foot in the door. From there, I'm sure it would be easier. That's what everyone says. Once you're in, it's easy to jump to the next one and the next one and the next one. But it's getting in because it's so competitive. That area is so competitive and lots of people want to work in it. It's being able to stand above the crowd and actually get through that door is the difficult part (Male, Politics and International Relations, Scottish HE)

In a good number of these cases, these graduates were looking to continue to build relevant experience that sustained their motivation and enhanced their confidence that they would eventually find suitable employment. Most in this group had reported some gain in the six months following the first interviews, mainly in terms of gaining further work experience and continuing to make in-roads into strengthening their career profiles. Consequently, they were content to bide their time, continuing pursuing goals they had set earlier in graduation or re-routing to potentially new career paths.

Emerging graduates had developed a meaningful breakthrough in their employment situations and were beginning to transition to positions which were becoming aligned to their targeted employment. Such positions were in some cases more defined graduate roles. These graduates had gained initial employment or relevant work experience that was perceived to be meaningfully contributing to their emerging career narrative from which they could use for employment in a specialised or general domain. Consequently, they perceived their employability to be relatively stronger and they conveyed a stronger sense of career confidence and control. Many nonetheless acknowledged the novelty of their situation, the continued distance from where they ultimately wanted to be, and some degree of ambivalence about the roles they were undertaking. In some

cases, these graduates expressed similar outlooks to those in more indeterminate positions, particularly when their current role was not fully matched to their future career intention. Overall, however, they were experiencing more tangible career development over the period which was viewed as providing a sound platform for future movement.

I would say I'm much more positive. Yes, I definitely feel that it's improved so much. Yes, I think the jobs, honestly, just weren't there before. Slowly things are picking up again for people. But, yes, I think it's just about developing your skills and figuring out what actually does work best. But I think I definitely feel more optimistic now (Female, Media Production graduate, English HE)

Yes, I think I can (staying in current workplace for foreseeable future). When I first took it, I didn't really see it as a long-term thing. But now that I'm doing it, I do think it's doing the same sort of thing I was aiming to do, which is just helping people. And also there's a lot of opportunity for a profession. They're really well known for doing that, or just even leading you on to a better job, and even if it's a different company. But, yes, they have health and wellbeing programmes and stuff. So, it is quite related to what I want to do anyway. So, yes, I could see myself being there long-term (Female, Psychology graduate, Scottish HE)

Integrating graduates were the furthest ahead in their career development since graduating. They had made smoother transitions into the labour market and not been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 job market context. This was partly because they had found employment before they had graduated or were working in fields which had been minimally impacted (for example, civil service, teaching, finance). These graduates had built up a significant career profile in the year since graduating which they perceived to have added significant value to their graduate profile and provide them with a clearer and well-defined graduate identity. The follow-up interviews revealed that these graduates were making significant in-roads in their career progression and developing significant forms of early professional identity that was providing them with a stronger sense of self-authorship and ownership over their early careers.

So, I was really keen to continue that work in my next posting because I really, really enjoyed it and also understanding how governments interact with external contractors and how to work with them along with multiple other people each with their own interests I find really interesting and it's a real challenge (Female, Politics graduate, English HE)

Continued engagement in careers services over a year on from graduating

Around two-third of respondents (65.3%) reported that they had engaged with their careers services and those who did not engage with their careers service were asked to report on some of the main reasons why they chose not to. These confirm findings from the previous survey and reveal that those who had been successful often perceived there being less need to engage in career services if they

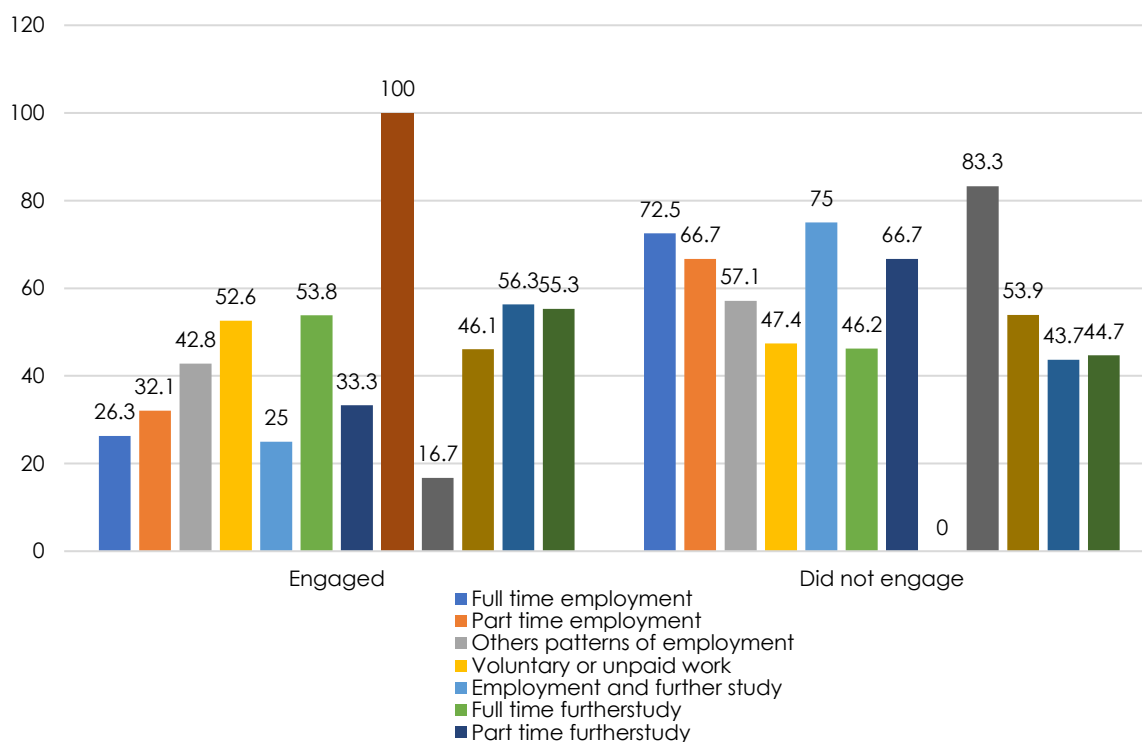
were confident about finding employment. We cannot infer fully that no value is given to careers support by successfully employed graduates, more that the frequency of sought support may be less, and careers viewed as a way of supporting already advanced planned job applications and decisions. The interviews confirmed that those who had successfully secured employment soon after graduating referred to, especially when applying for graduate schemes.

The most highly reported reason was that respondents were either in employment or did not see the need to engage. The next most widely reported reasons concerned knowledge of careers support. 22.2% of graduates felt that career services would no longer support them after graduation whilst 21.7% did not know what support was available. These are potentially significant findings if graduates who may benefit from additional support one year on graduating feel there are no or limited opportunities to gain further support, or how to go about re-connecting with their institution's career service.

There is a statistically significant correlation between current job outcome and engaging with universities' careers services¹¹⁶. As with the first survey, graduates that were unemployed but due to start work (56.3%) and unemployed were most likely to engage with careers services (55.3%). Other groups that indicated that they were most likely to engage with careers services were those in full-time further study (53.8%) and those in voluntary or unpaid work (52.6%). The groups of graduates that were least likely to engage with careers services were those in the other group (such as those travelling or caring for someone) (16.7%), those in employment and further study (25%), and those in full-time employment (26.3%). This indicates that while careers services remain valuable to graduates, they do tend to engage more when they are looking for employment.

¹¹⁶ To a 99% correlation.

Table 13 Have you engaged with your careers service at all since you completed your most recent degree? (%)



The open codes responses provide some further insight on how graduates perceived the value and efficacy of career services and other forms of support.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This research was conducted at a significant transitional period in the lives of those surveyed and interviewed in this study, as well as a significant period of social change. The challenges for graduates navigating pathways from HE into employment have been played out during a very challenging labour market context over the past 18 months. This research has shown that the context over that period had a discernible impact on the career prospects and post-HE experiences- real and perceived – of significant amounts of recent graduates. Whilst the data points to positive outcomes for a proportion of the graduate population, mainly those who had managed to secure suitable employment before or just after graduation, it also reported widespread challenges 15 months on from graduation. These concerned the continued decline in appropriate openings, delayed entry into chosen field, lack of opportunities for training, other forms of work-related learning, being able to capitalise fully on early gains in their perceived employability and emerging career development before they graduated. The study revealed that COVID-19 was perceived to be a

significantly disruptive influence in accessing the forms of employment which graduates had sought during their time in university, compounding long-standing issues about a congested, overwhelmed graduate market, recruitment squeezes, and building crucial networks that may enhance access to potential job openings.

These challenges were reported to be most pronounced for graduates who were currently unemployed, under-employed or who felt that their current work was not properly aligned to their future goals. Over a year on from graduating, they were likely to report adverse impact on their well-being, confidence, and motivation, indicating some concerning signs of initial labour market scarring and perceived disruption to the initial goals and aspirations they had formed before graduation. There was a widespread concern over a potential cohort disadvantage and competing with newer cohorts of graduates who would graduate in a period of potential economic recovery. The qualitative data indicated that graduates often perceived much value in gaining initial work experience that was aligned to employment goals. Even in cases where this was short-term, there was a strong sense that once they had achieved substantial labour market experience that enhanced their profiles, further opportunities might proliferate into improved job market scope. Gaining this experience for many continued to prove challenging, however, and many were continuing with part-time employment since their time at university which was perceived to add value to their longer-term prospects.

The research points to differential impacts based on graduates' profile characteristics. Graduates with disabilities reported greater challenges in accessing job opportunities, experienced greater challenges in finding employment, felt most impacted by the pandemic, and not supported by employers. Likewise, arts & humanities graduates reported the most difficulty in finding employment and felt that the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively impacted their careers. Female graduates were more likely to be less confident about their current careers and career prospects. While there was not a statistically significant difference in employment outcomes, non-British White graduates reported to be the most satisfied with their current outcomes and Black British graduates the least satisfied. Similarly, those graduates whose parents were graduates were more satisfied with their employment outcomes than first-generation graduates and more confident about their futures. Younger graduates (21 to 26 years old), and graduates from the year 2020, were the groups to more likely report that COVID-19 had impacted their employment search and confidence in their careers. Graduates from research-intensive universities and PhD graduates felt the most confident about what they could achieve in their careers and in developing transferrable skills.

Engagement with career services remained variable 15 months into graduation. However, those that were in unemployment or underemployment were the most likely to engage in careers services after graduation. The implications are that those in established careers do not feel like they need to further engage with careers services.

Implications of this research

This research raises significant implications for improving graduate employment prospects not only in the context of a pandemic-hit economy, but also more widely, as the study was completed following a challenging decade for those leaving HE. Debates about graduates' employment outcomes have often been defined in terms of their 'employability', how 'skilled' graduates are, and how effectively they can draw on such skills. Very few graduates in the current study framed their employment prospects in such ways. Instead, a widespread concern centred on how much demand there was for their skills and how this demand would shape the distribution of opportunities for recent graduates entering a weakened labour market. A related concern was the extent to which they would be supported, rather than penalised, by employers in gaining employment perceived to be meaningful, aligned to their profiles and of value. The current cohort of graduates (including those who graduated in 2021) occupy a position in-between more established pre-2019 graduates who have been able to develop their careers without the salient disruptions of the pandemic and future graduates who may enter employment during a more favourable economic upturn. Yet, the indications are that the effects of the current economy will endure for some time and this requires effective policy frameworks to enable recent and future graduates to be supported when entering the labour market at a time of heightened uncertainty.

The research raises significant policy implications for current and future generations of graduates, which have wider relevance for the future of the graduate labour market, namely HE institutions, employers, and other potential stakeholders who have most interest in the future of a high-skilled economy.

HE institutions

The value of engaging in career development opportunities needs to be promoted widely when students are in HE so that they are made fully aware of the importance of career development opportunities from an early stage during their HE study.

Careers services are a central part of universities and the importance of their role in supporting graduates has become even more so over the past 18 months. It is important that HE careers services are further resourced to be able to provide sustained and targeted support for students and graduates most affected by the current climate. This extends to providing additional training and support for practitioners and sharing good practice across the HE sector, including professional development and training for practitioners to be fully equipped in supporting future graduate cohorts.

Career services need to monitor and fully engage with less advantaged groups found in this study, in particular disabled graduates, during and after university, and continue to develop strategic support

channels to support those graduates experiencing the greatest barriers in realising their future employment.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) and programmes need to continue to develop high impact forms of employer engagement in ways that enable students to develop work-related learning experience that empowers them and enhances their profiles. The offering of internship opportunities as part of most degree programmes, sustained over at least one academic semester, may act as a significant bridge to future employment.

It is important that continued dialogue is maintained with graduates after they have graduated, including developing ways of tracking graduates' employment situations six to twelve months following graduation. This needs to engage with graduates' current employment situations, including their perceived career challenges and needs, with a view of continuing to support them into the future. This will be valuable to graduates who continue to struggle to find suitable jobs and require not only continued career support but also motivation and focus.

Active mentorship, including the use of graduate alumni who may be able to provide bespoke and targeted career development for graduates struggling to enter the labour market, should be promoted for supporting graduates.

The model of careers fairs may need to shift to more programme-specific engagement and be conducted over a longer timescale so that students can develop more meaningful connection with target employers. It may be valuable for careers services to run development programmes on gaining most out of such fairs so that these are of value to more than a few proactive or confident graduates.

Related to this, graduate alumni from diverse programmes and occupational settings should be included in career support programmes. This may be important in making graduates more aware of hidden job areas or markets which may continue to be unknown to graduates.

Employers

Employers need to provide reliable and accurate information about job profiles and how suitable these are for graduate entrants. Opacity in job descriptions needs to be minimised so that graduates are more knowledgeable about their suitability and matching for these jobs and how they may align their profiles, skills, and achievements to them.

Training and work experience pathways need to be provided to graduates who are struggling to find suitable employment opportunities six months after graduating. The offering of a structured paid internship in a field aligned to a graduates' profile may significantly enhance early prospects by adding substantial experience to their profiles and strengthening their industry contact bases.

The roll-out of the Kickstart programme for those aged 16-24 includes recent graduates, but this needs to be firmly regulated to ensure that the work tasks given to graduates meet their skills level and genuinely boost employment prospects. Regional specialist providers may need to work closer with targeted local HE suppliers and specific programmes to ensure graduates are made aware of these opportunities. This also needs to be extended to those of mature age (over 25-year-old graduates) who may equally benefit from such programmes.

Employers will also need to continue to commit to robust forms of professional development and support for recent graduates once they have entered employment, including support for those continuing to work from home and ensure their well-being.

Public policy makers

Despite the significant challenges of the current pandemic labour market, many graduates continue to report a range of benefits of studying in HE as well as sets of values towards working life. There is a need to reframe the value of HE and to work through how it may be repurposed as we move into unprecedented economic and social times. Students clearly need to be fully engaged in their development as future professional employees and look to maximise their chances of fulfilling their employment potential well before they have graduated. This can sit alongside a broader, more holistic view of the value that HE can provide, including developing values towards future working life, developing sustainable pathways, social entrepreneurship, and enhancing new technological innovations within a changing economy.

Related to this, the current framing of 'graduate outcomes' and 'employability' metrics may not be particularly helpful in this context and largely reinforce an instrumental view of HE's role in the economy and society. Likewise, separating the functions of disciplinary learning from future employment development may be less pertinent in a current period which is far-removed from 'elite' HE when the graduate labour market was more buoyant and well-defined. However, likewise, the notion that all is done to maximise graduates' employability potentially risks alienating both students and academics as the language connotes performative values. A broader notion of student and graduate development may be needed so that graduates are able to find better synchronicity between their academic studies, career, and personal development before entering the job market.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Approach to survey analysis

The second survey data contained 760 participants. However, 73 of the participants had a significant amount of missing or unusable data, so those participants were excluded. This brought the number of valid survey participants to 687. Though this was reduced to 611, as 76 surveys were completed multiple times by the same participants. A further participant was excluded as they had not completed the first survey, leaving the final number of participants at 610.

The analysis of the data began with bivariate correlations. Since most of the data is categorical and ordinal, this was done by determining Spearman's Rho using SPSS. It was assumed that any two variables would not have a statistically significant relationship as the null hypothesis. However, if after running the bivariate tests, there was a correlation to at least 95% confidence interval then the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that the chance the relationship between the two variables found to be random or based on statistical error to be 5% or less.

Appendix B. Aggregate academic disciplines

The following table shows how the composite academic disciplines were categorised into aggregate academic discipline areas.

Medical Sciences	STEM	Social Sciences	Business and Law	Arts & Humanities	Combined
Medicine & dentistry	Agriculture & related subjects	Social studies	Law	Mass communications & documentations	Combined
Subjects allied to medicine	Physical sciences	Education	Business & administrative studies	Languages	
Biological sciences	Mathematical sciences			Historical & philosophical studies	
Veterinary science	Computer sciences			Creative arts & design	
	Engineering & technology Architecture, building & planning				

Appendix C. Institution cluster explanation

The following table shows which institutions were represented in the survey and which cluster they were included.

Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Cluster 5
University of Cambridge	Heriot-Watt University	Abertay University	Edge Hill University	Open University (England)
University of Oxford	LSE	Aberystwyth University	Plymouth Marjon University	Open University (Northern Ireland)
	Newcastle University	Manchester Met. University	Wrexham Glyndwr University	University College of Estate Management
	Queen Mary (University of London)	Northumbria University	York St Johns University	University of the Arts London
	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Bradford		Writtle University College
	University of Sheffield	University of Chichester		
	UCL	University of East London		
	University of Essex	University of Gloucestershire		
	University of Exeter	University of Hertfordshire		

	University of Glasgow	University of Northampton		
	University of Reading	University of Plymouth		
	University of Southampton	University of South Wales		
	University of Strathclyde	University of Sunderland		

APPENDIX D – SURVEY QUESTIONS

Follow up survey - The impact of Covid-19 on recent graduates' career decisions and outcomes

1. Information for participants

This is the second survey in the project exploring the ways in which Covid-19 has affected recent graduates' career decisions, behaviours and outcomes. We plan to use the data to inform policy and provide graduates with the right support to help them achieve their post-graduation goals. We also aim to feedback findings to employers to improve graduates' access to employment and job opportunities.

Graduating into a pandemic must be immensely challenging and you may not have achieved what you hoped to achieve after leaving university but it is important to recognise that you are still developing positive attributes like agility, digital literacy, communication and adaptability - perhaps without even realising it. Your careers service is there to support you, so please do get in touch with them.

Are there any risks involved?

There are minimal risks to taking part in this study. The research will ensure that sensitive or personal issues are handled with due care and this includes minimising any discomfort you may feel when participating in this research. This also extends to respecting your right to withdraw from the study should you wish.

If you would like any further information about your participation in the research, including about how your data will be used and how you can request that your data is deleted or amended, then please [read this participant information sheet](#) or contact the project lead, Dr Michael Tomlinson (m.b.tomlinson@soton.ac.uk).

Do you agree with the following statements? I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study. I understand that only the research

team will have access to my personal data and all reporting of data will be fully anonymised and I will not be identified in any project dissemination. I give permission for my anonymised survey data to be stored and deposited as part of the UK Data Archive as specified in the Participant Information Sheet I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time for any reason without my participation rights being affected. *

Yes

No

**What is your User ID number?
This is the 9-digit number in your email invite. ***

2. Section 2. My experiences of job searching and recruitment

Which of the following best describes where you feel you are in your employment/education situation right now? Choose one option. *

I'm very far away from where I want to be

I've made some progress towards where I want to be

I'm not too far from where I want to be

I'm more or less where I want to be

Which of the following best describes what you are doing at the moment? *

3. Questions about your employment

Thinking about your current main employment, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

If you are employed in more than one role, just think about the one you consider your main employment. This could be the job you spent the most hours working per week or the one that more closely aligns to your career goals. *

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

My current work fits in with my future plans

My current work is meaningful

I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current work

I am currently doing a job that is suitable for a graduate

I am developing relevant skills that will be valuable for future employment

I am fulfilling the potential I had when I graduated

I am developing transferrable skills that will help me in the future

It is giving me confidence about what I can achieve in my future employment

I am experiencing job satisfaction and fulfilment in my current work

I am developing my profile in way that may makes me attractive to other employers

Do you believe you are currently employed in a job that aligns with your career aspirations? *

Yes

No

4. Questions about work that does not align with your career aspirations

To what extent would you agree with the following statements about being employed in a job that does not align with your career aspirations? *

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

It negatively affected my employment outlook

It is a necessary step to future employment

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

It felt like something that could become long-term

It affected my confidence about what I can offer to employers

It affected my wellbeing and/or morale

It made me concerned that my skills were not going to be valued

It made me question the value of my degree

It gave me a chance to develop experience and new skills

It gave me the chance to reflect on what I want from my career

5. Questions about your further study

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the further study you are currently undertaking? *

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

My current study fits with my future plans

My current study is meaningful

I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current study

I feel that what my further study will help with my job prospects

I am pleased to be studying rather than having to look for employment

I chose further study because of concerns about my immediate job prospects

Further study was always a part of my longer-term career plans

My current study is at a higher level than my previous degree

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

My current study is in the same field or subject as my previous degree

6. Questions about your experience of being unemployed

To what extent would you agree with the following statements about being unemployed? *

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

It negatively affected my employment outlook

It is a necessary step to future employment

It felt like something that could become long-term

It affected my confidence about what I can offer to employers

It affected my wellbeing and/or morale

It made me concerned that my skills were not going to be valued

It made me question the value of my degree

It gave me a chance to develop experience and new skills

It gave me the chance to reflect on what I want from my career

7. Questions about the impact of Covid-19 on the graduate jobs market

How would you describe your situation since you completed the last survey? *

My situation has improved

My situation has not changed

My situation has got worse

How far do you agree with the following statements? The Covid-19 situation has: *

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree Strongly agree

Significantly damaged my short-term job prospects

Significantly damaged my long-term job prospects

Made me think differently about my future

Affected the types of jobs I have targeted

Made me less confident about my future employment

Resulted in greater challenges finding employment than I expected

Had a detrimental impact on graduates' employment prospects

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about graduate jobs since you completed the last survey?

If the statement does not apply to you, for example if you have not applied for graduates jobs since the last survey, please leave blank.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree Strongly agree

I have found it a challenge to find graduate jobs I want to apply for

I have noticed a fall in the number of available opportunities

I have felt supported by employers during the recruitment process

I have the sufficient experience that employers require

I have found the recruitment process challenging

I feel able to access different types of opportunities

I feel more optimistic about my employment prospects

I feel I am moving in the right direction

I am anxious about my employment prospects

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree or disagree Agree Strongly agree

I feel empowered to make my own career decisions

Since the last time you completed this survey, which of the following have you found most challenging? Please select up to 5. *

- Being able to access careers support and guidance
- Being able to market myself and what I can offer
- Finding help to make decisions about my career
- Gaining relevant experience that employers say they want
- Knowing what employers are looking for
- Knowing what I want to do/what my career aspirations are
- Knowing where to find careers support and guidance
- Knowing where to find relevant job opportunities
- Networking with people in my chosen field because of social restrictions
- Progressing in my career, in terms of role or salary
- Trying to adapt to new challenges in my current job
- Trying to stay motivated and focused
- Working remotely

Thinking about your longer-term job prospects, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? *

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

- I am confident about my longer-term career prospects
- I feel I will be able to find future employment that matched my skills and qualifications
- I feel I will be able to pursue a fulfilling future career
- I feel less certain about my longer-term career prospects

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

I am making good progress towards my long-term goals

OPTIONAL: Please share any comments on your employment situation since you completed the last survey.

8. Section 4: My engagement with my careers service

Have you engaged with your careers service at all since you completed your most recent degree? This could include using their online resources and jobs board, attending a one-to-one appointment, attending a workshop etc *

Yes

No

If you have not engaged with your careers service, why not? Select all that apply

I did not need to

I already have a job

I did not know there was a careers service

I did not know they would support me after graduation

I did not know what I want to do/what my career goals are

I did not know what support is available

I did not know how to access the support I need

I sought support from somewhere else

I am too far away from where the careers service is based

I haven't had the time

I haven't had the motivation

It hasn't been a priority for me

I've felt too nervous or anxious to seek support

I don't know what I want to do or want from a career

I didn't think they could help me because I am an international graduate

I didn't think they could help me because I am a mature graduate

I didn't think they could help me because of the type of jobs I am interested in

I didn't think they could help me because I am self-employed or want to start my own business

They are too busy

Other (please specify):

What kind of careers service support will be most helpful to you right now? Select up to five. *

Help researching career options

Help to clarify my career preferences/goals

Support to identify and evaluate possible career options

Support to help me understand my skills

Guidance on how to develop different skills

Help identifying opportunities to develop my skills

Help to understand what employers are looking for

Support to help me gain the confidence to approach employers

Advice on how to market myself to employers

Advice on how to approach the recruitment process

Support to look for jobs

Help with my CV, cover letter or application

Guidance on completing psychometric tests

Help with interviews or assessment centres

Advice on working remotely in a graduate job

Advice on how to progress in my career

Help to navigate challenges at work

Guidance on changing careers/jobs

Help to find a mentor

Other (please specify):

OPTIONAL: Is there anything you would like to tell us about your experiences since completing the previous survey?

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