How graduates are looking for jobs
2017
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GradTouch’s report into how students and graduates are applying for jobs gave young people an opportunity to better inform recruitment practices so that they work for everyone.

In this report we not only set out to share data and insights with employers, but to also allow students and graduates themselves to understand how their peers are performing, and, with our unique advice section, help them overcome the challenges they face.

Our survey revealed some alarming truths about the graduate job hunt, such as how 55% of university students feel their university isn’t doing enough to prepare them for the real world, and how 46% of job-seeking graduates said they are not feeling optimistic about their career prospects.

Alongside this we analysed GradTouch website data to reveal that it takes 108 days to find a graduate job, and that people are more likely to apply for a graduate role on a Tuesday afternoon.

GradTouch’s report gives us a glimpse into the mind of a young job seeker in 2017. Understanding this demographic is the first step to being fully equipped to attract the newest and best graduate talent.”

Sean Talbot
Head of Audience, GradTouch
Methodology

Our aim was to provide a snapshot of how students and graduates are engaging with the graduate job market; as such, the data used in this report is from two sources: GradTouch website data and the results of a nationwide survey.

Utilising this combination of current trends in website activity and survey feedback, we have provided a uniquely direct insight into the thoughts and habits of this generation of graduate job seekers.

Percentages in this report have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Website data

Analysis of website data taken from over 10,900 users of GradTouch.com who logged in between 1 January 2017 and 30 June 2017.

The survey

A nationwide survey of 789 students and graduates, collected in July 2017.

Things to remember

“Job” refers specifically to graduate jobs. Students and graduates were asked if they were employed in a job which required a degree. “Student” refers to anyone who was in full or part-time education at the time the survey was conducted in July 2017. “Graduate” refers to an individual who has completed higher education and is not currently in post-graduate education. “Job-seeking” and “job seekers” refers to survey respondents who said they were not currently employed in a graduate role.
The longer it takes to find a graduate job, the harder it becomes

59% of employed graduates surveyed found their role before or within three months of graduation. Contrastingly, unemployed graduates express a much lengthier search, with 31% of those currently unemployed or in a non-graduate position saying they've been searching for over a year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 1 year</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months - 1 year</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6 months</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 months</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 month</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before graduation</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How long it took employed graduates to find work

To determine how many applications a graduate can expect to make before finding a job, we asked employed survey respondents how many applications they made before being offered their role.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26+</td>
<td>17%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

40% of employed graduates made 1-5 applications before securing a job

It takes 108 days to find a graduate job

based on how long users are actively searching for jobs on GradTouch.com.
Levels of career optimism felt by students and graduates

Only 5% of job-seeking graduates feel “very optimistic” about their career prospects

Job-seeking graduates were asked to rank how optimistic they felt about their prospects on a scale from “very optimistic” to “not optimistic at all”.

Very optimistic: 5%
Not optimistic at all: 45%

45% of students said they were “really worried” about their future career prospects

Current university students were asked to select how they felt about their job prospects from the list of answers below.

“I’m optimistic”: 14%
“I’m feeling great”: 11%
“I’m feeling OK”: 20%
“I’m trying not to think about it”: 9%
“I’m really worried”: 26%

Career expectations vs. the reality

Are graduates doing what they expected to be doing when they graduated?

29% of employed graduates say they aren’t doing what they expected with their degree, with the majority saying their job “somewhat” matches their expectations.

Are you doing what you expected to be doing when you graduated?

- Yes: 34%
- No: 37%
- Somewhat: 29%

The vast majority of students believe their degree will be relevant to their future career

Do you think your degree will be relevant to the job you end up in?

- Yes: 79%
- No: 21%
When people are applying for graduate jobs

Job seekers are far less likely to submit applications on weekends

GradTouch website data shows that 90% of all graduate job applications happen on a weekday, with Tuesday being the most active day for job hunting.

51% of graduate job applications are submitted between 12:00-17:00

This website data reveals that students and graduates will be more likely to see and apply for a graduate job on a Tuesday afternoon.
How people are searching for graduate jobs

74% of job seekers read email alerts about potential jobs, but browsing jobs online is the most popular method.

We asked students and graduates currently looking for work to select how and where they actively look for graduate jobs. Respondents were able to select multiple options, reflecting every resource they have utilised in their search.

- Online jobs board: 94%
- Email alerts: 74%
- Uni careers service: 59%
- LinkedIn: 58%
- Company’s own website: 57%
- Facebook or Twitter: 46%
- Careers fairs: 30%
- Speculative emailing: 22%
- Newspaper or magazine: 16%
- Other: 3%

“Would you prefer to apply for a job by submitting your CV & Cover Letter, or by filling in an online application form?”

- CV & Cover Letter: 70%
- Online application form: 30%

“Through which source did you find your current graduate job?”

- Online jobs board: 44%
- Company’s own website: 22%
- Uni careers service: 6%
- Personal or professional connections: 6%
- Recruiter: 5%
- Careers fairs: 4%
- Email alerts: 3%
- LinkedIn: 3%
- Facebook or Twitter: 2%
- Other: 2%
- Speculative emailing: 2%
- Newspaper or magazine: <1%

44% of employed graduates found their job through an online jobs board

We asked survey respondents who said they were employed in a graduate job to select how they found out about their role. 44% of employed graduates found and applied for their job on online jobs boards, followed by a company’s own careers website.

The three most useful job search methods according to students and graduates

1. Online jobs boards
2. Searching a company’s own website
3. Reading email alerts and newsletters
“Please can you give feedback? I want to know why I didn’t get the job so I can try harder!"

“Why don’t you give feedback?”

“Why don’t you give constructive feedback?”

“Applications and test centres take a lot of time and it feels like employers don’t acknowledge this”

“Why is it not an open, honest, transparent process?”

Only 7% of job-seeking graduates say they “often” or “always” receive feedback

62% who responded to our survey said they “never” or “rarely” receive feedback on their graduate job applications, showing that many applications made are being rejected without notification.

The survey also offered students and graduates the chance to submit hypothetical questions to employers.

To the left you can see some we’ve selected which represented common themes and reoccurring concerns.

“Please can you give feedback? I want to know why I didn’t get the job so I can try harder!”

“Why don’t you give feedback?”

“Why don’t you give constructive feedback?”

“Applications and test centres take a lot of time and it feels like employers don’t acknowledge this”

“Why is it not an open, honest, transparent process?”

“How often do you receive any kind of feedback on your unsuccessful graduate job applications?”

23% Never

39% Rarely
What students and graduates want from a job

Survey respondents were asked to prioritise what they look for in a graduate job, ranking each job property from “most important” to “not important at all”.

The survey data shows us that, overall, people want career progression more than anything else in a graduate job.

The next page shows the difference in priorities between men and women, revealing that 59% of female students and graduates in the survey listed career progression as the most important thing they look for in a graduate job, compared to just 41% of men.

Women prioritise career progression more than men, whereas men rank things like brand reputation and location higher than women. 37% of men said brand reputation was the most important to them, compared with just 18% of women.
University students need more guidance

The majority of students say they have an idea of what they want to do after education, but agree that their university isn’t doing enough to help them get there.

- 44% No
- 56% Yes

“Do you know what industry you want to work in after university?”

- 55% No
- 45% Yes

“Is your university doing enough to prepare you for the working world?”
Where student and graduate job-seekers want to be

“If you could work in any industry, which would it be?”

When faced with this question, job-seeking students and graduates overwhelmingly chose creative industries such as Advertising, Marketing & Media.

The least desirable fields include Trading, Transport, Recruitment and Sales.

London remains the place to be for graduate work, with 35% of all graduates wanting to live and work there.

The South East and North West are the next most popular destinations in the UK. The survey found that the least popular places to live and work are Northern Ireland and the East of England.

Perceived obstacles to finding a graduate job

What obstacles do students and graduates think are holding them back?

Participants selected the reasons they believed were preventing them from succeeding.

“I don’t have enough experience”

34% agreed

“There’s too much competition for graduate roles”

31% agreed

“I don’t know what I want to do”

15% agreed

“There aren’t enough jobs”

9% agreed

“My degree grade”

5% agreed

“The university I studied at”

1% agreed

5% said “other”
What this all means for graduate employers

Are you a graduate employer?
The next section of this report is designed to help students and graduates with the issues they raised in their survey feedback.

We also offer free graduate attraction audits to all graduate employers. Click below to book yours and find out how equipped you are to attract the next generation of talent.

Click to book your free audit

The insights this report gives us into the minds of young job seekers is invaluable to employers who wish to remain at the forefront of attraction, management and retention.

What we can see is that the vast majority of student and graduate job seekers remain heavily dependent on online jobs boards, yet what they wish to understand about a potential job is moving away from what traditional jobs boards offer.

Career progression was listed by student and graduate job seekers as the most important thing to them when looking for work - articulating your excellent training schemes and opportunities to progress within your business, it seems, is now imperative when advertising job roles. But how do you successfully get this across?

Even more importantly we see that graduates are still not receiving feedback from their applications - which could also explain why 24% of graduate job seekers are sending over 20 applications before finding work.

Here at GradTouch we empower small to medium sized companies to compete alongside the big brands. Whether it is reaching the relevant audience, effectively managing the volumes of applications that come through or utilising key data to measure value, we provide you with the right hiring infrastructure to ensure graduate recruitment is manageable and effective.

If you’re interested in learning more about the services we provide, click below.

Zac Williams
Founder & Director, GradTouch

Request a GradTouch demo
Advice for students and graduates from industry experts

After hearing the concerns of students and graduates who participated in our survey, we put the key issues to industry experts to find solutions that for the next generation of professionals
How to get a graduate job when you have no experience

Stuck in a loop of not being able to get experience because you have no experience? We’ve asked the experts how to break free.

Of everyone we surveyed for this report who are not currently employed in a graduate job, 34%, the highest number, selected “I don’t think I have enough experience” as their greatest obstacle to employment.

With the help of Shaun Foster, Buying and Merchandising Recruiter for Next, and Alison Poulton, Talent Acquisition Specialist at BT, we’re going to unpick the experience obstacle. We’ll explore why some companies look so favourably upon work experience, how you can still get a job if you have none, and detail some practical steps you can take to boost the Experience section of your CV right now.

Why some companies expect you to have work experience for graduate positions.

Both Shaun and Alison are unsurprised that students and graduates are worried about how a lack of experience affects their graduate employment prospects. Though neither Next nor BT expect a relevant degree or work experience for their graduate roles, the benefit of having some work experience on your CV when you come to apply for graduate jobs is undeniable.

“Some roles can be very competitive and the experience of a work placement year is such an advantage,” Shaun says. He believes that a graduate with internships listed on their CV is likely to have “increased knowledge of the role, familiarity with working within a team environment, and a higher level of maturity,” compared to someone who has no work experience. He adds that he would always encourage students to seek work experience, saying, “it will help you understand thought processes for the role and provide you with real life examples for use in interviews. It will also help the candidate realise if the role is something they want to dedicate their career to.”

Alison says it’s all about the confidence you gain from doing internships or placements - confidence that will help you succeed at interview stage.

Graduate candidates who have more experience behind them may also be seen as a more ‘certain’ hire. They have a proven track record, references to vouch for their professionalism, and they have demonstrated prior commitment to and passion for a sector. From a hiring manager’s perspective, experienced candidates may be more likely to understand what they’re getting into when starting a job and are therefore less likely to leave after a few months - costing the company time and money training and hiring their replacement.

Work experience alone won’t get you anywhere

With 73% of 2016 graduates leaving university with a 2:1 or above, work experience seems to many like a means of differentiating yourself from the competition - particularly if you studied a broad subject that doesn’t lead you down a specific career path.

However, Alison questions: “If students and graduates feel that they can stand out from the crowd by gaining work experience, how does an employer then differentiate between everyone who has gained work experience?” This is why BT’s graduate hiring process focuses on each candidate as an individual, assessing how well their values align with the company’s own, and how they could have a positive impact on the organisation. Alison advises that what will really set you apart from other candidates is your personality and how well you communicate your experiences and interests in interviews.

Experience does not speak for itself, it’s up to you to use it. Alison says: “If some individuals are getting feedback that their lack of work experience has impacted on their performance in the process, then it may be that it is how they are performing rather than the absence of the experience that is coming across.”

Therefore, it’s less about having work experience to tick a box on a hiring manager’s set of criteria and more about demonstrating the skills and qualities an employer may expect of someone who has benefitted from work experience. It then follows that if you’re full of confidence and knowledge, and are clearly excited about the role at interview, that’ll speak louder than someone who has some experience but without the same personality shining through.

Focus on the overall package: your potential and passion for an industry

Two of the key benefits graduates take from having some work experience behind them are increased confidence and knowledge of an industry - things you can achieve without having formal experience. In lieu of an internship, you can use LinkedIn to network with relevant people in your field - they will, by and large, be happy to answer your questions about their job if you reach out. Shaun also advises that LinkedIn is a great tool for accessing work experience opportunities at small to medium sized companies.

You can keep up with news and trends in the industry you’re interested in via relevant publications and influencers, do free online courses to add to your skillset, volunteer, or ask to shadow someone you admire for a couple of days and help out. All of these steps will go towards making you feel more knowledgeable and confident throughout the hiring process and enable you to communicate that in your applications.

Ultimately, when it comes to the experience obstacle, you can’t win them all. There are going to be some cases where an employer doesn’t have the budget to train someone who is completely inexperienced in their sector, but that will not always be the case. If you don’t have experience right now, focus on what you can control going forward: whether that’s adding to your CV, or working out how you can make yourself stand out regardless.

As Alison and Shaun explain, work experience can be advantageous in assuring an employer of your track record, but showing you have potential and enthusiasm to learn is just as, if not more, important.
Finding your career path

One of the most worrying yet equally unsurprising findings from this eBook is that 44% of students say they don’t know which industry they want to go into after university; this suggests they either don’t know what to do entirely, or are open to a wide variety of opportunities – or both.

To help those students graduating without a sense of direction this year, we spoke to Gemma O’Leary, a Graduate Recruitment Advisor at Fujitsu, and asked what advice she has for anyone still figuring things out.

Fujitsu, like many large companies with graduate schemes, offers more than one role to its early careers candidates. The benefit of programmes and schemes like this is that, in most cases, they allow you to rotate around the business, experiencing different ‘industries’ and advancing in an area that suits you best. This can be ideal for anyone with an open mind and a willingness to get stuck in.

For Gemma, the most important thing to have when graduating is not a set path into an industry, but an “understanding of your key skills and what you are really passionate about.” With that, you can align your skills and interests with relevant jobs and industries.

27% of employed graduates surveyed for this eBook listed the biggest obstacle to them finding a job was not knowing what they wanted to do. Finding that right career might not have been easy, but they did it.

Gemma says she didn’t know what she wanted to do after university either, and spoke about how she had a number of different roles in childcare before doing what many unsure graduates end up doing: going travelling and volunteering abroad for a year.

“I learnt a lot about myself,” she says. “How to relate my skills to a work environment, taking the time to think about what I am interested in and would best suit my skills.” When she returned, she secured a role in HR, working in a number of different roles before moving into the Recruitment role she’s in now at Fujitsu.

Gemma assures us that taking time out to figure out your next move will not be a detriment to your career. “We would be looking at what the candidate has learnt from those experiences and [for them] to show their passion for the role/sector they have applied to,” she says.

For students who’ve yet to find their career path, imagining how you go from being a graduate who doesn’t know what to do next to a graduate with a career and a job they love can seem almost impossible. But it’s not.

If you find yourself not knowing what to do next, it seems being prepared to do your research and keep your options open are crucial steps to getting you started in the right direction.

Not knowing what you want to do doesn’t have to be a stumbling block; think of it more as springboard that could take you into any number of surprising directions.

And besides, thinking you know what you want to do isn’t everything it’s cracked up to be; after all, only 33% of graduates who actually did have an idea of what they wanted to do after university have ended up doing so.

Top tips from the expert:

Gemma O’Leary
Graduate Recruitment Advisor
Fujitsu

Here are Gemma’s top tips for both finding your dream career, and successfully landing it

Do your research
“We see a number of candidates who have not done this and are unable to demonstrate how their skillset will suit Fujitsu.”

Show personality
“We’re looking for people who will bring their own personalities and skills to the role, who are willing to learn and eager to push themselves.”

Be enthusiastic
“If you’re passionate, enthusiastic, committed and looking to learn new skills, then you’re exactly the sort of person we are looking for.”
How exactly do you prepare for the working world? Can you ever really be prepared for it? Is it the responsibility of universities to prepare you for life after you have graduated, or are students just expecting too much from them? To help us understand this issue from both sides, we spoke to university careers advisor Kristina Tamane-Laing.

In Kristina’s opinion, the problem isn’t that universities aren’t doing enough to help students prepare for the working world, nor that students’ expectations are too high. Instead, she thinks the issue lies within trying to ensure that students are aware that help is on offer as early as possible.

“Often, despite extensive marketing, students do not realise there is support available to them,” she tells us. “We’re at almost all inductions advertising ourselves and the benefits of engaging early.”

However, 54% of those students who said their university is not doing enough to help them declared that they have used their university’s careers service, while 44% said they have been to a careers fair.

Can universities do more in terms of career inspiration?

If utilising the services available to them is still not enough to assuage so many students’ fears about their future employability, how much more can universities do?

Almost half of the students in the report said they don’t know what they want to do after university. We asked Kristina whether this is the biggest obstacle facing both students and the university careers services trying to help them. After all, how do you help someone without knowing what kind of help is required?

Although she agrees that trying to help people who are unsure of what they want to do next is an issue, Kristina highlights students’ “lack of confidence and resilience” as the biggest obstacle she faces as a careers advisor.

“Students often get discouraged after a few rejections and I frequently see students who do not feel they can apply for a job if they don’t meet 100% of the requirements or if they do not feel confident in themselves.”

When it comes to inspiring students who have yet to figure out what they want to do next, Kristina stresses the importance of universities as a whole - not just the careers services - doing their part to advise students not only how to apply for jobs, but what jobs to apply for.

“Career inspiration needs to come from [students’] subject leaders, in conjunction with the careers service,” she explains. “In-curruculum delivery of careers topics is always well-received and often delivers a positive effect for the student, inspiring them, making them think.”

Is it OK to leave university still not knowing what you want to do?

“100% yes,” says Kristina. “As someone with over 7 years of employment experience, I am still not sure of what I want to do.”

As far as Kristina is concerned, knowing exactly what you want to do after university isn’t the be-all and end-all. The most important thing you need to figure out is what you enjoy doing - and what you don’t enjoy doing - until you can narrow down your ultimate career goal.

With that being easier said than done, we asked Kristina what advice she would give to a student reading this who is about to enter their final year of study and still feels unprepared for the future.

“Speak to someone as soon as you get into your final year,” she says. This is particularly important if you think you might want to apply for a graduate scheme, with many of them closing for applications in September.

“Take every opportunity to take on responsibility and boost and build up your CV,” she encourages. “Have a look into student reps, societies, causes to get involved in.”

Kristina also recommends attending as many careers events as you can, keeping your CV and LinkedIn profile up to date and, if possible, displaying your skills online using tools like YouTube or GitHub or Carbonmade.

So where does this leave universities and the students who feel more help is needed?

Perhaps it is, as Kristina pointed out, a simple case of making sure more students know that help is available to them at an earlier stage, as well as ensuring career inspiration also happens outside of the careers department.

Alternatively, in some cases, maybe the help a student requires of a university is to point them in the direction of another method through which they can prepare for the working world, be it smartening up their use of social media or registering to an online jobs site.

Whatever it is, the most important thing is that both students and universities alike are aware of the help available to them when it comes to preparing for the working world so that when help is needed, each party feels enough is being done to provide it.