

# Degrees of Insecurity

Graduate employment issues in Scotland



# Degrees of Insecurity

By Matthew McLister

Citizens Advice Scotland and its member bureaux form Scotland's largest independent advice network. CAB advice services are delivered using service points throughout Scotland, from the islands to city centres.

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to ensure that individuals do not suffer through lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, or of the services available to them, or through an inability to express their need effectively

## **and equally**

to exercise a responsible influence on the development of social policies and services, both locally and nationally.

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# Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
Key findings .....	4
Recommendations.....	5
INTRODUCTION .....	6
CONTEXT.....	7
THE UNEMPLOYED GRADUATE.....	9
THE UNDER-EMPLOYED GRADUATE.....	11
SUPPORT TO FIND EMPLOYMENT THROUGHOUT EDUCATION .....	14
Careers advice at school.....	14
Careers advice at university .....	16
Internships.....	21
SUPPORT TO FIND EMPLOYMENT AFTER GRADUATION .....	24
The Jobcentre .....	24
Government work schemes.....	26
ADVICE TO CURRENT STUDENTS.....	28
CONCLUSIONS .....	30
APPENDIX 1: SURVEY RESPONDENTS.....	31
REFERENCES.....	33

# Executive Summary

In April 2012, CAS launched an online survey aimed at recent graduates who are unemployed, have struggled to find a graduate level job or have faced difficulty since leaving university. The survey aimed to explore issues that are affecting graduates who have suffered from unemployment, underemployment or who have struggled in some form since graduating. The survey featured a range of questions on issues that affect graduates including; the support they have received in finding employment, internships, attitudes to the government and employers, as well as what advice they give to current students to increase their employment prospects.

The number of graduates has increased over the decades but the number of graduate level positions has not kept pace, particularly since the recession hit the UK in 2008. Many graduates can therefore find themselves unemployed, in a lower skilled position than they might have expected to achieve with a University education, or in a position of financial insecurity.

The destination of a graduate matters not just to the individual but also to other workers. Many graduates enter jobs at a different level or field than they are qualified for, or undertake part-time employment which can have the effect of displacing other workers down and out of the job market. The problems experienced by graduates can therefore cause ripples throughout the wider workforce.

The problems that graduates experience in employment can also have an impact on the future health of the economy. Graduates who fail to find employment in their chosen field may not develop the skills and experience gained through work to carry on from a retiring work force. The struggles of graduates may therefore lead to a displacement of skills in the economy.

This report examined the support that is available to graduates before, during and after they leave university. The transition from full-time education into employment is a crucial time for a graduate as the problems that they may experience can affect their employment prospects for a number of years. Their success in making this transition can be closely related to the support and guidance that the individual received at school, from the university careers service, during their degree, from internships, and from the Jobcentre if they found themselves unemployed. This report found many instances of good practice in providing support and guidance to students and graduates, but also identified areas which could be improved.

This report outlines a number of ways in which better support can be provided to graduates to make a successful transition into the workforce. Failure to do so will impact not just on the graduates themselves, but on other workers and on the future health of the economy.

## Key findings in the survey:

- A large proportion of survey respondents have been unable to find a graduate level job, or even an entry level job in their chosen field.
- High levels of frustration and disillusionment amongst graduates that the time, money and effort they have spent obtaining a degree is 'wasted' when they cannot secure employment in a relevant field, and that their perception is that degree level education is not the route to higher employability that it is commonly perceived to be.
- Support systems aimed at helping students get into employment were often found to be unhelpful. From school through university, and beyond, many respondents noted a lack of focus on:
  - alternatives to going to university
  - general employability skills and experience that will be required in the work place
  - exploring the transferrable skills which students have gained at university.
- Just over half the survey respondents found university careers advice services useful, but many felt that it was not advertised well enough by the university and that its usefulness would be enhanced if students were encouraged to access it earlier in their university career.
- The majority of respondents stated that Jobcentres were unhelpful in their search for employment, noting that they are not set up to deal with graduates, and with some feeling that they had been forced into applying for positions which they are over qualified for and may have little relevance to their degrees.
- Government schemes such as Community Jobs Scotland were welcomed by survey respondents, with some suggesting schemes should be extended to cover those beyond the 18-24 age group.
- Unpaid internships was identified as a concern, with survey respondents concerned about lack of regulation, and accessibility in that they predominantly benefit graduates with alternative means of support.

## Recommendations:

- CAS encourages that every school pupil should continue to be encouraged to explore and appreciate skills for life, learning and work through the Curriculum for Excellence
- That every school pupil should continue to be encouraged to make full use of the careers advice offered to them, both in person and virtually, to explore their individual career prospects
- CAS believes that the best practice of embedding the positivity of careers advice at school age should be continued so that current learners are aware how to engage with careers advice even when they have left education, for example with the National Careers Service <sup>1</sup>
- That University careers services engage more directly with students, liaising with university departments regarding employability skills.
- That careers services be available to graduates for longer than 2 years after graduation, with a new six year minimum (the Office for National Statistics defines a recent graduate as within up to six years).
- That more emphasis be put into employability initiatives at universities, allowing for greater interaction between students, university departments and employers.
- That universities ensure that employability skills are a core part of course curriculums, with a focus on how to create a more employable graduate.
- That universities continue to interact with local employers, with talks and workshops guiding students into an industry, advising them what steps they should be taking to become more employable.
- CAS encourages employers to sign up to internship schemes that allow equal access for all graduates to develop skills and employability
- CAS encourages universities to continue to engage with employers and promote internships to students and graduates.
- That Jobcentre Plus works with AGCAS Scotland to understand the job requirements of graduates. A referral system should be in place to ensure that graduates are directed to the most appropriate source of advice for their needs without affecting their entitlement to benefits.
- That the Community Jobs Scotland employment scheme be extended in greater numbers to those over the age of 25.

# Introduction

Citizens Advice Scotland and its CAB offices form Scotland's largest independent advice network. Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) is the umbrella organisation for Scotland's network of 81 Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) offices. These bureaux deliver frontline advice services throughout nearly 200 service points across the country, from the city centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh to the Highlands, Islands and rural Borders communities.

There are 2,200 volunteers in the service who provide almost 13,000 hours of their time each and every week. Paid staff provide a further 15,200 hours of work each week in management, support, administration and specialist advice work. There are citizens advice bureaux in 30 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland, making the network the only independent advice and advocacy body in the country with truly national on the ground coverage.

Around one in ten clients that approach a citizens advice bureau for advice are under the age of 25. Almost a third of clients in this age group are unemployed compared to 18% of all clients, while employment issues make up one in seven of their advice enquiries compared to one in 15 for all clients. Compared to the average, clients in this age group were twice as likely to experience problems with pay or dismissal.

Anecdotally, bureaux report that there has been an increase in the number of students and graduates who are reporting in-work and out-of-work employment problems. In response to this trend, Citizens Advice Scotland launched an online survey aimed at recent graduates who are unemployed, have struggled to find a graduate level job or have faced financial difficulty since leaving university. A total of 954 graduates responded to the survey, sharing their opinions on a range of different issues that have affected them.

The survey aimed to explore issues that are affecting graduates who have suffered from unemployment, underemployment or who have struggled in some form since graduating. The survey featured a range of questions on issues that affect graduates including; the support they have received in finding employment, internships, attitudes to the government and employers, as well as what advice they give to current students to increase their employment prospects. The report outlines the views of graduates on the support to find employment that is available to them and makes a series of recommendations on how this support could be improved to help graduates into suitable employment and reach their full potential.

# Context

Since 2008 unemployment rates of 16-24 year-olds in Scotland has risen from 55,000 to 100,000.<sup>2</sup> In a bid to tackle this, Angela Constance MSP was appointed as the first Scottish Government Minister for Youth Employment in December 2011. With the creation of this office came a commitment to helping 16-24 year-olds into work which was published in the January 2012 '*Youth Employment Strategy*' (the strategy).<sup>3</sup>

The strategy stated that young people deserved the opportunity to be able to put their "talent, enthusiasm and energy into sustainable and rewarding employment"<sup>4</sup> and the Scottish Government has pledged £30 million over the next three years towards achieving this overarching aim. The approach will be to provide opportunities for young people through a comprehensive programme of support encompassing work, education and training as well as a pledge to tackle the wider root causes of unemployment.

The major focus of effort is undoubtedly on 16-19 year-olds and embedding a culture of flexible learning and training opportunities in conjunction with employers. The theme of tackling the root causes of employment also relate in most part to this group, with targeting towards those disengaged from the learning process who are therefore more likely to end up long-term unemployed.<sup>5</sup>

Citizens Advice Scotland welcomes this commitment to young people but recognise that issues specific to graduates, graduate employment or the wider consequences of graduate underemployment to the economy are not broadly addressed. The strategy does not take or allocate responsibility for graduates as a group and in the course of the document, reference to 'graduates' as a specific group is only made once.<sup>6</sup>

The major responsibility for quantifying information about higher education sits with the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), who work to collate and disseminate information about Higher Education (HE) standards and experiences.<sup>7</sup> A large part of their work in relation to university education is the annual *Destination of Leavers of Higher Education Survey* which HESA administer through universities, then collate and publish.

The survey is taken 6 months after graduation and explores elements of graduates' progress in work such as destination, industry sectors and starting salaries. The most recent survey, published in July 2011 (featuring the information of 2010 graduates), revealed that Scotland had the highest rate of 'positive destinations' in the UK: 92.2% of Scottish university graduates had entered further education or were in employment gained as a direct result of their qualification compared to the UK average of 90.4%.<sup>8</sup>

While this information is very useful, without any policy element to their work it



is not the responsibility of HESA to provide a contextual voice to their statistics. As a consequence, the figures may seem more positive than at first glance; the concept of 'employment' is not separated or defined between full-time, part-time or internship and the percentage of positive destinations is not separated between employment and further study.

The HESA data is the most comprehensive in relation to graduate destinations but this way of reporting makes it difficult to draw accurate conclusions about how graduates as a group interact with the job market and economy. Such information is not held in one comprehensive source and yet could bear significantly on other groups.

The destination of a graduate matters not just to the individual but also to other workers. In the short term, job displacement is a very real threat when graduates enter employment not in line with the level of job their education has prepared them for, therefore pushing others without similar qualifications down and out of the job market. This undoubtedly ripples through the wider workforce in every sector.

When destinations do not coincide with the qualifications of graduates the effect is on the wider economy. In the longer term, skills displacement is a threat when graduates cannot find full-time work or any employment in their field and so will lack the skills, experience and depth of knowledge gained through work to carry on from a retiring work force. Both of these issues stem from the root cause of underemployment.<sup>9</sup>

# The unemployed graduate

► **“I was unemployed for three months after graduating. I found it hard to even get a minimum wage job. My qualifications meant many places would not take me on as they assumed I would leave after a month or two for a better paid job.”**

**24 year old, 2009 graduate in Event Management & International Marketing.**

On graduating from university many graduates struggle to find work and the CAS survey found that the majority of respondents (56.4%) were unemployed at some stage following graduation. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures from the final quarter of 2011 show that unemployment rates amongst the most recent graduates in the UK (those who had graduated within two years) was at 18.9% - up from a 2007 pre-recession low of 10%.<sup>10</sup>

The ONS also found that the longer the time period from graduation, the lower the percentage of unemployment,<sup>11</sup> which fits with the findings of the survey.

**Fig. 1: Total period of unemployment since graduation among survey respondents**

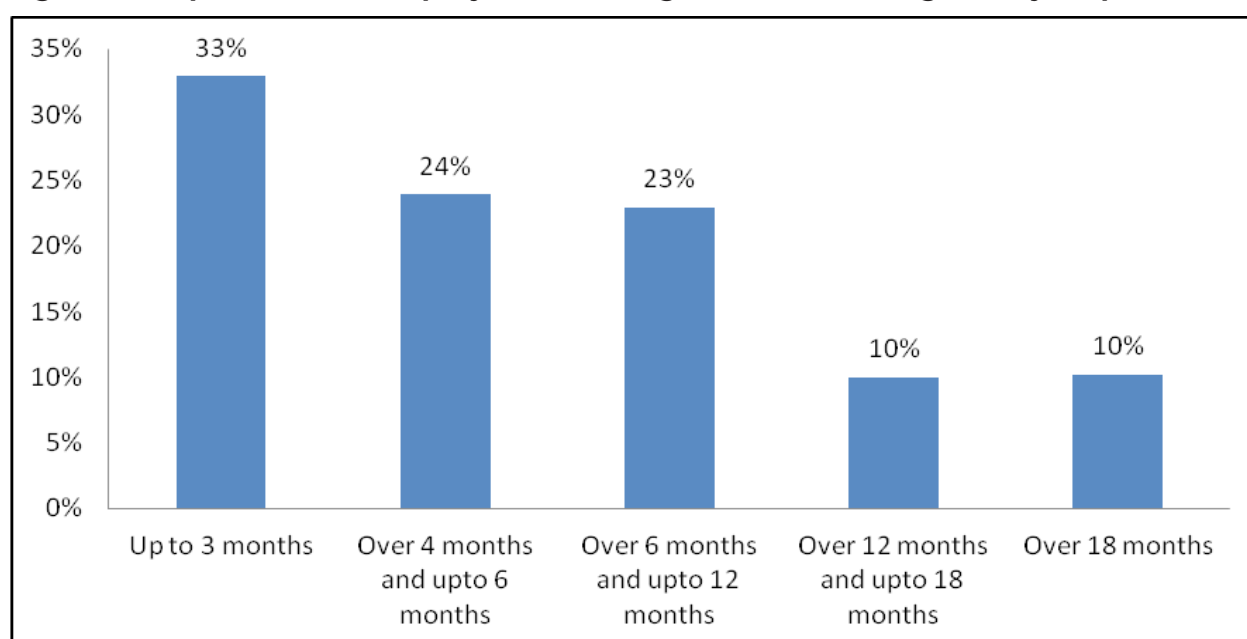


Figure 1 shows the total duration of unemployment following graduation among the 56.4% of respondents of our survey who experienced unemployment directly following graduation.

The ONS figures for unemployed graduates reached a peak of 20.7% in 2009 and this figure is now experiencing a downward turn.<sup>12</sup> In addition the employment rates amongst graduates are higher than non-graduates, with statistics for the final quarter of 2011 showing that 86% of all graduates were in employment,

compared with 72.3% of non-graduates.<sup>13</sup> On the surface this would seem to be a positive statement of confidence in the higher education system and the status of graduates. However, these figures do not take account of the graduates who are employed but not in the job level or field they expected their University education would bring them.

Our survey revealed a theme of frustration amongst respondents at the lack of opportunity for them to fulfil the potential of their education. Much of this frustration related to the fact that they were questioning how useful their degree was in today's job market.

▶ **“The general vibe of the media, my peers and tutors is that the market for jobs is bleak and it shows no sign of improving. It's really disheartening after investing so much time in education. This is particularly difficult when the degree you have obtained is primarily focused in one professional area.”**

**23 year old, 2009 graduate in Law**

▶ **“I feel I am losing all hope in getting a job using my degree. I am losing confidence in myself, my knowledge, skills and also the job market.”**

**22 year old, 2010 graduate in Retailing**

Student bodies such as the National Union of Students are concerned about graduate destinations but like HESA, it is not their responsibility to act on behalf of graduates. There is no one body which assumes that responsibility and in Scottish and UK Government policy, graduates are generally defined in terms of age (broadly falling into the 16-24 or 25+ ranges) and not by virtue of graduate status.

This means that the policies and support systems in place for employment are not well suited to the needs of graduates as a group. Further there is little ability for dialogue about the consequences of the employment, unemployment or underemployment of graduates may have on the wider working population.

# The underemployed graduate

- ▶ **“Although I have not been unemployed, I have been working in low skilled, low paid jobs to keep an income. I feel incredibly frustrated that after two law degrees I still can’t find the economic security I thought was guaranteed.”**

**24 year old, 2010 graduate in Law and Governance**

One of the issues facing graduates is the prospect of underemployment which can happen in two ways:

- A person being employed in a job for which they are over-qualified,
- A person working part-time in a job for which they are qualified.

Of respondents to the CAS survey, 24.8% declared themselves as underemployed which compares with the ONS figures from the final quarter of 2011 where 35.9% of those who had graduated from University in the last 6 years were in ‘lower-skilled jobs.’<sup>14</sup> In 2001, the ONS figure was 26.7%.<sup>15</sup>

Alongside the finding of underemployment in the CAS survey ran a notable level of frustration. Mostly this frustration was focused around respondents being unable to find a job matching their qualifications and aspirations

- ▶ **“I am still working in my 17-hour a week job stacking shelves I had when I was a student. I do not count in graduate unemployment statistics because of my job, but I did not get the job as a result of any of my qualifications and surely shelf-stacking is not what one would go to the time effort and expense of studying a PhD for at any rate.”**

**28 year old, 2011 graduate with a PhD in Art**

- ▶ **“Since graduating in 2009 all my jobs have been in cafes and bars and completely unrelated to anything I studied at University.”**

**24 year old, 2009 graduate in Criminological Studies**

While graduates understandably find underemployment frustrating, it is the wider consequences of the situation which are perhaps most worrying. When graduates’ employment prospects are displaced, this can have the effect of displacing the wider work force and economy in two main ways: job displacement and skills displacement.

The most immediate threat to the wider workforce is as a result of job displacement where graduates fill positions at a lower entry level than they might have expected with their qualifications. This causes a chain reaction where those who would have filled such jobs are pushed down the job market and ultimately those with the least qualifications are pushed out of employment opportunities. Job displacement can happen at levels of experience, in some cases halting the promotion prospects of

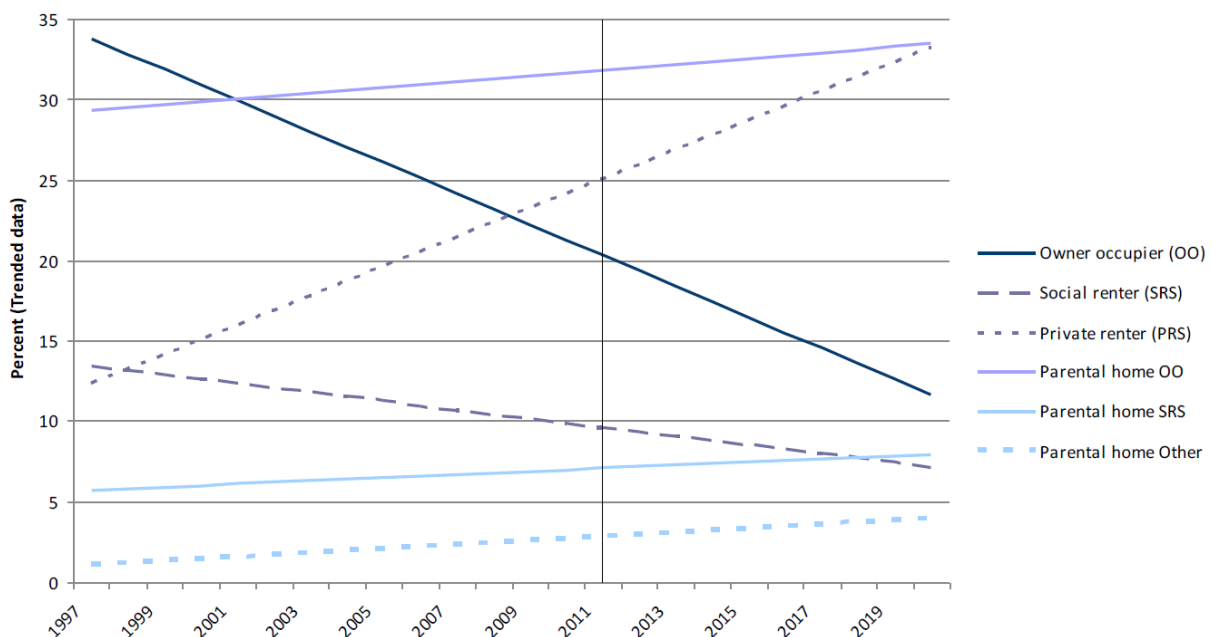
an employee by superseding years of service with qualifications and in other cases, denying opportunities to other young people who hold aspirations within that industry but lack qualifications.

An ultimate consequence of job displacement is the prospect of skills displacement where graduates will lack the depth of experience and breadth of ‘on the job’ knowledge to assume responsibility from an aging workforce. When graduates become employed in sectors other than that for which they are qualified, or when they enter prolonged periods of part time work, the potential to gain experience from a career is lost.

Using an annual population survey, the report *A stalled generation? Transitions in adulthood in Scotland Today*, prepared by ScotCen Social Research for Project Scotland, showed that there are a growing number of young adults taking part time work. In the 16-29 age group those in part time work increased from 27.3% in 2007/08, to 33.7% in 2010/11.<sup>16</sup> The report also shows there has been an increase in short term contracts, which cause a lack of financial security and can result in slower progression to independent adult life.<sup>17</sup> The consequences of this in the longer term may mean a skills deficit which could have an impact on many individual sectors and the economy as a whole.

Parallel to these wider economic effects, underemployment can also significantly impact on individuals. The transition to adulthood today differs remarkably from that of previous generations and, partly due to the economic recession, young adults find it more difficult to move into fully fledged adult life.

**Fig. 2: Housing tenure changes amongst young people in Scotland, 1997-2020**



From Consultation on a Strategy for the Private Rented Sector, APS Group Scotland <sup>18</sup>

Since the beginning of the recession, there has been a rise in young adults moving back to their family home after University, and the average age of first time house buyers has risen by three years to age 36.<sup>19</sup> The Joseph Rowntree Foundation have predicted that by 2020 the number of young people under 30 living at home will increase by approximately 550,000.<sup>20</sup>

As shown in Figure 2 (previous page), the Scottish Government estimates that by 2020 35% of young people will be renting from the private sector, compared to 25% renting today and 15% in 2002. Equally, the number of young owner occupiers is expected to fall from 21% in 2012 to 12% by 2020.<sup>21</sup>

# Support to find employment throughout education

- ▶ **“We were not really educated at all about the job market. They would tell you what your course could lead to, but they failed to mention that it is incredibly difficult to get those jobs without any work experience.”**

**23 year old, 2010 graduate in Computer Animation**

This chapter explores how well graduates felt they were supported towards employment before, during and after their studies. The first careers advice graduates received would normally have been from their schools.

## Careers advice at school

- ▶ **“At school I was encouraged to apply for university courses but not given the proper time or advice to think about what I really wanted to do.”**

**23 year old, 2010 graduate in Politics**

The CAS survey found that 59.9% of respondents said they had been ‘poorly advised’ about careers during school, with 18.7% even saying they had received no advice at all. Over 80% of graduates who took part in the survey were in their 20’s22 and so it follows that the experience of these graduates is typical of the then National Curriculum.

**Fig. 3: How well survey respondents felt they were advised by their school**

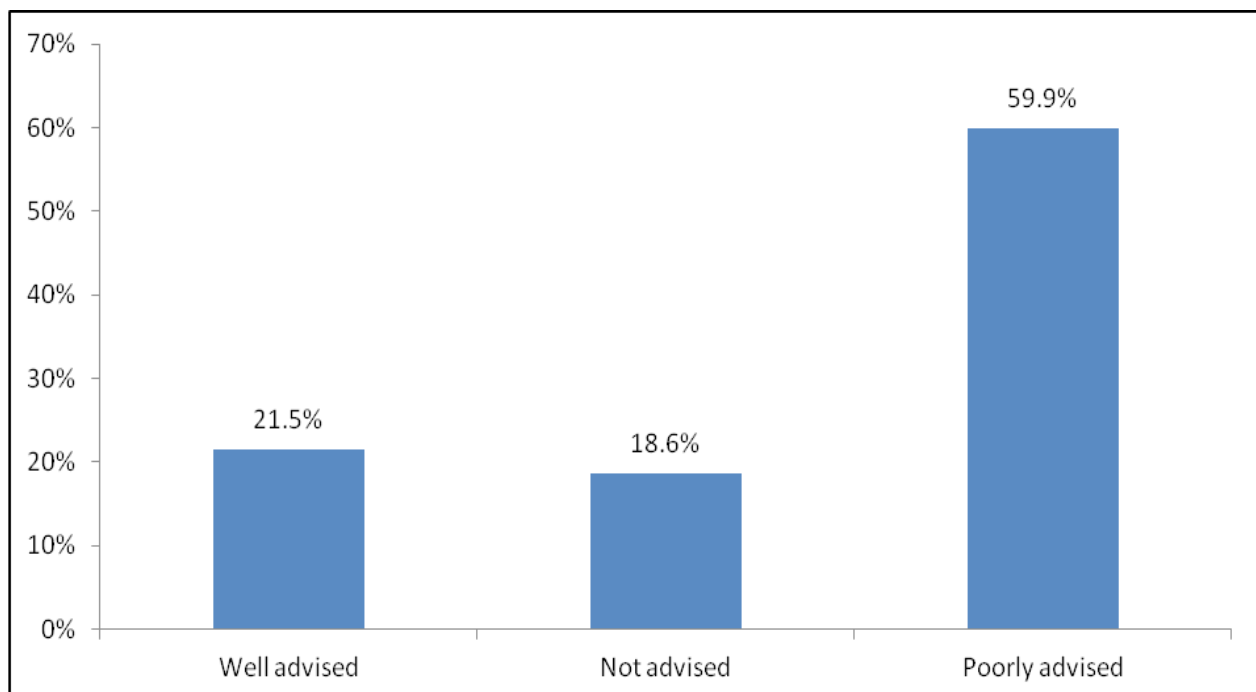


Figure 3 (previous page) shows that when asked how well they were advised at school about their future career prospects 59.9% of our survey respondents stated that they had been 'poorly advised.' A large number of respondents felt their experience was of schools being too focused on sending students to university, with little consideration of alternative options. Many respondents felt that their employment problems stemmed in part from a lack of careers advice in the time they were at school.

Many graduates went to University as they felt that there were no other real options available to them. The results of the survey show an expectation among graduates that a degree would be enough to gain employment in the future.

- ▶ **"I believe I was well-advised about what courses I could do at the various universities. However there was perhaps a less realistic focus on how I could use my degree after I achieved it. I just automatically assumed that I would step into a relevant, decent role which simply hasn't been the case."**

**24 year old, 2011 graduate in Journalism and Creative Writing**

- ▶ **"Other options seemed to be brushed aside, such as work experience, college and so forth. These are all other paths that can lead to a good, stable career. At school age, I was so focused on getting into University that there was very little discussed as to what my future career prospects would be."**

**22 year old, 2011 graduate in Music**

While the survey found a great strength of feeling towards the experiences of careers advice the respondents had at school age, the situation has now changed. Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), the new Scottish Curriculum, is an innovative and comprehensive approach to learning which 'aims to help every learner develop knowledge, skills and attributes for learning, life and work.'<sup>23</sup> CfE runs throughout school life from the ages of three to 18.

One of the embedded themes running throughout this time is 'Skills for Life, Skills for Learning and Skills for Work.'<sup>24</sup> Learning outcomes build from the earliest stages to senior level where students take part in work experience programmes and careers advice schemes (in person and virtually) with the aim of achieving a destination which is positive and sustained. Rather than the definition of 'positive destination' being applied predominantly to university leavers, CfE encourages positive destinations judged on the achievement plan of the individual.

This theme within CfE is a process which encompasses many elements of building skills towards work and appreciating the achievement of those skills, with



mindfulness of personal learning and career management. Embedding the thinking towards the world of work from such an early age means that school children should now experience the rounded careers advice which respondents to our survey felt was lacking. CAS are very supportive of this new approach to learning and believe it will resolve many of the issues with school career advice highlighted through our study.

## Recommendations

- CAS encourages that every school pupil should continue to be encouraged to explore and appreciate skills for life, learning and work through the Curriculum for Excellence
- Every school pupil should continue to be encouraged to make full use of the careers advice offered to them, both in person and virtually, to explore their individual career prospects
- CAS believes that the best practice of embedding the positivity of careers advice at school age should be continued so that current learners are aware of how to engage with careers advice even when they have left education, for example with the National Careers Service<sup>25</sup>

## Careers advice at university

This section examines the structures and schemes that are in place to help future graduates to be more informed and more employable, including careers advice from universities, support from university departments, and internship schemes.

### University careers advice services

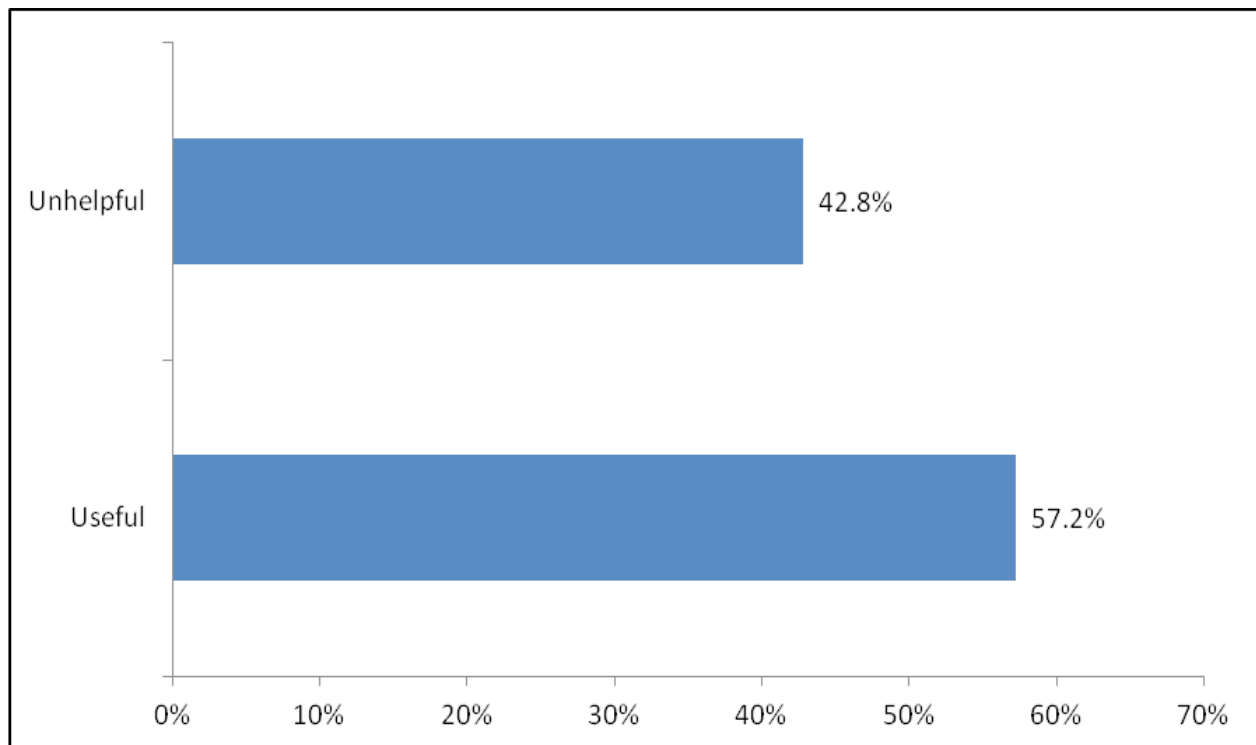
▶ **“The careers service was very good at mentoring and helping with CV and interview technique. They were also good at promoting and supporting positivity.”**

**46 year old, 2010 graduate in Geographical Information Science**

Positive comments outweighed negative ones in relation to University Careers Advice in the survey. Graduates were pleased with the support they received from this service, particularly help with their CV's, job applications and gaining confidence.

As shown in Figure 4 (over the page), when asked how useful they found their university careers service 57.2% of our survey respondents said they had found it useful, compared with 42.8% who said they found the service 'not helpful.'

**Fig. 4: How useful survey respondents found their university careers service**



▶ **“The Careers Service taught me how to present myself to employers and there are regular vacancies posted on the webpage, as well as regular lectures arranged with companies.”**

**24 year old, 2011 graduate in Journalism and Creative Writing**

▶ **“The careers service was very good at mentoring and helping with CV and interview technique. They were also good at promoting and supporting positivity.”**

**46 year old, 2010 graduate in Geographical Information Science**

However, many felt that the careers service was not advertised well enough by the university and those who used the service only did so late into their university career.

▶ **“Whilst I received valuable advice from the careers service, I didn’t feel as if the service was well advertised. Certainly nothing was said about it by our university department and it was only in the final term of my final year that I felt compelled to give them a visit.”**

**25 year old, 2009 graduate in History**

## Recommendations

- CAS recommends that university careers services engage more directly with students, liaising with university departments regarding employability skills.
- CAS recommends that careers services be available to graduates for longer than two years after graduation, with a new six year minimum (up to six years following graduation is the definition of a recent graduate).

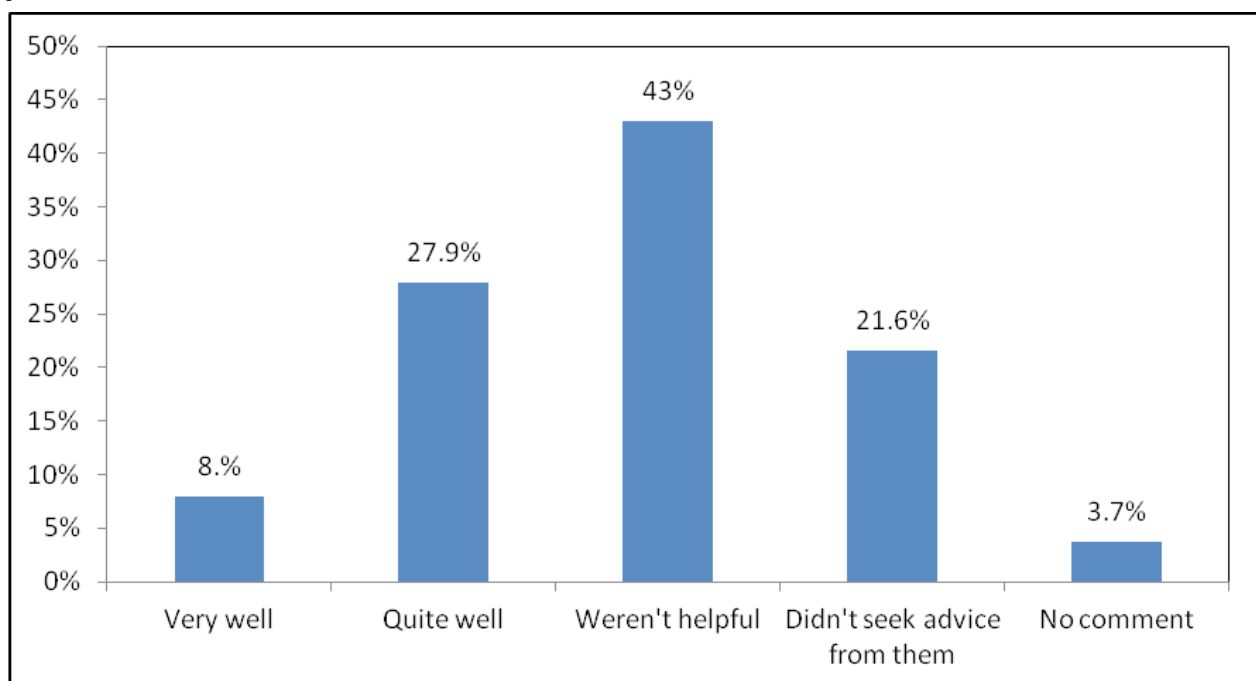
## University departments

- ▶ **“Too much coursework focuses on theory, with little to no practical, real-world application. Graduates are not prepared to face the demands and expectations of the current workplace, especially given how we must all do so much more with so much less.”**

**33 year old, 2010 graduate in Network Computing**

Our survey revealed concerns by graduates over the lack of preparation they received from their university courses to getting a job. Figure 5 shows that 43% of our survey respondents believed their university department/faculty wasn't helpful in preparing them for the job market, compared with 35.8% who said they had been prepared 'very well' or 'quite well', whilst 21.8% didn't seek advice.

**Fig. 5: How well respondents felt their university course had prepared them for the job market**



- ▶ **“As a ‘First in family’ student, I was quite clueless about university all the way through - probably partly due to not taking information in**

[or] not seeking it out but also partly to do with the lack of support in my department. No Careers advice was ever offered as part of our classes, nor were we encouraged to go to the Careers Service.”

25 year old, 2008 graduate in French and Spanish

- ▶ “I think academic departments are not focused on preparing students for the job market.”

27 year old, 2010 graduate in Geography

However, whilst the majority in our survey stated that they were disappointed with how their course prepared them for the working world, there were also positive responses and these are the experiences which we would like to be seen adopted across the board.

- ▶ “Guidance on job applications, CV writing, targeting future elective choices appropriate to your desired career path was provided from the first year of the course through to the last.”

26 year old, 2008 graduate in Aero-Mechanical Engineering

- ▶ “Previous successful students did give talks on their employment in my final year. Lecturers were always friendly and approachable and open to questions regarding employment.”

22 year old, 2011 graduate in Geography

Our survey shows a strong feeling amongst graduates that students should be given greater help in learning about their career prospects, and told how they can transfer their university skills into a work related environment.

## Examples of good practice

Organisations such as Universities Scotland and the National Union of Students (NUS) are trying to improve the employability of students. On 21 February 2012 Universities Scotland hosted an Employability Summit with the Financial Skills Partnership and Scottish Investment Operations. Here discussions were held on graduate employability between Scottish Higher Education Institutions and employer representatives. It was decided that more could be done to align curriculum to the needs of employers, and that there was more scope to explore how universities and employers could work together to help students in their career development.

The Student Skills project is a pilot programme being run by the NUS which will give students an award for the skills they have gained in extra-curricular activity at university. It is open to all student unions with NUS membership. The purpose of this is to help students gain employability skills and to create a consistent

UK wide approach to the recording, assessment and accreditation of student skills. The scheme will work with employers to decide what skills students should be learning to make them more employable and will work with a range of different private, public and voluntary organisations to help students achieve skills.<sup>26</sup>

Over the past few years several employability initiatives have been launched by universities across Scotland. Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) launched an initiative called Real WoRLD (Realising Work-Related Learning Diffusion) with the aim of enhancing students' professional skills, engaging with employers on a regular basis. Examples of projects within this initiative include entrepreneurial initiatives with Scottish Enterprise and participation by Law students in the Innocence Project, which seeks to overturn wrongful convictions. By 2015 GCU aims to have a work experience placement for all students.

Edinburgh Napier University has launched a Confident Futures Programme, whereby the university recruits professionals from a range of different employers. Students are then trained by these professionals and mentored by them, helping develop skills that can be taken into the workplace. The initiative is funded by the Big Lottery and is open to third and fourth year students.

Several cross-institutional initiatives exist which attempt to make students more employable. The first strand of the Learning to Work initiative ran between 2004 and 2011, with £4 million from the Scottish Funding Council going towards developing employability in learning and teaching in the university sector. It also created the Scottish Higher Education Employability Network which brought together universities and employers with the aim of increasing the employability of students. The second strand of Learning to Work has seen the development of Third Sector Internships Scotland with 200-300 paid student placements with third sector organisations. Another ongoing initiative is the Making the Most of Masters partnership between the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Stirling. The partnership provides opportunities for masters students to improve their employability by undertaking a real world project, applying what they have learned during their course into a professional situation.<sup>27</sup>

## Recommendations

- CAS recommends more emphasis be put into employability initiatives at universities, allowing for greater interaction between students, university departments and employers.
- CAS recommends that universities ensure that employability skills are a core part of course curriculums, with a focus on how to create a more employable graduate.

- CAS recommends that universities continue to interact with local employers, with talks and workshops guiding students into an industry, advising them what steps they should be taking to become more employable.

## Internships

- ▶ **“They should be paid and they should have a real structure. A mentor should be there to help the graduate and feedback should be provided. If the intern proves themselves then there should be a real employment opportunity.”**

**29 year old, 2009 graduate in Jewellery and Silversmithing**

Internships can offer valuable experience to a graduate, helping them develop skills and knowledge in a working environment. It helps graduates become more employable, putting them in a better position when they enter the job market. Employers also benefit as they are able to develop graduates into employees fit for their sector, needing little training if they were to receive a permanent position.

However, there is concern about a growing culture of unpaid internships. Many students and graduates take up these opportunities in order to progress their careers. The overwhelming response received from the survey respondents was that unpaid internships were unfair and discriminated against those from less privileged backgrounds. Many graduates felt that internships should be made fairer, more accessible and paid.

- ▶ **“Internships need to be available to everyone on merit. Many internships are unpaid, and therefore are not even options for people without the personal or family finances to support them.”**

**24 year old, 2010 graduate in International Relations**

- ▶ **“I think internships need to be appealing to graduates. They need to offer living wages and provide work that will actually benefit the intern. Young people and graduates should be respected and given the opportunity to shine. Relevant experience and a salary are the ways to do this. It also gives the intern a sense of belonging and achievement.”**

**27 year old, 2007 graduate in Creative Advertising**

Whilst unpaid internships offer opportunities for those who are able to access them, unpaid internships have been criticised for being inaccessible for those without alternative means of support. It has been revealed that there has been a rise in advertisements for expenses-only interns to work for MPs, political parties,

charities and news organisations. Museums and art galleries have also been criticised for using unpaid interns to work in press offices, produce magazines and work on conservation projects. Cuts may have hit many sectors, but it is possible that some paid work is being replaced by unpaid interns.<sup>28</sup>

The June 2010 Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) report spells out the importance of internships to organisations and why interns should be paid. Employers benefit from having young people with new ideas and can build a talent pipeline for their industry. 63% of UK employers pay their interns at least National Minimum Wage (NMW), with 92% of those paying their interns over and above the Minimum Wage out of choice. The CIPD recognise that many companies won't be able to afford to pay their interns NMW, recommending that a new 'training wage' of £2.50 per hour be introduced and that any unpaid internships should be treated as a breach of NMW legislation. It was also recommended that a new code of practice be introduced to govern how interns are treated, create working rights and to guard against exploitation.<sup>29</sup>

*Unleashing Aspiration: The final report of the panel on Fair Access to the Professions*, published in 2009, states that "internships are an essential part of the career ladder in many professions. They are part and parcel of a modern, flexible economy and are useful both for interns and for employers. Yet they operate as part of an informal economy in which securing an internship all too often depends on who you know and not what you know".<sup>30</sup> There is no agreed definition of what an internship is and they are often difficult to define against a 'volunteer' and a 'work placement'. However the Fair Access to the Professions panel defines internships as lasting between three and 12 months, providing full time work with an organisation to help a young person develop a broad range of skills.<sup>31</sup>

Many respondents to our survey felt that internships should give a worthwhile experience to the graduates and present them with skills that can be carried into the workplace, although both positive and negative experiences were reported.

▶ **"I completed two internships before I was employed in my current position, one unpaid and the latter paid. Both were invaluable in preparing for my current position. A good internship should give a graduate or undergraduate responsibility and particularly some project management experience with deadlines and workload adjusted in consideration of low pay."**

**26 year old, 2010 graduate in Economics**

The panel on the Fair Access to the Professions believe that internships should be open to all, with the best and most talented able to compete solely on intellect, talent and potential: "Internships have become a part of the professional career

structure and that is why fair access to internships is vital for social mobility.”<sup>32</sup> The panel states that social background and social network should not be crucial factors in securing such a position. It is also suggested that there also needs to be a commitment from the employer to running an internship that provides a quality learning experience, with appropriate measures of assessment and support. Many companies use unpaid interns as a cheap way to cover a position that would otherwise have been filled by a permanent full time member of staff.<sup>33</sup>

## Examples of good practice

Despite criticism of internships, there are positive examples that should be followed. Adopt an Intern is an initiative by the Centre for Scottish Public Policy (CSPP), Scotland’s only independent cross-party think tank. The initiative helps graduates find placements in a variety of different public, private and third sector organisations across Scotland. The internships are both part and full time for at least three months. In 24 months, 180 interns have been placed in paid internships, and new internships are advertised each week. 61% of graduates who used the service gained full-time employment soon after their placement, with 44% of those being kept on at the same organisation. National Minimum Wage is insisted upon and the programme encourages companies to pay the living wage of £7.20 an hour.<sup>34</sup>

Third Sector Internships Scotland is a programme delivered by Queen Margaret University, The Open University in Scotland and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, with support from universities across Scotland. It is funded by the Scottish Funding Council. It is available to undergraduate students and gives them the chance to develop their skills and experience, as well as helping Scotland’s third sector. The internships last up to ten weeks during their summer holidays, paid at the living wage of £7.20 per hour.<sup>35</sup>

Talent Scotland run a graduate programme giving recent graduates an opportunity to work on a short term project with an established business or social enterprise. A variety of different organisations take part and the interns are offered a minimum salary of £14,000 (pro rata), with a supplement of £1,500 for placements based in the Highlands and Islands. The internships range from three to 12 month projects with an established business or social enterprise.<sup>36</sup>

## Recommendations

- CAS encourages that the Scottish Government create a recognised definition of an internship with a minimum standard for what it entails.
- CAS encourages universities to continue to engage with employers and promote internships to students and graduates.



# Support to find employment after graduation

This section examines the support that is available to graduates after they leave university. This is a crucial time for a graduate as the problems that are experienced in making the transition from full-time education into employment can affect their employment prospects for a number of years. This section looks at the structures and schemes that are in place to help graduates when they struggle to make this transition, including Jobcentre Plus and various government employment projects.

## The Jobcentre

▶ **“I felt like I had to ‘dumb down’ my qualifications in order to find a job through the Jobcentre. I wasn’t prepared to do this and was not made to feel comfortable as a result.”**

**22 year old, 2011 graduate in Languages: Interpreting and Translating**

A number of our survey respondents reported the difficulty they faced as graduates with the Jobcentre. The survey revealed a lack of confidence in the Jobcentre in finding graduate level jobs, and in some cases, being told to apply for jobs that did not meet their expectations as a graduate.

**Fig. 7: How helpful survey respondents found their Jobcentre in finding them any job/ graduate level job**

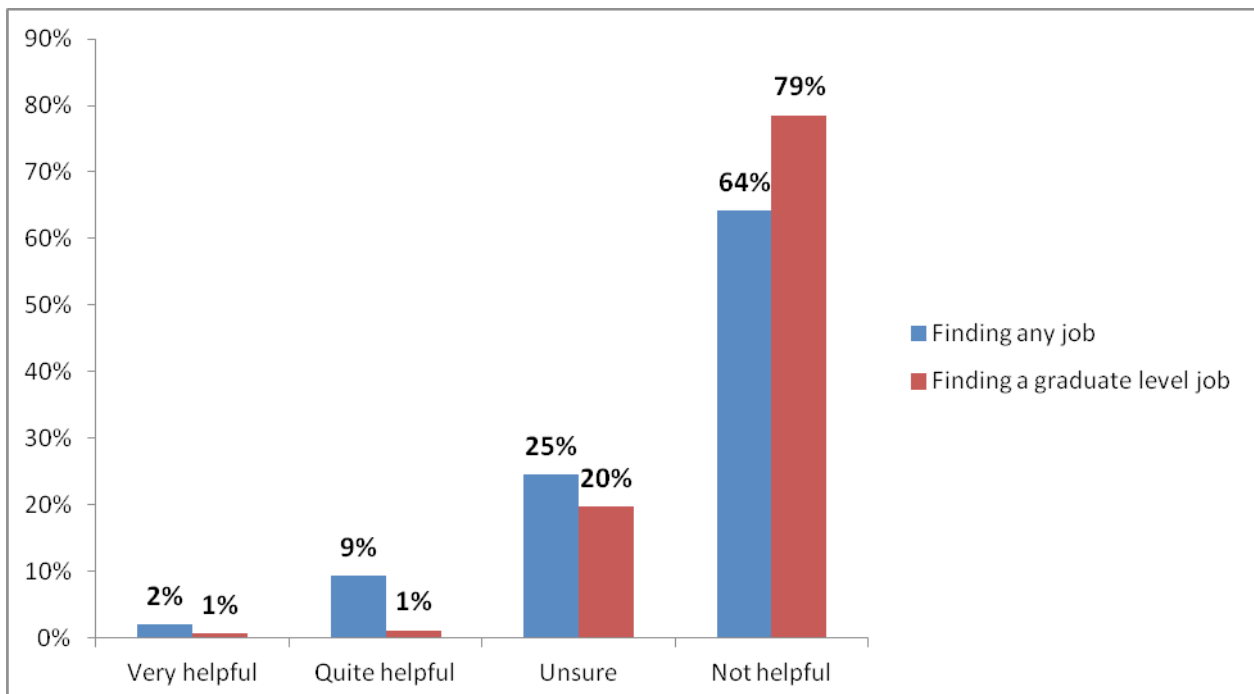


Figure 7 shows that 78.4% (476) of our survey respondents found the Jobcentre unhelpful in finding them a graduate level job with only 1.8% saying the service had been helpful.

- ▶ **“The Jobcentre offered no help in finding a job. I was told they would contact me with positions and that this would be quite regular due to the degree I had taken. I heard nothing and had no help.”**

**24 year old, 2011 graduate in Event Management and International Marketing**

In some cases it was reported that the Jobcentre advisers had actually told the client to play down their degree to make them more employable.

- ▶ **“At the group meetings we were encouraged to leave any degree off the CV to help us find more plentiful unskilled work. Nobody would employ me as a cleaner if I had a degree. I was told to stop looking for graduate work and take a ‘survival’ job.”**

**25 year old, 2008 graduate in Law**

- ▶ **“The Jobcentre was not interested in my degree and they were unhelpful in assisting in the job search process, either at graduate level or otherwise. Frequently they seemed to suggest that, if anything, my qualification and level of education were a deterrent to possible future employers.”**

**25 year old, 2011 graduate in Art History**

Graduates reported that there was a strong emphasis on applying for jobs they were overqualified for rather than ones that matched their skills and experience. This was blamed on a lack of graduate level jobs being found on the Jobcentre system.

- ▶ **“Having worked part-time in retail throughout university, they focused on finding me a job in retail which ‘suited my experience’. However, this neglected the fact I had a degree, related internships and completely different career aspirations related to my studies in politics and public policy.”**

**22 year old, 2011 graduate in Politics & Public Policy**

- ▶ **“When I go to the jobcentre I get a really inconsistent service. Some advisers seem genuinely keen to get me into a job, others barely talk to me, I’m just there to sign my name and leave.”**

**24 year old, 2011 graduate in Genetics**

When asked about whether the Jobcentre had been helpful in finding them any job, 64.5% of graduates said that the Jobcentre had been ‘unhelpful’, compared with 11.4% who had found the Jobcentre either ‘very helpful’ or ‘quite helpful’ and 24.1% who were unsure. There is strong feeling that the Jobcentre is not designed to meet the expectations or support needs of graduates. It is therefore imperative

that a system is put in place that provides the advice that graduates require at the same time as allowing them the support provided through benefits.

In September 2010, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) Scotland published a *Statement of Provision for Skills Development Scotland and the Jobcentre*. The statement provides advice for dealing with graduates, advising Jobcentre staff to refer them to their university careers service, where they can get face to face time with a careers adviser up to two years after graduating.

Unlike the Jobcentre adviser, the university careers adviser is more likely to have the experience of dealing with students and graduates. Here graduates can be supported with job applications, CV's, preparing for interviews and looking for jobs that fit their skills and qualifications.<sup>37</sup> Students and graduates can also be referred to the following job related websites specifically aimed at graduate employment:

- [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)
- [www.agcasscotland.org.uk](http://www.agcasscotland.org.uk)
- [www.graduatecareers-scotland.com](http://www.graduatecareers-scotland.com)

## Recommendations

- CAS recommends that Jobcentre Plus works with AGCAS Scotland to understand the job requirements of graduates. A referral system should be put in place to ensure that graduates are directed to the most appropriate source of advice for their needs without affecting their entitlement to benefits.

## Government work schemes

▶ **"This Community Jobs Scotland post so far has been my best job ever. I wish I was able to be kept on. Government should be putting funding in place to give people further opportunities after their six months."**

**22 year old, 2009 graduate in Business Information Management**

Many graduates felt that employers were not giving them an opportunity, with a lack of experience being blamed. They felt that they were being denied the opportunity to develop working skills. Government work schemes, such as Community Jobs Scotland, appeared popular as they provided a chance for young people to gain useful employment and pick up skills and experience.

Community Jobs Scotland is a partnership between the Scottish Government, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and Social Enterprise Scotland. It has created 2,000 paid positions for young unemployed people with a wide range of

third sector organisations across Scotland. The main aim of the scheme is to help put young people into sustainable employment. The participating organisations must promise a high quality programme of support to the individual. The programme guarantees at least 26 weeks of paid employment. Whilst it is mostly aimed at 18-24 year olds, opportunities for 16-17 year olds and 25+ year olds also exist, though not in the same numbers.

Community Jobs Scotland and the now closed Future Jobs Fund were popular schemes amongst our survey respondents. However many survey respondents were critical that the job was not for long enough as they simply went back to unemployment upon completion.

▶ **“I found that I gained a lot of experience and felt better about myself because I was working rather than claiming benefits. The organisation I worked for was very supportive and since completing the Future Jobs Fund placement I have worked an additional nine months with them. I gained six months worth of valuable experience but I did not feel that there was enough support once the scheme ended and therefore, when the organisation was unable to keep me longer, I found myself unemployed again for seven months before I secured another position.”**

**26 year old, 2009 graduate in Investigative Journalism**

▶ **“I am currently working in a job via Community Jobs Scotland. This has been useful in improving my CV in admin and operations. However, although it is paid employment, I am earning the same as when I worked in retail at the age of 17.”**

**24 year old, 2011 graduate in Neuroscience Mind and Cognition**

In late 2011, the Community Jobs Scotland Training and Employability Support was launched, being delivered by The Wise Group, a social enterprise who help people gain new skills and gain employment. The aim of the service is provide comprehensive training, advice and support to develop and gain new skills for those on the Community Jobs Scotland programme. Support is given during the placement and then up to six months after, with a range of free vocational training courses offered as well as help with CVs, application and careers guidance. The free vocational training courses are provide in areas such as administration, health and safety and IT to improve the employability of the individual.<sup>38</sup>

## **Recommendations**

- CAS recommends that the Community Jobs Scotland employment Scheme be extended in greater numbers to those over the age of 25.

# Advice to current students

- ▶ **“Get experience whilst you’re studying. It is ruthlessly competitive and the qualification will only meet one element of what a future employer wants to see. It’s like a blank colouring-in book!”**

**30 year old, 2009 graduate in Urban and Regional Planning**

The final question on our survey asked respondents what advice they would give to current students about how they could improve their employability. This chapter explores the main themes reflected by the answers.

Students were encouraged to not rely solely on their degree to find a job and gather experience to improve their application.

- ▶ **“Make sure you build up experience! Use the careers service as much as possible. If you can afford to, do a summer placement in a related field. Don’t expect to get help into a graduate job from the Jobcentre.”**

**25 year old, 2009 graduate in Geography**

- ▶ **“Try to get relevant experience when you’re at university so you hit the ground running. Work over summers, work in a part time job, try to get work experience placements, speak to as many people as possible and try to make contacts. Stand out from the crowd, be creative and most of all, keep at it. Hard work reaps rewards - you’ll get there eventually.”**

**27 year old, 2007 graduate in Creative Advertising**

Students were encouraged to sell themselves and to try and think about how they can transfer the skills they have learnt at University into the work place.

- ▶ **“Learn how to sell yourself and your transferable skills even if you don’t have direct experience of the particular industry, the chances are you will have skills that you can apply. Learn to identify them and sell!”**

**27 year old, 2006 graduate in Accountancy**

- ▶ **“Ensure that your CV demonstrates the key competencies which most employers are looking for such as team work, communication, problem solving, and decision making.”**

**28 year old, 2006 graduate in International Business and Modern Languages**

Students were told to think about their job prospects as early as possible and to use the careers service as soon as they could, rather than leaving it to the last minute.

- ▶ **“Research all career opportunities related to your chosen subject before you start it.”**

**28 year old 2006 graduate in Neuroscience, Glasgow**

- ▶ **“Start thinking about a career as soon as you start university. Don’t become complacent. Take your summer holidays to take work experience and gather skills you can carry into the workplace. Create contact with your careers service as soon as you can.”**

**25 year old, 2009 graduate in History**

- ▶ **“Decide what you want your career to be then work out how to get there. A degree may not be necessary. Don’t do a degree for the sake of it and make sure it is related to getting you the job you want.”**

**28 year old, 2007 graduate Chemical Engineering**

Students were advised to be prepared for the job market and to not get too disheartened if they couldn’t find a job immediately.

- ▶ **“Try not to have unrealistic expectations of how much you should earn in your first ‘graduate job’ and how quickly you should progress. I’d suggest that most graduate recruits probably earn a reasonably modest salary and won’t be gifted with a high level of autonomy.”**

**29 year old, 2007 graduate in Biological Science**

- ▶ **“Be prepared to accept work you are over qualified for while you pursue your desired career.”**

**22 year old, 2011 graduate in Philosophy and Theatre Studies**

# Conclusion

- ▶ **“Graduates have that horrific Catch 22 situation where employers want experience, but if nobody will give you the experience, how are you meant to get a job? Yikes, it’s a conundrum and no doubt. People lucky enough to get an entry level position can usually find this is the leverage they need to get a foot on the ladder, but it’s tough getting there in the first place with so much competition.”**

## **27 year old, 2008 graduate in Creative Advertising**

Our survey revealed the plight of many graduates who have sought and failed to get on the career ladder. The current economic situation has had a great effect on employment in general, however it is important that graduates, having studied for several years to acquire skills and qualifications, are given the required support and opportunities to advance their career paths.

The destination of a graduate matters not just to the individual but also to other workers. Many graduates have taken up lower skilled or part-time employment which can have the effect of displacing other workers down and out of the job market. In the longer term, graduates who fail to find employment in their chosen area may not develop the skills and experience gained through work to carry on from a retiring work force. The problems experienced by graduates can therefore cause ripples throughout the wider workforce and threaten future economic prosperity.

The report found that the support and guidance offered to students and graduates can vary widely in effectiveness. The majority of graduates in the survey didn’t find careers advice at school to be helpful, although recent changes in the curriculum may improve guidance for current school. University careers advice was generally effective for those who accessed it, but there was a high number of graduates who reported that they did not use their careers service or who did not know there was one. Finally, graduates who had found themselves unemployed were pessimistic about the ability of Jobcentres to help them find employment that met their qualifications and expectations. Jobcentres may not be set up specifically to support graduates, but it is important that graduates are referred to an appropriate source of advice that does not affect their entitlement.

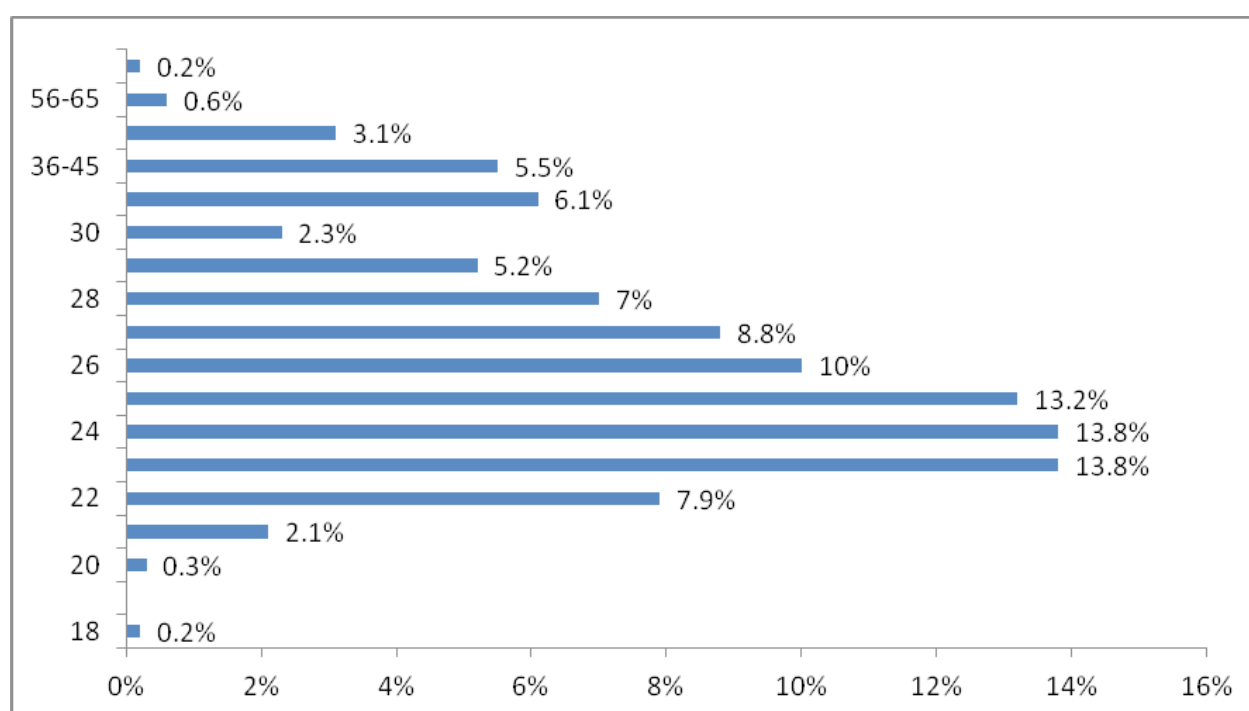
The current generation of young people are often labeled as a ‘lost generation’, particularly by the media. This is a statement that should be avoided. However, a failure to provide graduates with effective support and guidance now risks having a generational effect on the long term success of Scotland’s economy. If this generation grows up without the skills and experience that are only attained through suitable employment, we may find that the economy lacks the skilled individuals needed to replace the retiring workforce.

# Appendix 1: Survey respondents

A wide range of ages took the survey, with the majority being in their 20s:

- 2.3% of those who took the survey were aged between 18 and 21
- 84.1% were aged between 22 and 30
- 13.6% were over 30, with the age range going up to 65

**Fig. 10: The age of the survey respondents**



Survey respondents had graduated from a variety of disciplines:

- 20.4% graduating from the Social Sciences faculty
- 18.6% from Arts
- 14.4% from Business
- 12% from Science
- 8.8% from Engineering
- 8% from Humanities
- 17.8% from other faculties.

30.8% of our survey respondents graduated between 2005 and 2008, 16.2% in 2009, 20.7% in 2010, 28.4% in 2011, and 5.1% in 2012.



Although the survey was initially aimed at graduates struggling for employment, results showed that 58.2% were employed, but that 42.5% of those were in a lower skilled job. Of the remaining respondents 15.7% were unemployed seeking work, 2% were on an unpaid internship, 8.8% were volunteering and 6.7% were taking a second degree at university.

56.3% of participants reported that they had been unemployed at some stage since graduating. Of this number 67.2% were unemployed for longer than 4 months, and 20% had been unemployed for longer than a year.

62.1% of those who were unemployed at any stage, sought benefits, 97.7% of whom claimed Jobseekers Allowance.

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