

Media Release

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Embargoed until 11:30pm, Tuesday 1 July 2008

Generation gap not so wide when it comes to employment values

A national survey of university students has found a high level of consistency between generations in what they regard as important in their employment.

The *University and Beyond 2007* report, released this week by Graduate Careers Australia (GCA), presents the findings of a survey of the expectations and perceptions of 32,000 university students. Contrary to perceived generational differences, the innovative new survey, which is funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and is the largest of its kind in Australia, found a high level of consistency between generations regarding their employment values.

GCA's Executive Director, Cindy Tilbrook, said the report indicated that students and graduates of today share with previous generations an interest in good training and development and interesting, challenging work. Other significant survey findings:

- students are presenting to employers as more confident than they actually feel;
- students indicate a greater intention to remain in their 'ideal' job following graduation than employers are experiencing;
- over three-quarters of students would prefer a job that gives them personal life and career balance with work flexibility over a higher salary in a comparable role;
- nearly a third of all students felt that they would stay in their *ideal* employment for five years or more, with a further third staying between three and five years. Over half the employers felt the average graduate would leave within the first three years.

By including some results from GCA's Graduate Outlook Survey (GOS) and Australian Graduate Survey (AGS) in the report where relevant, some new insights into the gaps between employer and student perceptions, and student expectations and perceptions relative to actual graduate outcomes, were identified. Ms Tilbrook, said that while there was "a high level of congruence between many areas of student and recruiter expectations and perceptions, there are also areas of notable difference".

- 'Opportunities for advancement' was ranked first by employers, but fifth by students;
- job security was ranked important by over 80 per cent of students, relative to just over 20 per cent of employers;
- 'Making a contribution to society' was important to over 80 per cent of students compared with just under 50 per cent of employers believing this was important;
- students were more willing to work additional unpaid hours to progress their careers than employers believed they would be;
- company-paid training and development was clearly the most attractive non-cash benefit to students, followed by additional leave and performance-related bonuses.

For findings relating to international students see separate media release.

Further information and comment

A full copy of the report can be purchased from the GCA website, www.graduatecareers.com.au – go to 'shop'. If you are a journalist, email contact 03 9605 3723 for details on obtaining a free copy.

For comment please contact Cindy Tilbrook, GCA Executive Director: (03) 9605 3740 / 0438 988 772 / Cindy.tilbrook@graduatecareers.com.au



Media Backgrounder

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University and Beyond 2007

The *University and Beyond 2007* report is based on a survey of the expectations and perceptions of 32,000 university students, a student demographic that is of key interest to organisations wishing to attract, recruit, and retain their leaders and employees of the future. With such a high level of response, the survey allows an in-depth analysis of the results by a wide variety of differing demographic profiles. As such, the survey results provide invaluable data to organisations, government, employers, university teachers and administrators, university Career Services and students.

Generic Employability Skills

Of their generic employability skills, students rated their communication skills highest, followed by learning skills, self-management, technology and technical skills.

- For the employability skills of communication, learning, self-management, technical skills, and planning and organising, females rated themselves higher than males.
- Males rated themselves higher in technology, initiative and enterprise, and problem solving.
- Students also indicated that they feel their generic employability skills increase as their course progresses.

In regards to what is important to graduate recruiters, students believe that attitude, drive and commitment are most important, closely followed by interpersonal and communication skills, then teamwork skills.

- Females consistently rated each attribute more important to an employer than males.

When comparing the importance of various generic skills to both students and employers:

- Students did not feel that cultural/social alignment and values fit were overly important to an employer, whereas employers found this to be a key selection criteria.
- Academic qualifications and critical reasoning/analytical/technical skills were ranked higher by graduate employers than students.

Benefits and Remuneration

Undergraduate students were shown to have a realistic expectation of their salary post-graduation, unlike students at the postgraduate level where differences between salary expectations and outcomes were more pronounced.

- Over three-quarters of students would prefer a job that gives them personal life and career balance with work flexibility over a higher salary in a comparable role.
- Over two thirds also felt that good training opportunities, opportunities for advancement, and interesting and challenging work would be more important than a higher salary in a comparable role.
- Just over 50 per cent of students felt that working for an ethically responsible or environmentally sound company was more important than salary, but less than 50 per cent of students would place 'making a contribution to society' as more important than salary.
- The importance of the different factors relative to salary varied considerably by field of education.

'Employment Outcome' Expectations

The more important, or relevant, a job becomes to the field of study the student is undertaking, the less confident they become in being able to obtain it.

- At the 'strongly confident' level, male students were more confident of obtaining employment across all job types than were females.

Graduate employers' perceptions of students' confidence in finding employment was slightly higher than the confidence levels expressed by the students, with the difference increasing significantly as the employment became more specific.

- The major changes students expect to make within the first five years of their employment are to 'achieve a higher position' and 'achieve a better use of my qualifications'.
- Males were notably more likely to want to achieve a higher position, move to a more challenging job or change their field of responsibilities than females.
- Females were notably more likely to want to achieve a better use of their qualifications, and 'achieve more secure employment' than males.

Just over half the students expect to achieve more secure employment within their first five years of employment. There is a mismatch between the time a graduate employer believes a graduate will stay with their first employer following graduation, and what the students anticipate.

- Nearly a third of all students felt that they would stay in their *ideal* employment for five years or more, with a further third staying between three and five years. Over half the employers felt the average graduate would leave within the first three years.
- Older graduates intend to stay with their first employer longer than their younger counterparts.

Attraction – the importance of “Corporate Culture”.

In terms of factors relating to employment that are of importance to students, the top issues were 'good training opportunities and be developing new skills', 'conducting interesting and challenging work, ' personal life and career balance/work flexibility', and ' good people to report to.

- Over 60 per cent of students indicated that they are prepared to work additional unpaid hours to progress their careers.
- For males, interesting and challenging work was the most important factor, whereas for females, good training and development was more important.
- Females are notably more likely than males to consider ethical and environmental issues, and the prospect of making a contribution to society and job security.
- Males are more likely than females to be interested in above-average financial rewards and to feel a successful career is the most important goal in their life.

Whilst graduate recruiters have a relatively good understanding of the ranking of the importance of these factors to students, there were some notable differences in the ranking, and significant differences between the level of importance of the factors between recruiters and students.

- 'Opportunities for advancement' was ranked first by employers, but fifth by students.
- Job security was ranked important by over 80 per cent of students, relative to just over 20 per cent of employers.
- 'Making a contribution to society' was important to over 80 per cent of students compared with just under 50 per cent of employers believing this was important.
- Students were more willing to work additional unpaid hours to progress their careers than employers believed they would be.
- Company paid training and development was clearly the most attractive non-cash benefit to students, followed by additional leave and performance-related bonuses.

For findings relating to international students see separate media release.

Further information and comment

A full copy of the report can be downloaded from the GCA website, www.graduatecareers.com.au. Go to News Room/Media Centre and log-in using 'media' (password: 'media'). For comment please contact Cindy Tilbrook: (03) 9605 3740 / 0438 988 772 / Cindy.tilbrook@graduatecareers.com.au