

# Employer Demands from Business Graduates

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## Abstract:

### Purpose:

This paper reports on research carried out with employers to determine demand for graduate business and management skills in the Scottish workforce.

### Design/methodology/approach:

The research used an employer questionnaire distributed through various methods (either telephone or face-to-face interviews, self-completion and returned by e-mail, or completion of an online survey). 71 employers took part in the study.

### Findings:

The research found that the factors which were most important to employers when recruiting graduates, with a business school first degree, were: personal attitude, employability skills, relevant work experience, and degree result. The most important transferable skills to employers when recruiting graduates were: trustworthiness, reliability, motivation, communication skills and a willingness to learn.

### Research limitations/implications:

The article shows the importance of: graduates developing excellent job searching skills; high quality work experience; and developing business courses that enhance students' employability and better reflect employers' requirements but also reflect important wider educational values.

### Originality/value:

The article is timely given the introduction by Higher Education Institutions of Key Information Sets. The provision of such information may drive HEIs to further develop students' employability so as to support them in obtaining graduate level jobs.

## **1. Introduction**

The employability of graduates is becoming an increasingly important topic within higher education. The 2008 recession had an impact on graduates' concerns over employment and on Higher Education Institutes in an increasingly competitive environment. Graduate prospects are also a key determination of university league ranking.

Thus, it is important for universities to better understand employer skills requirements, so that their graduates can better meet those requirements as well as the crucial wider educational objectives of a university degree. This article originates from research into the nature of employer demand for business and management skills in the wider Edinburgh regional workforce and considers those who have just graduated from their first degree in a business school.

### **The Role of Business Schools**

Discussing graduate employability brings into focus the role of universities and particularly the role of business schools. There have long existed tensions between the diversity of demands on business schools, such as: producing trained functionaries for industry and the development of creative and critical minds; differing levels of skills development and education, from undergraduates to PhDs; theoretical research and impact on society; and what can realistically be delivered within the resources available and are expectations appropriate?

This is particularly relevant when it comes to business schools. Business schools had their origins as trade schools, where sometimes the local manager of a plant would come in and teach the students. In 1959, the Ford and Carnegie foundations criticised business schools for their lack of research and theory. Both foundations recommended that business schools become academically focused. Universities invested heavily in their business schools and their focus switched towards scientific research (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005).

However, criticisms are nowadays levelled against business schools in that they are too detached from business, that they are more concerned with theory rather than practice, that staff have limited experience in the private sector and are more interested in academic

research, influenced in the UK by the Research Excellence Framework, than working with businesses (Shackleton, 2012).

Likewise, business schools have been criticised for producing research which is not relevant to business and not contributing to improvements in business practices and wider society. Furthermore, business schools are criticised for doing a poor job of educating and preparing their graduates for the world of work (Pfeffer and Fong, 2004).

There are, however, problems when business schools align too closely with business and their requirements (Gleeson and Keep, 2004; Mackney, 2007). Often these employer expressed requirements are short-term rather than focussed on long-term needs of both industry and society (rather than specific employers) and education that may be beneficial across the career of the graduate. They can lose their academic integrity and not promote high ethical standards among students. In addition some employers may be seeking to transfer training and staff development costs from themselves to others and there is a question as to which employers' views should be taken account of rather than responding to the most vocal (Keep, 2012). Further issues include, should the focus of business education be on: SMEs, or larger global organisations; on innovation and entrepreneurship; and on business education or wider management education for a variety of types of employers?

Indeed, business schools have been charged with championing the worst aspects of capitalism and promoting fast track corporate growth without due attention to the wider societal effects, which was seen in the Enron disaster and the financial crisis (Starkey and Tempest, 2005).

Intrinsic to the debate about business schools is the perception of business education by universities, such as: the tensions and balance between theoretical research and impact on businesses and society; academic purity of subjects versus multi-disciplinary research; pedagogy and professional practice; the financial performance of business schools and their consideration of wider global issues such as inequality and climate change (Clarke, 2013a).

Is business considered a typical academic subject or more of a profession, such as medicine or law? Most teachers in the medical faculty are practising doctors and therefore 'practice what they preach' and have intimate knowledge of the current issues in practice and how they link to theory (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005). New technical and socio-economic developments are important, such as the influence of major economic changes, including the recent financial collapse and the development of new teaching forms such as Massive open online courses (MOOCs) which may profoundly alter the form, content and accessibility of business education (Clarke, 2013b).

### **Policy Context**

The pressures to produce employable graduates, from students, employers and governments, have placed graduate employability further up the higher education agenda. This results in a need for students to clearly understand how their academic achievements relate to developing skills valued by potential employers. The labour market remains very competitive and therefore universities seek to ensure they are equipping graduates with the right skills to meet employer demands, while at the same time equipping students for future long-term careers and life and providing a worthwhile education.

The institutions also have a role in providing employability enhancement and encouraging students to undertake other activities away from their core studies (Pegg *et al.*, 2012). Since 2012, universities and colleges have been required to publish standardised information for all their undergraduate courses in the form of a Key Information Set (KIS) (Key Information Sets, 2012). This will allow potential students to see what percentage of graduates from a particular course secure a graduate level job within six months of graduating.

In a Scottish context, the Lifelong Skills Strategy recognises the need for universities to explore ways of promoting and recognising achievements of young people, in addition to formal qualifications, across various education levels from primary to higher education. Furthermore, it is recognised that employers need to have their skills requirements met to support economic and employment development (The Scottish Government, 2007).

In 2006, the Scottish Funding Council allocated £4 million of strategic funding for their employability strategy, *Learning to Work*, to the university sector to develop graduate employability between 2007 and 2011. Some of the institutions employed Employability Co-ordinators to deliver activity change. The general feedback has been positive and resulted in students examining their employability needs at an earlier stage. Many institutions were found to be continuing to develop more work-related and work-based learning opportunities (SQW, 2011).

In 2009, the Scottish Funding Council published *Learning to Work Two*. The strategy needed to develop to take account of the increased emphasis of the Scottish Government on skills and employability and the introduction of the New Horizon Fund for universities. The strategy's main focus was on developing work placement projects to increase employability and also the creation in 2010 of The Scottish Higher Education Employability Forum (SHEEF) to provide leadership, support and policy advice for the development of employability, employer engagement and entrepreneurship across the Scottish HE sector (Scottish Funding Council, 2009).

The next section considers graduate skills in general and then business school graduate skills. Section 3 sets out the methods and survey while section 4 presents the findings. This is followed by a discussion and consideration of qualitative responses from employers and then the conclusions.

## **2. Graduate Skills in General**

Analysis of 1,000 job advertisements aimed at recent graduates in four occupational categories (finance, general management, HRM, marketing), found that the most common skills demanded of graduate job entrants were: Communication (420), IT (320), Organisation (280), Team working (270), Interpersonal (240) and Motivation (230) (Bennett, 2002).

In the CBI's Education and Skills Survey 2012 of 542 employers – the most important factors considered when recruiting graduates were: employability skills (81%), degree subject (70%), relevant work experience/industrial placement (68%), and degree class (46%). The same

survey also found that employers were concerned with graduates in terms of inadequate work experience (37%), team working (25%), and problem solving (23%) (CBI, 2012).

Similarly, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills Employer Skills Survey 2011 interviewed 2,503 Scottish employers and found that 86% of Scottish employers thought that graduates from Scottish universities were well prepared for work. The minority, who felt that graduates were not well prepared, considered that they lacked experience, or motivation (Davies *et al.*, 2011).

The Council for Industry and Higher Education published their survey of 233 employers in 2008 (Archer and Davison, 2008). Their research found that, generally across all sizes of organisation, the most important skills and capabilities when recruiting new graduates were: communication skills, team working skills, integrity, intellectual ability, and confidence. The largest gaps in the capabilities of new graduates were seen as commercial awareness, analysis and decision-making skills, communication skills, and good writing skills. In relation to numeracy skills sought by employers, research involving 165 employers indicated that the numerical tasks which employers expected graduates to be competent were calculating percentages (88%), data interpretation (85%), numerical problem solving (78%), and using spreadsheet software (78%) (Durrani and Tariq, 2012).

Industry organisations such as Universities Scotland (2012) and AGCAS Scotland have produced publicity which highlights the achievements of a number of graduates from Scottish universities who have succeeded in gaining employment and pursuing professional careers after graduation. Employers also contribute their views on recruiting graduates. Many employers showcased in the publication offer internships and work placements. They consider it offers an insight into their particular industry and builds key skills and attributes in the students. The employers want applicants to demonstrate these key skills and attributes during recruitment. The general consensus amongst employers is that graduates that make themselves as 'work ready' as possible are in a much stronger position.

The graduates showcased in the publication offer their opinions in what has helped them. Several of the graduates considered that group work and presentations as part of their studies better prepared them for work. All the graduates considered that work experience greatly boosted their confidence and developed their skills (Universities Scotland, 2012).

However, there is a discrepancy between the desire for students with work experience and the willingness of employers to provide it. CMI (2014) research of 1,065 organisation members found that only 22% of employers provided student placements or internships, although 89% wanted students to have meaningful work experience.

Universities Scotland have also identified existing good practice in enhancing employability and proposed further action to improve employability. This includes; further embedding employability skills in university teaching, greater role of careers service, improved work placements, developing entrepreneurship, greater engagement with SMEs, and enhancing global skills to thrive within multi-national companies (Universities Scotland, 2013).

### **Business School Graduates Skills**

Although business schools vary in the disciplines that they cover, in this paper we focus on to as large extent on business studies, management and HRM. In research undertaken with 154 employers in New Zealand, employers were asked to rate the importance of a number of business graduate competences and also to rate new business graduates' performance for the same graduate competencies (Hodges and Burchell, 2003). The research found that the employers most valued: ability and willingness to learn, energy and passion, teamwork and cooperation, and interpersonal communication. It also indicated that the largest gaps between importance and performance were: customer service orientation, order quality and accuracy, interpersonal communication, and problem solving. Similarly, Maxwell *et al.* (2010) found communication and problem-solving skills to be highly ranked by employers and urged their involvement in curricula design.

The impact of the 2008 global economic downturn has given rise to a significant change in the higher education sector. Despite differences in approach within each of the UK nations of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (Pegg *et al.*, 2012), a common theme has been the need to ensure that graduates emerging from the HE system are capable of contributing to national economic growth through their knowledge, skills and creativity.

Although a contested term, a dominant concept of graduate employability is based on the assumption that employability is defined in terms of the skills and attributes that an individual is seen to possess (Pool and Sewell, 2007; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). It is

commonly assumed that this set of achievements should include skills, understanding and personal attributes that collectively make an individual more useful in the labour market thereby benefiting themselves, the workforce and the wider economy (Yorke, 2004).

As an indicator of the importance of graduate employability to the higher education sector, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) embedded employability at the core of their HE agenda. It is claimed that this will bring significant private and public benefit, demonstrating higher education's broader role in contributing to economic growth as well as its vital role in social and cultural development (HEFCEa 2011, p4).

In the United States, the issue of graduate employability has gained increasing prominence since the late 1990s (Robinson *et al.*, 2007). It was noted that 'entry level college graduates have not acquired the skills necessary for the workforce and, as such, are not prepared for the demands of industry careers' (Peddle, 2000).

There has been criticism of business schools for placing too much emphasis on technical skills at the cost of soft skills such as communication, interpersonal skills and teambuilding (Winstead *et al.*, 2011). In 2004, the influential *Wall Street Journal* published an article that argued that soft skills such as 'leadership, communication and the ability to work in teams, are just as important as the 'hard stuff' to recruiters in the evaluation of potential employees' (Alsop, 2004).

Similarly, an international comparison found that both Australian (155) and UK academics (135) placed considerable significance on the need of business graduates to develop: problem solving skills, data analysis and management skills, critical thinking skills, and the understanding of business management principles (Jackson and Chapman, 2009).

Australian research into the oral communication skills needs and uses of business graduate employees (based on a small sample of 24 employers) found that oral communication skills were a vital component in the workplace. Indeed, they were seen as important or very important by the overwhelming majority of employers in the recruitment, job success, and promotion of business graduates. Furthermore, it is considered that Business Schools need to go beyond students undertaking formal presentations to improve graduates oral communication skills (Crosling and Ward, 2002).



In relation to the recruitment of business graduates, research carried out with 75 employers in the USA indicated that the skills they sought were: communication, computer literacy, interpersonal/social, critical/thinking, leadership, and teamwork. The majority of employers surveyed considered that portfolios were useful in providing these skills in context (Moody *et al.*, 2002).

The educational process in business schools has been criticised for not developing graduates with employability skills. Generally, this is perceived by the lack of relevance of management theory being taught and the processes used to teach the students (Avramenko, 2012).

### **3. Methods**

To identify the sample of employers to be contacted for their views of business graduates, a request was made to Student and Academic Services within Edinburgh Napier University for the 'Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education' (DLHE) database. The DLHE database provides information on the activities of students gaining a qualification from Edinburgh Napier University after graduation. Data are collected through a survey carried out approximately six months after the student has left the university with a first degree from the Business School. The DLHE database follows a standardised format devised by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and provides a robust and reliable measure of student post-graduation activity (see HEFCE, 2011b).

The DLHE survey requests that graduates supply information on their current activity, qualification, location and employer. Those included in the DLHE survey are: United Kingdom (UK) and European Union (EU) domiciled students; students who obtained doctorates, masters, postgraduate bachelors degrees, PGCE's, postgraduate diplomas and certificates, first degrees (excluding intercalated degrees), Diploma of Higher Education, Certificate of Higher Education, HND or HNC; Those who study at least part of the programme of study within the UK.

The DLHE survey collated by graduates of Edinburgh Napier Business School provides a large sample (1,642) of graduate activity six months after leaving the university for the

period 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10. For the purposes of the research we focussed only on those graduates that had entered full-time graduate occupations. Hence, employers with full-time graduate posts, into which graduates of Edinburgh Napier Business School had entered, were contacted by email and phone to arrange an interview (Table 1).

**Table 1: DLHE 2007 – 2010 Graduates of Edinburgh Napier Business School**

	<b>2007/8</b>	<b>2008/9</b>	<b>2009/10</b>
Full time paid work only	260 (55%)	250 (47%)	348 (55%)
Part time paid work only	29 (6%)	36 (7%)	32 (5%)
Voluntary/unpaid work only	2 (0%)	4 (0%)	2 (0%)
Work and further study	28 (6%)	33 (6%)	33 (5%)
Further study only	103 (22%)	161 (30%)	140 (22%)
Assumed to be unemployed	7 (1%)	11 (2%)	31 (5%)
Not available for employment	19 (4%)	20 (4%)	18 (3%)
Other	10 (2%)	6 (1%)	9 (1%)
Explicit refusal	13 (3%)	16 (3%)	21 (3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>471 (100%)</b>	<b>537 (100%)</b>	<b>634 (100%)</b>

A standardised questionnaire was developed that was used across all business sectors. The questionnaire used a mixture of qualitative open ended questions and quantitative Likert scale questions (see Appendix). The Likert scale questions enabled researchers to create a standardised response tool that could be used with all interviewees and asked respondents to assess the skills of graduates across a wide range of areas including basic literacy and numeracy skills and higher level transferable skills. The questionnaire also sought to assess change in the level of graduate recruitment in the 12 months prior to the research interview.

The use of a mixed methods approach to data gathering through telephone interviews, face to face interviews and online surveys represented a flexible approach towards a wide range of employers. Each of the approaches used a common questionnaire that was adapted for use over the telephone, online or face to face. This approach ensured that although there were differences in the way in which interviews were conducted, interviewees were all responding to the same questions.

## Responses

In total, 207 employers from the DLHE database were contacted and an interview requested. Information was received from 72 respondents (71 unique organisations) giving a response rate of 35%. The majority of interviews (58) were conducted by phone, three interviews were conducted face to face and three were completed by e-mail. A total of 10 online surveys were started and 8 were completed. Most of the respondents were from the private sector organisations with fewer from the public and third sectors (Table 2). The findings described in this paper suggest that further research in this area using a larger sample, would better inform the direction of the development of employability within the UK HE sector.

**Table 2: Total respondents by sector**

	Private Sector	Public Sector	Third Sector
Total Number of respondents	50 (70%)	16 (23%)	5 (7%)

The overwhelming majority of respondents were large employers, with fewer small and medium employers (Table 3).

**Table 3: Respondents by size of organisation**

Employees	Respondents
1-50	13 (18%)
51-250	8 (11%)
251+	50 (71%)

The largest number of private sector organisations operated within professional services, a sizeable number operated within retail and hospitality (Table 4).

**Table 4: Respondents by occupational sector**

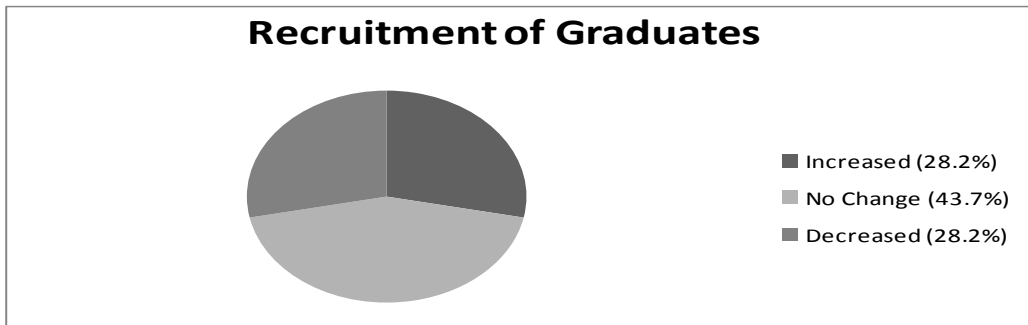
Occupational Sector	Respondents
Professional Services	17 (24%)
Public Sector	16 (23%)
Retail/Hospitality	13 (18%)
Banking/Finance/Insurance	6 (8%)
Third Sector	5 (7%)
Transport/Distribution	5 (7%)
Manufacturing	3 (4%)
Engineering	2 (3%)
Hi-tech/IT	2 (3%)
Training	1 (1%)
Energy/Water	1 (1%)

## 4. Research Findings

### Impact of the Recession

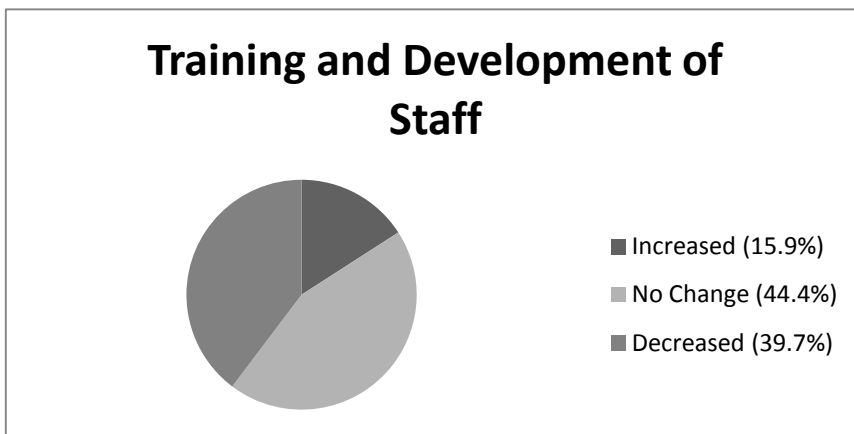
Employers were asked what impact the recent recession had had on their recruitment of graduates. Furthermore, they were asked about the impact of the economic situation on the training and development of all staff.

**Figure 1: What impact has the recent recession had on your recruitment of graduates?**



Nearly 44% of employers reported that the recession had not impacted on the number of graduates they recruited, whilst just over 28% of employers stated that the numbers of graduates they have recruited had either increased or decreased. Nearly 38% of employers in the public sector reported that their recruitment of graduates had declined. This likely indicates the effect of reducing public sector expenditure on recruitment.

**Figure 2: What impact is the current economic situation having on the training and development of staff?**

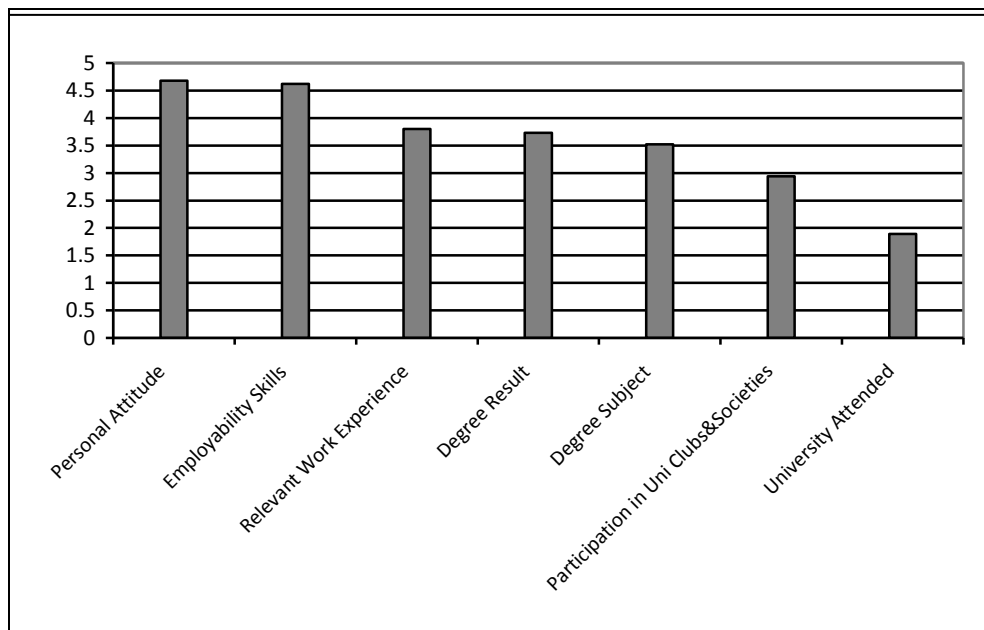


The economic situation was clearly having a negative impact on the training and development of staff in many organisations, with nearly 40% of respondents reporting decreased training and staff development. In particular, 64% of the public sector respondents reported a decline in training and development. Some public sector organisations reported increasing their training simply because they performed an economic development role and there was a need to increase this role given the economic climate.

### Factors Recruiting Graduates

Employers were asked about the most important factors they consider when recruiting graduates. Respondents reported that personal attitude, employability skills, relevant work experience, degree result, and degree subject were what they valued most.

**Figure 3: What are the most important factors you consider when recruiting graduates?**



(5 = Very important, 1 = Least important (mean))

The CBI's Education and Skills Survey (2012) similarly found that employability skills and relevant work experience were important factors in recruiting graduates. The importance that employers placed on attitude came over clearly in the interviews. One large service private sector organisation described how – *'the most important thing is attitude and personal presentation skills'*. Another large manufacturer informed us – *'it is all about the soft skills and the attitude of the individual'*. This may imply that the technical skill level

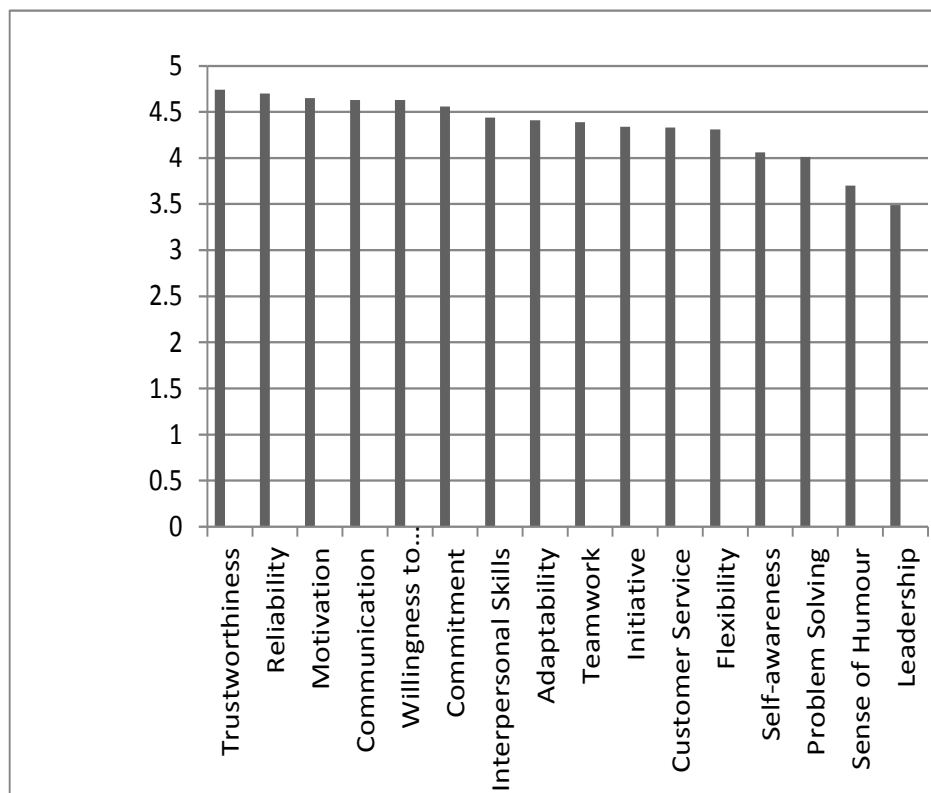
demanded was low, or that most graduates were assumed to have a sufficient level of technical skills.

The relatively small sample size means that it is less likely that there would be large statistically significant differences. However, there were indications that employers with under 2,000 employees valued the degree subject more than larger employers (using a simple t-test at 5%).

### Transferable Skills Favoured

Employers were asked their views on what were the most important transferable skills when recruiting graduates. Respondents reported that trustworthiness, reliability, motivation, communication skills, and a willingness to learn were what they valued most. In relation to trustworthiness, research carried out by The Council for Industry and Higher Education (Archer and Davison, 2008) found that integrity was a key capability when recruiting new graduates.

**Figure 4 What are the most important transferable skills when recruiting graduates?**



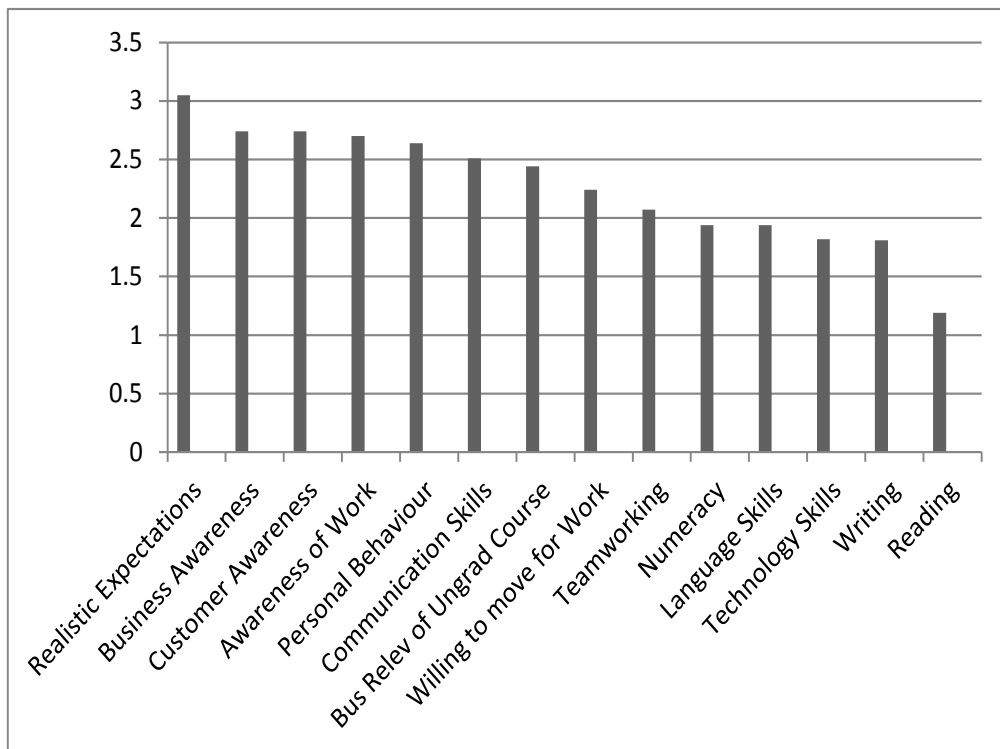
(5 = Very important, 1 = Not important (mean))

The UK Commissions Employer Skills Survey (2011) found that a lack of motivation of graduates from universities was an issue amongst the minority of employers who felt that graduates were not well prepared for work. As one SME stated – ‘English and writing are very important, as well as motivation and understanding that they are there to work’. There were no significant differences between employers operating in different sectors in any of the transferable skills.

### Key Areas Needing Addressed

Employers were asked what they thought were the key areas that needed to be addressed by all the graduates they recruited. Respondents reported that realistic expectations (of what the job entailed and the pay and conditions of the job), business awareness, customer awareness, and awareness of work were most lacking.

**Figure 5 What are the key areas that need to be addressed by the graduates you recruit?**



(5 = strongly needs addressed, 1 = No concerns (mean))



The Council for Industry and Higher Education's research of 233 employers found that largest gap in the capabilities of new graduates was commercial awareness. Many employers in this study reported that students had unrealistic expectations; as one large private sector organisation informed us – *'student expectations are too high, students place too much value on a degree, whilst employers value experience and attitude more...'*

The service sector (particularly Retail/Hospitality and Professional Services) had a higher level of concern around business awareness compared to other sectors.

## **5. Discussion**

The results of the research indicate that the higher education sector should continue to ensure that the employability of graduates is given serious consideration throughout their university education. Our research findings suggest that employers are placing considerable importance on the capacity of graduates to demonstrate that they possess a wide range of skills.

Indeed when asked to rank factors considered to be important when recruiting graduates, employers ranked personal attitude and employability skills above more traditional hard outcome measures such as degree result and degree subject. This mirrors research elsewhere (see Hodges and Burchell, 2003; CBI, 2012).

Employers frequently voiced their belief in the importance of graduates having soft skills. About a third of all employers that participated in the research stated that graduates lacked the skills to obtain employment. This included: poor CVs; not researching the company they are applying to work for; not understanding the recruitment/interview process; and not performing well at interview. A large public sector employer stated that graduates needed *'training for filling in application forms, preparing for interviews, better understanding recruitment process'*.

The Graduate recruiter for a large financial services organisation explained that he was surprised how graduates arrived for interview with little understanding of the organisation to which they were applying. He advised graduates to *'make sure they research the company fully before applying'*.

It was also clear from interviews with employers that a key resource for the development of soft skills and wider employability was the use of work experience. The majority of employers considered work experience to be vital in the development of graduates, as suggested by (Davies *et al.*, 2011).

Work experience was seen to improve soft skills, increase confidence, produce more rounded individuals and improve their connections to the labour market. A large public sector organisation explained *'students must do other things other than study, do voluntary work or paid work so they are a more rounded individual'*. A large retailer explained that *'graduates need more practical experience than theory, first-hand experience and exposure leads to more realistic expectations'*. Another large retailer felt it *'Important that students get some work experience. It's important that universities manage students expectations, graduates are expecting too much too soon, universities could explain about salary expectations and the need to work their way up the organisation'*.

Employers also highlighted the need for work experience to be targeted in a way that helped develop the employability of graduates. Whilst work experience was, for some, seen to be better than none, it was also clear that work experience that was targeted at an area relevant to the future career of the graduate was vital.

A large private sector organisation stated that *'any relevant work experience is good, even 2-week work shadowing. Commercial work experience is far better than something like bar work'*. An interviewee from a large private sector organisation said in an interview that *'work placements have to be managed well, they have a chance to deal with performance reviews, chance to deal with difficult situations'*.

Work placements are a vital link for undergraduates and graduates to the labour market but also for the development of personal employability. Several interviewees described situations where the recruitment of graduates had taken place as a result of work placements. An engineering company described how, *'We took on a student on an industrial placement with us, it was very useful in securing a graduate position'*. An SME mentioned that they took students on placement from another University through their Club 21 Business Partnership Programme, which often led to offers of employment.

Some employers mentioned curriculum changes. One considered that giving business students the opportunity to learn a foreign language would boost their employability with employers who operated internationally, which would also broaden their education. Other employers felt that sales training would be of use to both business students and employers alike. One SME considered that there was a lack of high quality Internet Marketing teaching in any regional university. Another SME thought that accounting programmes in universities were geared to meet the needs of large accounting firms and not theirs. Obviously, these are the views of these particular employers and may not be representative of others and further research is needed on ways of giving employers, as a whole, a 'voice' in dialogues on graduate employability.

The evidence collated during this research suggests several approaches that could be adopted by university business school to improve the employability of students and graduates. Firstly, consistent with the Council for Industry and Higher Education (Archer and Davison, 2008) survey, is improvement to the courses. One large manufacturer felt that business school courses needed to be developed – *'Business school graduates need to be rounded, such as taking courses in languages and social sciences'*.

Secondly, the relationship between academia and industry in the development of employability skills is a two way relationship. Several employers in the study highlighted the need for closer linkages between university business schools and employers. Closer links would enable greater information sharing about possible work placements, graduate recruitment and allow employers to offer undergraduates insights into a variety of industrial sectors. Care would need to be taken, as discussed above, against: an over influence of the most vocal employers, an emphasis on short term job readiness rather than lifelong and career skills; and a diminution of the wider educational role of degree courses.

Thirdly, whilst technical skills continue to form the basis of a strong academic education, it is important for students to develop their soft skills. Effective communication skills, working together in groups and possessing relevant work experience are frequently cited by employers as key soft skills that are required to strengthen the employability of graduates.

## **6. Conclusions**

A key theme emerging from the research was the fact that many graduates appear to be lacking in some relevant skills to obtain employment. This may emanate partly from an expectation that getting a degree is enough and simply do not take into account the effort required in creating excellent CV's and application forms, of researching a potential employer fully, of understanding their value to an employer and having the skills and confidence to demonstrate these at an interview and/or selection centre.

Our findings suggest that employers do value, good relevant work experience. Therefore, it is important that students in seeking to develop their employability find opportunities for relevant work experience.

As discussed earlier, tensions exist between the roles of the business school as an institute of academic excellence whose teaching develops students' critical thinking and that which is closely aligned to business needs and produces graduates which meet their requirements.

This research has indicated that business schools could do more to increase the employability of their students and graduates. There could be additional resources put into innovative forms of careers services. There clearly is a place for high quality internships and work placements to develop students' confidence and skills and relate academia to the world of work. The business schools should engage in dialogue with businesses, so that it is clear for them who to contact around, work placements, recruitment, and input. However, the business schools need to retain a strong recognition of the need for academic independence and to produce teaching and research relevant to the needs of society and graduates who are confident, multi-skilled and critical thinkers throughout their lives, as well as to the needs of good employers.

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## Appendix - Questionnaire

Regionally Coherent Access and Employability provision: Demand for business and management skills in the Edinburgh

1. Name of participant
  
2. Title
  
3. Company

4. Type of business / organisation

5. Contact details:

a. Address:

b. Phone Number(s):

c. E-mail:

d. Website:

6. Date:



REMIND EMPLOYERS THAT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IS ONLY CONCERNED WITH GRADUATES OF EDINBURGH NAPIER BUSINESS SCHOOL UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED.

1. About the Employer

1.1 What is the principle activity of the business?

1.2 In which sector does the business operate?

Retail and hospitality	
Professional services	
Engineering	
Public sector	
Energy and Water	
Manufacturing	
Transport and Distribution	
Science	
Construction	
Hi-Tech/IT	
Banking/Finance/Insurance	
Other	

1.3 Approximately how many people are employed by the business in?

Scotland	
England	
Wales	
Northern Ireland	
EU	
Worldwide	

2. Impact of Graduates

2.1 What is the role of graduates within the business?

2.2 What impact has the recent recession had on your recruitment of graduates?

2.3 What impact is the economic situation having on the training and development of staff?

2.4 Please indicate how you rate employee skills levels for each of the following job levels.

Job Level	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Employees in low skills jobs			
Employees in intermediate skilled jobs			
Employees in high skilled jobs			

2.5 How confident are you that there will be sufficient people to meet your businesses skills needs in the near future.

Job Level	Confident	Not Confident	Don't know
Employees in low skilled jobs			
Employees in intermediate skilled jobs			
Employees in high skilled jobs			

2.6 Have you knowingly employed any graduates of Edinburgh Napier Business School?

2.7 If known, which of the following Edinburgh Napier subject areas have you recruited from?

Subject Area	
Accounting	
Business & Enterprise	
Business Management	
Business Studies	
Corporate Strategy and Management	
Festival and Event Management	
Financial Services	
Heritage and Cultural Tourism Management	
Hospitality Management	
International Business Management	
Languages	
Law	
Marketing	
MBA	
Strategic Risk Management	
Tourism	

2.8 In your decision making, what importance if any, is the university the graduate comes from?

3. Types of Graduate Employment

3.1 What graduate level occupations do you have within the organisation?

3.2 Approximately what proportion of your jobs require a degree?

3.3 What proportion of your graduate jobs require a specific degree discipline?

3.4 How do you recruit graduates?

*<probe in relation to advertising methods / graduate events>*

3.5 Thinking about *all* the graduates that you recruit (regardless of the university from which they graduated), what do you think are the key areas that need to be addressed?

*1 – No concerns*

*5 – Strongly needs addressed*

<i>Skill Area</i>	1	2	3	4	5
Reading					
Writing					
Numeracy					
Communication skills					
Personal Behaviour					
Realistic expectations					
Science skills					
Technology skills					
Language skills					
Business relevance of undergraduate courses					
Awareness of work					
Business awareness					
Customer awareness					
Willingness to move for work					
Team working					
Other (specify)					

3.6 Thinking *only* about graduates of Edinburgh Napier Business School, how do you rate their skills in the following areas:

1 – *No concerns*

5 – *Strongly needs addressed*

	1	2	3	4	5
Reading					
Writing					
Numeracy					
Communication skills					
Personal Behaviour					
Realistic Expectations					
Science skills					
Technology skills					
Language skills					
Business relevance of undergraduate courses					
Awareness of work					
Business awareness					
Customer awareness					
Willingness to move for work					
Team working					
Other (specify)					

3.7 Please rate the following transferable skills by their importance when recruiting graduates

1 = not important

5 = very important

	1	2	3	4	5
Self-awareness					
Initiative					
Willingness to learn					
Interpersonal skills					
Communication					
Team work					
Leadership					
Customer service					
Problem solving					
Flexibility					
Commitment					
Motivation					
Reliability					
Adaptability					
Trustworthiness					
Sense of humour					

3.8 Looking to the future, how confident are you that graduates' of Edinburgh Napier Business School can meet the skills requirements of your business?

1 = Not confident

5 = Very confident

Level	1	2	3	4	5
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3.9 In your business, how have recruitment levels changed in the last 12 months for:

	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	Not applicable
Recruitment of school/college leavers aged 16				
Recruitment of school/college leavers aged 18				
Recruitment of undergraduates				
Recruitment of post-graduates				

3.10 When you are recruiting graduates, what are the most important factors you consider?

1 = Least important

5 = Most important

	1	2	3	4	5
University attended					
Degree result					
Degree subject					
Employability skills (e.g. communication, team working)					
Relevant work experience					
Personal attitude					
Participation in university clubs & societies					
Other					

3.11 When recruiting graduates to your organisation, what degree subject areas do you prefer?

Subject	Tick
Science	
Technology	
Engineering	
Maths	
Languages	
Business	
Arts	
Social Science	
Law	

3.12 Would you be willing to participate in a panel through which the view of employers could be fed back to universities and colleges?

3.13 Are there any other issues that you think are important but which we have not yet discussed?