

## **NUS Students and Work research – Summary findings**

**Sample:** NUS interviewed almost 4,000 (3,894) students and recent graduates online between February 14<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> through the NUS Extra database and the YouthSight online panel.

### **Headlines:**

- Students and graduates are more pessimistic than optimistic about the job market. Almost four in ten were pessimistic (39 per cent), while almost three in ten were optimistic (28 per cent).
- Students and graduates think most responsibility for improving the job market lies with employers. 55 per cent think big employers are responsible and 33 per cent think small and medium sized employers are responsible.
- Almost twice as many students and graduates thought big employers are responsible for improving the job market (55 per cent) compared to the Westminster government (29 per cent).
- One in three students and graduates think young people themselves were responsible.
- Less than two in ten (18 per cent) of students and graduates agree that the National Minimum Wage is currently set at the right level to give people a decent standard of living
- Fair pay was voted the most important when asked what were the most important factors in terms of what makes a decent job for young people (57 per cent said it was very important).
- FE students are more than three times as likely to say flexible working is very important in terms of what makes a decent job for young people (36 per cent) compared to graduates (11 per cent)
- Only one percent thought it was fair for a person to work for more than six months without pay in order to gain experience.
- One in three thought think it is fair to work for more than 4 weeks without pay in order to gain experience (30 per cent).
- Graduates and university students are more likely (26 per cent and 27 per cent) to think that working for free at all to gain experience is unfair compared to FE students (19 per cent).

- 62 per cent of current FE students and 56 per cent of graduates say they would be willing to set up their own business or social enterprise if they were given enough support and guidance.
- Financial backing is regarded as the most desirable support for those willing to set up their own business or social enterprise (85 per cent said they would need or want this support).
- Introducing travel discounts (e.g. Graduate / Jobseekers' Railcard, cheaper bus/Tube costs) was rated as the most popular policy suggestion that would improve the job market for young people (85 per cent said this was a good idea).
- This was followed by increasing the Minimum Wage to the Living Wage (78 per cent), having job placements available on all courses (77 per cent), increasing Apprentice pay to Minimum Wage level (75 per cent) and creating a government-funded paid internship scheme (73 per cent).
- For those out of work, gaining the experience to get a job is perceived as a bigger barrier for graduates (52 per cent) than those who are still in education (33 per cent).
- Graduates (15 per cent) are three times more likely than FE students (5 per cent) and more than twice as likely as current university students (15 per cent) to see the need to work for free to gain experience as the main barrier

## Detailed breakdown of different themes:

### Attitudes towards the job market for young people in the next 12 months

Respondents were asked "Overall, are you optimistic or pessimistic about the job market for young people over the next 12 months?"

- Only two per cent of students and graduates are extremely optimistic
- Students and graduates are more pessimistic than optimistic about the job market. Almost four in ten (39 per cent) were pessimistic, while almost three in ten (28 per cent) were optimistic.

### Who is responsible for improving the job market?

Respondents were asked "Which, if any, of the following groups and organisations would you say can do the most to improve the job market?"

- Students and graduates think most responsibility for improving the job market lies with employers, big and small.
- Almost twice as many students and graduates think big employers are responsible for improving the job market (55 per cent) compared to the Westminster government (29 per cent).
- 55 per cent of students and graduates think big employers are most responsible for improving the job market.
- Small and medium size employers are the second most responsible according to our respondents, with 33 per cent seeing improving the job market as their responsibility.
- Young people themselves bear significant responsibility also. One in three survey respondents thought young people themselves were responsible.
- University undergraduates and graduates (32 per cent) think the Westminster government is more responsible than FE students (24 per cent) do.

### Barriers to employment

Respondents out of work were asked *about the main barrier to them getting a job they wanted*

- Gaining experience to get a job is perceived as much more of a barrier for those that have finished their studies than those who are still in education.
  - 52 per cent of graduates said gaining experience was the main barrier to getting the job they want compared to 32 per cent of HE students and 33 FE students.
  - This suggests that the need for experience is not realised until students have finished their studies and are facing the realities of job hunting.
  - This iterates the importance of gaining experience while studying, either through part-time work whilst studying or through extra-curricular activities, in order to improve prospects after studying. Working while studying and working after studying cannot be divorced.
- Graduates are three times more likely than FE students and more than twice as likely as current university students to see the need to work for free to gain experience as the main barrier (15 per cent compared to 5 per cent and 7 per cent).

- Despite the narrative around the need for young people to gain skills, only 8 per cent see skills as the main barrier. Only 5 per cent of graduates see this as the main barrier compared to 9 per cent of FE students.

### **What makes a decent job?**

Respondents were asked *"Please rate the importance of the following factors in terms of what makes a decent job for young people"*

- Fair pay was rated the highest as 'very important'
  - 57 per cent said very important
  - FE students are more likely to say fair pay is very important (64 per cent) compared to graduates (51 per cent)
- Opportunities for progression
  - 52 per cent said very important (54 per cent graduates, 49 per cent FE students)
- Flexible working pattern
  - FE students are more than three times as likely to say this is very important (36 per cent) compared to graduates (11 per cent)
- Pleasant working environment
  - 47 per cent said very important.
  - FE students are more likely to say a pleasant working environment is very important (51 per cent) compared to graduates (40 per cent)
- Good learning and development
  - 44 per cent said very important
  - Graduates are more likely to say good learning and development is very important (48 per cent) compared to FE students (40 per cent).
- Work that reflects your values of interests
  - 35 per cent
  - Current HE students rate this of higher importance than FE students (39 per cent compared to 32 per cent)
- Job security
  - 42 said very important
- Engaging work
  - 40 per cent said very important
- Good terms and conditions
  - 37 per cent said important
- Work that reflects your values of interests
  - 35 per cent
  - Current HE students rate this of higher importance than FE students (39 per cent compared to 32 per cent)

### **Levels of pay**

Respondents were asked *"Do you agree or disagree that the Minimum Wage is currently set at the right level to give people a decent standard of living?"*

- 67 per cent of student and graduates think it isn't.

- Only two per cent of students and graduates strongly think it is.
- Less than two in ten students and graduates think it is.

## **Working for free**

Respondents were asked "*What amount of time is it fair for a person to work without pay in order to gain experience?*"

- Only one percent of the 3894 respondents thought it was fair for a person to work for more than six months without pay in order to gain experience.
- Only 15 percent thought it was fair for a person to work for more than six weeks without pay in order to gain experience.
- One in three think it is fair to work for more than 4 weeks without pay in order to gain experience.
- Graduates and university students are more likely to think that working for free at all to gain experience is unfair compared to FE students.
- Almost one in four FE students think it's fair to work up to two weeks without pay in order to gain experience.

## **Setting up own businesses or social enterprises**

Respondents were asked "*Do you agree or disagree that if you were given enough support and guidance, you would be willing to set up your own business or social enterprise?*"

- 62 per cent agreed that they would while 24 per cent disagreed that they would be willing
- Current FE students were the most willing, with 62 per cent saying they were willing compared to 56 per cent of graduates.
- 25 per cent of FE students strongly agreed they would be willing compared to 14 per cent of graduates.

Of those who said they were willing, when asked "*What support would you need or want to help you set up your own business or social enterprise?*"

- 85 per cent said financial backing eg: start-up loan
- 68 per cent said legal and financial advice
- 58 per cent said mentoring

Of those that said they weren't willing, when asked "*What are the main barriers to you wanting to set up your own business or social enterprise?*"

- 42 per cent said they'd rather be an employee of somebody else
- 56 per cent said they didn't know what sort of enterprise they'd start

## **Information, Advice and Guidance**

- Family members are the most common source of advice for students and graduates, followed by teachers/lecturers and then friends (76 per cent, 73 per cent, 68 per cent)
- FE students are more likely to receive advice from family members than HE students and graduates.
- FE students are more likely to receive advice from teachers/lecturers than HE students and graduates.
- FE students are twice as likely to be dissatisfied with advice received from their personal tutor than HE students.
- Only 42 per cent have received advice from their personal tutors.
- Students and graduates are significantly more likely to be satisfied with advice they receive from informal and personal contacts than official sources of advice

- Of those who receive advice from the job centre, more are dissatisfied than satisfied with the advice they receive (20 per cent have received advice, 10.2% are dissatisfied).
- Of those who receive advice from the careers service at their institution, almost a third are dissatisfied with the advice they receive (32 per cent).
- Of those who receive advice from government websites, almost one in three are dissatisfied with the advice they receive (27 per cent).
- Of those who receive advice from their friends, almost nine in ten are satisfied with the advice they receive (89 per cent are satisfied).
- Of those who receive advice from other people studying on their course, nine in ten are satisfied with the advice they receive (89 per cent are satisfied).
- Of those who receive advice from other people studying on their course, nine in ten are satisfied with the advice they receive (88 per cent are satisfied).

### **Policy ideas**

Respondents were asked *"Please tell us whether you think these policy ideas are a good idea or a bad idea, or if you are neutral about them"*

In order of popularity (rating as a good idea)

- Travel discounts (e.g. Graduate / Jobseekers' Railcard, cheaper bus/Tube costs)
  - 85 per cent good idea, 3 per cent bad idea
- Increase the Minimum Wage (£5.03 - £6.31) to the Living Wage (£7.65 - £8.80)
  - 78 per cent good idea, 6 per cent bad idea
- Job placements available on all courses
  - 77 per cent good idea, 4 per cent bad idea
- Increase Apprentice pay to Minimum Wage level
  - 75 per cent good idea, 5 per cent bad idea
- Create a government-funded, paid internship scheme
  - 73 per cent good idea, 4 per cent bad idea
- Give government money to employers to create jobs and opportunities for young people
  - 67 per cent good idea, 9 per cent bad idea
- Take less tax from employers who create jobs and opportunities for young people
  - 65 per cent good idea, 9 per cent bad idea
- Introduce compulsory careers guidance for all students
  - 60 per cent good idea, 9 per cent bad idea
- Make unemployed people work for their benefits
  - 57 per cent good idea, 11 per cent bad idea
- Ban zero hour contracts
  - 49 per cent good idea, 12 per cent bad idea

- Guarantee a job for 18-24 year olds who are unable to find one on their own
  - 48 per cent good idea, 20 per cent bad idea
- Remove benefits from people aged under 25 if they are not in work, education or training
  - 33 per cent good idea, 36 per cent bad idea
- Remove or relax employment regulations
  - 20 per cent good idea, 31 per cent bad idea