The Grad Files

Number 1, December 1999 Gradlink: http://www.gradlink.edu.au

Uni Graduates: Work, Salaries, Study and Course Satisfaction

The Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCCA) conducts an annual survey which looks at what happens to graduates shortly after they leave university. The Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) gathers information about how many new graduates were in work, and their earnings, or how many were still looking for work, and how many were in further study (say, for a higher degree).

The survey also gathers information as to how satisfied graduates were with aspects of their courses.

The Grad Files is designed to provide relevant information about recent bachelor degree graduates to prospective university students and their families, course and careers advisers, and the general public.

This information will help prospective students make informed decisions about their university options, and will assist others to an understanding of where a university degree leads

We will use only a few simple statistics, and jargon will be kept to a minimum.

For those who want extra detail, our GradStats publication gives a more complete overview, and will supplement the information in *The Grad Files*. There are also numerous GCCA reports that will give more information. Careers advisers might have copies to show you.

Before we get down to looking at the figures, let's consider an important point that is sometimes overlooked. There is no doubt that for almost all university students, their hard work is about establishing the building blocks of a successful career. However, there are many intangibles like issues of personal growth and development beside which more mundane things like starting salaries seem a little less significant. So the information presented here, while important and of interest to many, represents just a few aspects of the benefits of a university education.

Employment

This section gives an overview of what has been happening to graduates in terms of their employment over the last few years. The top line in Figure 1 shows what percentage of bachelor degree graduates who wanted full-time work had found it by the time of the GDS (about 4 months after they finished their degree).

There were strong employment prospects in the mid-to-late 80s, and the early 90s saw larger percentages still looking for full-time work at the time of the GDS. This coincided with the last recession.

The mid-90s saw an improvement in employment prospects for new graduates, but they have not yet reached the levels seen ten years before.

The two lower lines shown for most of the 90s break the percentage still looking for work up into two groups, those who were in part-time work but continued to look for full-time work, and those who had no work at all while they were looking for full-time work.

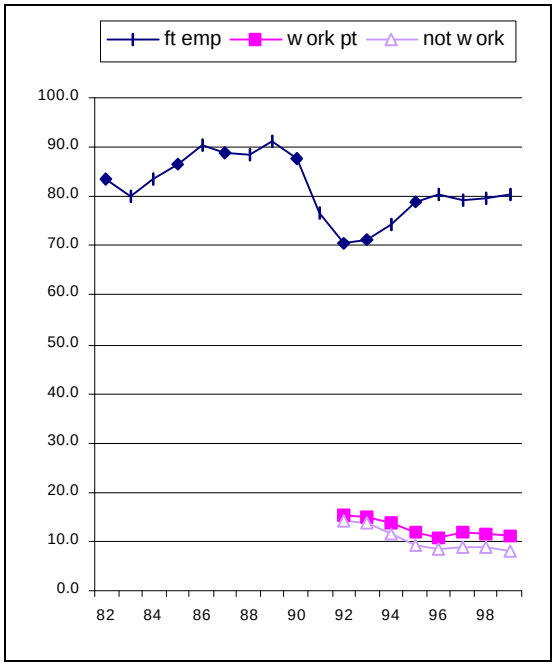

Figure 1: Employment figures for bachelor degree graduates, 1982-1999 (%).

In more recent years, employment prospects for new graduates have plateaued after the mid-90s recovery. Later in this document, we discuss figures for various fields of study.

Of course, for people just starting a degree, it will be three or more years before they are looking for a job with their degree, and things can change quickly. By way of example, think about the change in employment prospects that those who started a degree in 1989 would have been greeted with in 1992 or 1993 (check Figure 1). Even so, it remains the case that graduates are less likely to be unemployed than non-graduates when fewer jobs are available.

So the message for current or prospective university students is to keep an eye on these employment figures as they move through their studies. Forewarned is forearmed.

Currently, of bachelor degree graduates who look for full-time work when they finish their degrees, about eight in every ten have found it within four months. Of the remaining two in ten, one is in part-time work while looking for a full-time job and the other is not working.

Research suggests that those two quickly find full-time work, and that in the long-term, unemployment is not a great concern for university graduates.

Salaries

Similar patterns can be seen when we look at graduates' starting salaries. Our starting salaries figures are based on the annual median earnings of graduates who were aged less than 25 and in their first full-time job in Australia. This means that new graduates with some experience might earn more. So these figures should be seen as a base-line.

Figure 2 shows that graduate starting salaries have also changed over the years when compared with average earnings in the community. Salaries fell between the late 70s and early 80s before improving in the mid 80s, and note how that coincides with the better employment figures in Figure 1.

Salaries fell again at the time of the recession in the early 90s and a slight recovery can be seen in recent years.

Overall, salaries for male graduates are higher than those for female graduates, and this is usually because of the choices they make at enrolment time. This is discussed in more detail later in this document.

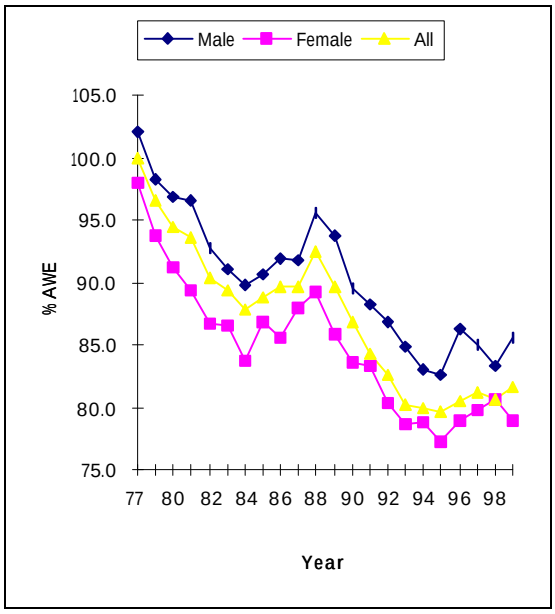

Figure 2: Starting salaries for bachelor degree graduates, 1977-1999.

Further Study

Apart from work, many graduates go on to further full-time study. This includes people doing an honours year in their bachelor degree, or those doing a postgraduate diploma, or those doing a masters degree or doctorate. People usually do further study in order to improve their work prospects or to gain entry to professional employment.

Generally, about two in every ten new graduates continue their full-time study. This figure fluctuates occasionally, especially when employment prospects take a downturn. During the recession of the early 90s, about a quarter of all graduates went on to further full-time study.

Current Figures

These historical figures help to put recent survey results into context. Table 1 gives a broad overview of the results of the GDS for the last three years. Overall, the majority of graduates were either available for full-time employment, or went on to full-time study. 'Available for full-time employment' covers those who were either in full-time work or were looking for a full-time job.

There are other small groups who were only interested in part-time employment, or who were interested in neither work or study at the time of the GDS.

The two notable points in Table 1 are:

- A fall in the percentage of graduates available for full-time employment;
- A rise in the proportion going into further full-time study.

Table 1a looks at the situation of those in the 'available for full-time employment' category in more detail. These are the survey results that form part of Figure 1.

The figures show that the proportions still looking for full-time work at the time of the GDS have been falling slightly. There are some points worth noting:

- Males were slightly more likely to be in full-time work than females;
- Females were less likely than males to be without any work; and
- Females were more likely than males to be in part-time work.

Table 1: Activities of bachelor degree graduates, by sex, 1997-99 (%).

	Available for full-time employment (see Table 1a)	In full-time study	In part-time or casual employment, not seeking full-time employment	Not working, seeking part-time or casual employment only	Unavailable for full-time study or full-time employment
Males					
1997	70.8	22.6	3.4	0.5	2.6
1998	71.5	22.6	3.3	0.4	2.2
1999	68.7	24.2	3.3	0.5	3.3
Females					
1997	64.9	20.8	9.4	1.0	3.9
1998	64.4	21.7	9.0	1.0	3.8
1999	63.8	22.4	8.6	0.9	4.2
All					
1997	67.2	21.5	7.1	0.8	3.4
1998	67.1	22.0	6.8	0.8	3.2
1999	65.1	23.7	6.6	0.7	3.9

Table 1a: Breakdown of bachelor degree graduates available for full-time employment, 1997-99 (%).

	In full-time employment	Seeking full-time employment, not working	Seeking full-time employment, working part-time or casual	Total seeking full-time employment
Males				
1997	80.4	10.3	9.3	19.6
1998	80.8	9.9	9.3	19.2
1999	81.8	9.1	9.1	18.2
Females				
1997	78.3	8.0	13.7	21.7
1998	78.7	8.1	13.2	21.3
1999	79.8	7.4	12.9	20.2
All				
1997	79.2	8.9	11.9	20.8
1998	79.6	8.8	11.6	20.4
1999	80.8	8.0	11.2	19.2

Table 2 sets out some GDS figures for various fields of study. Research suggests that this is some of the information in which most prospective students are interested.

The first three columns of figures give breakdowns of graduates available for full-time employment by their field of study. Employment-related factors characteristic of some fields of study can affect the percentages in, and seeking, full-time employment. So these figures are not a useful basis for comparison between fields.

For example, medical graduates, of whom 99.9 per cent were in full-time work, always have high percentages in this category due to the requirement that they serve an internship in a public hospital for a period after graduation. Hence, they all have positions to go to.

The message here is that one field is not necessarily better than another simply because it has more graduates in employment at the time of the survey. Employment related factors need to be taken into account.

Pharmacy (96.8 per cent), veterinary science (95.1 per cent), post-initial nursing education (95.1 per cent), surveying (94.3 per cent), initial nursing education (93.8 per cent), dentistry (93.4 per cent), law (92.9 per cent), aeronautical engineering (91.3 per cent), civil engineering (90.6 per cent) and electrical engineering (90.2 per cent) also had high proportions in full-time employment at the time of the survey.

At the time of the last GDS, average earnings in the community were $38,000. At that time, the median annual starting salary for new bachelor degree graduates was $30,000, which was 81.6 per cent of average earnings.

New male graduates earned $32,500 (or 86.5 per cent of average earnings) and females earned $30,000 (or 78.9 per cent of average earnings).

It should be noted that fields of study such as law, architecture and pharmacy always have relatively low starting salaries, and this is due to the further training requirements the graduates of these fields must meet for professional registration during their first employment.

As noted earlier, many differences between males and females starting salaries are the consequence of earlier decisions to enrol in particular fields of study.

Males tend to have enrolled in the more highly paying fields of study while females tended to come from the middle and lower paying fields. The top six ranked fields in terms of starting salaries (medicine, dentistry, optometry, engineering, computer sciences and earth sciences) account for 25.7 per cent of male respondents but only 7.1 per cent of females.

Table 2: Employment, further study, starting salaries, 1999.

	In full-time employment %	Seeking full-time employment, not working %	Seeking full-time employment, working part-time or casual %	Further full-time study %	Median starting salary, $,000
Agriculture	83.5	5.1	11.4	17.7	29.0
Architecture	81.9	6.8	11.3	27.7	26.0
Building	88.9	6.6	4.5	10.8	28.0
Urban & Reg. Planning	84.0	7.5	8.5	16.1	33.0
Humanities	69.0	13.0	18.0	34.7	28.0
Languages	68.9	15.0	16.1	39.9	29.5
Visual/Performing Arts	57.3	16.6	26.1	34.0	26.0
Social Sciences	65.1	14.0	20.9	30.8	29.5
Psychology	68.6	12.0	19.4	45.8	28.5
Social Work	74.8	9.5	15.7	9.0	32.0
Business Studies	80.2	8.0	11.8	14.3	30.0
Accounting	88.8	6.7	4.5	12.7	29.0
Economics	83.1	8.1	8.8	27.2	30.4
Education, Initial	81.7	2.8	15.5	13.3	32.7
Education, Post-Initial	87.5	3.2	9.3	9.1	33.8
Aeronautical Eng	91.3	7.7	1.0	11.5	37.5
Chemical Eng	82.4	8.3	9.3	22.1	37.0
Civil Engineering	90.6	6.3	3.0	7.9	33.9
Electrical Eng	90.2	7.2	2.6	16.7	37.0
Electron/Comp Eng	84.8	11.8	3.3	16.5	37.0
Mechanical Eng	78.4	16.0	5.6	13.6	35.0
Mining Engineering	89.0	8.2	2.7	7.6	43.0
Other Engineering	84.6	10.5	4.9	14.8	35.0
Surveying	94.3	1.1	4.5	15.7	30.0
Dentistry	93.4	0.9	5.7	8.1	42.3
Health, Other	83.9	5.5	10.6	22.2	31.6
Nursing, Initial	93.8	1.5	4.7	6.2	30.0
Nursing, Post-initial	95.1	1.2	3.8	4.5	29.6
Pharmacy	96.8	2.5	0.7	13.9	24.0
Medicine	99.9	0.0	0.1	7.1	43.0
Rehabilitation	87.1	4.0	8.9	5.6	33.0
Law	92.9	3.7	3.4	28.4	31.5
Law, Other	85.3	7.5	7.2	23.5	28.0
Computer Science	86.6	8.2	5.3	18.1	35.0
Life Sciences	65.5	14.2	20.3	43.9	30.0
Mathematics	76.2	17.2	6.6	41.7	34.0
Chemistry	67.0	20.3	12.8	47.2	32.0
Physics	65.8	19.2	15.0	57.7	33.7
Geology	73.3	13.1	13.6	51.8	38.0
Veterinary Science	95.1	2.1	2.8	6.3	32.5
Total %	80.8	8.0	11.2	23.7	31.0
Total N	31,513	3,111	4,379	14,197	

Graduate Satisfaction

The GDS form is accompanied by the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and Figure 3 shows that bachelor degree graduates' overall satisfaction with their courses has been slowly rising since 1995. Dissatisfaction has been falling over the same period.

The satisfaction figure represents the percentage of respondents answering '4' or '5' on a 5 point scale. Persons responding to the 5th point indicated they strongly agreed they were satisfied with their course. The broad satisfaction figure represents the percentage of respondents answering '3', '4' and '5' on the 5 point scale.

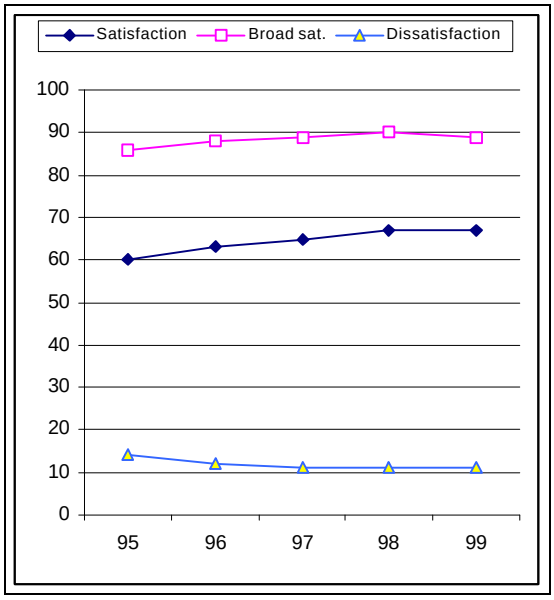

Figure 3: Level of satisfaction with course, bachelor degree graduates, 1995-99.

Occupations

The following section lists the type of full-time work graduates from the various fields of study were doing at the time of the GDS.

After each field listed below, we list the major occupations reported by graduates. The first listed was the one most often mentioned, the second listed was the second most frequently mentioned, and so on.

Don't be put off by the regular occurrence of occupations like 'clerk' or 'manager'. These often represent trainee positions in a field in which the graduate is interested, and which can lead to more advanced positions later.

Agricultural Science: agricultural or environmental scientist; clerk; manager; farmer; business professional; manual worker; scientific officer

Architecture: architect; building technical officer; designer; clerk; manager; business professional

Building: manager; building technical officer; designer; surveyor; quantity surveyor; business professional

Urban and Regional Planning: urban and regional planner; clerk; manager; science professional; other building professional; business professional

Humanities: clerk; manager; business professional; other professional; journalist; teacher; public relations; librarian

Languages: clerk; teacher; business professional; manager; other professional; translator or interpreter

Visual and Performing Arts: clerk; designer or illustrator; teacher; visual or performing artist (other); business professional; manager; film, radio, TV, and stage; manual worker; musician or composer; actor or dancer; photographer

Social Science: clerk; welfare/counselling; manager; business professional; other professional; teacher; health professional; science professional

Psychology: clerk; business professional; manager; welfare/counselling; teacher; other professional; psychologist; health professional

Social Work: social worker; welfare/counselling; clerk; counsellor; manager

Business Studies: clerk; manager; business professional; marketing; accounting; personnel; computing professional

Accounting: accountant; clerk; business professional; manager

Economics: clerk; business professional; manager; accounting; economist; other professional

Education (Initial) - initial teacher training: primary teacher; secondary teacher; pre-primary teacher; other teacher; manager; clerk

Education (Post-Initial) - further teacher training: primary teacher; secondary teacher; other teacher; manager; pre-primary teacher; business professional

Aeronautical Engineering: manager; engineer; business professional

Chemical Engineering: engineer (general); chemical engineer; mechanical engineer; business professional; clerk; manager; engineering technical officer

Civil Engineering: civil engineer; other engineer; engineering technical officer; manager; business professional

Electrical Engineering: electrical engineer; computing professional; manager; engineering technical officer; other engineer

Electronic/Computer Engineering: computing professional; electrical engineer; other engineer; business professional; engineering technical officer

Mechanical Engineering: mechanical engineer; other engineer; engineering technical officer; manager; business professional; computing professional

Mining Engineering: mining engineer; engineer (other)

Other Engineering: engineer; manager; engineering technical officer; business professional; computing professional; clerk; science professional

Surveying: surveyor; building professional; engineering technical officer; business professional

Dentistry: dentist; health professional

Health Sciences: medical imaging professional; medical/scientific professional officer; manager; other professional; clerk; science professional; podiatrist; health professional; nurse; chiropractor/osteopath; medical records administrator; dietitian; occupational therapist

Nursing: nurse

Pharmacy: pharmacist

Medicine: medical practitioner

Rehabilitation Studies: physiotherapist; occupational therapist; speech pathologist

Law: lawyer; legal clerk; business professional; manager; accountant; clerk

Law (other): police; legal clerk; lawyer; clerk; business professional; manager; accountant

Computing: computer professional; business professional; clerk; manager

Biological and Life Sciences: clerk; medical/science officer; manager; environmental scientist; business professional; other professional; health professional; teacher; other scientist

Mathematics: computing professional; clerk; business professional; organisational analyst; manager; actuary; mathematician; teacher

Chemistry: chemist (not pharmacist); medical/science technical officer; clerk; engineering professional; manager; business professional; other professional

Physical Science: clerk; medical/science technical officer; engineer; business professional; other professional; health professional; engineering technical officer; computing professional; manager

Geology and Earth Sciences: geologist or geophysicist; clerk; environmental scientist; engineer; manager

Veterinary Science: veterinarian

For more information …

More information about the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) and Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) can be found by talking to a careers adviser at school or university, or a prospective student officer at university.

We have placed more information on the ***Gradlink*** website at http://www.gradlink.edu.au where you can find contact information for careers advisers and read more information from the GDS and CEQ (including GradStats).