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Higher Degrees of Freedom: The Value of Postgraduate Study

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The Career Development and Employment Centre (CDEC) provides information, careers advice and guidance to the University's 12,000 students and supports their transition to work and training. Throughout their studies, Sussex University students have access to a range of CDEC development activities to enhance their skills. These include: work shadowing, part time vacancies and volunteering; student development projects where groups of students develop work-related skills; support from an active alumni network; and self presentation workshops.

CDEC also offers a comprehensive range of services and events, working with academics and employers, including an information centre and website — www.sussex.ac.uk/cdec providing information on career options and training; guidance — one to one drop in sessions with a careers adviser; vacancies and employer links -- opportunities to work during term time, gain experience during the vacations as well as graduate jobs; a programme of talks and recruitment events from a range of national and local organisations -- many delivered by Sussex alumni and labour market information including surveys of Sussex graduates' careers.

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Executive Summary

The demand for postgraduate study in the UK is increasing at a much faster rate than undergraduate study (41 per cent compared with eight per cent in the last five years). Last year there were approaching half a million postgraduate students in HE study. Much is known about graduate choices and destinations yet far less is known about the rising population of postgraduates.

This report looks at what influences individuals' choice of postgraduate study, their study experiences and labour market outcomes, and the value of studying beyond first degree.

The main report tracks the destinations and labour market experiences of over two hundred home (UK domiciled) postgraduates graduating in 1999 and 2001. It uses questionnaire data supplemented with interview data to provide a rich picture of study outcomes, labour market expectations, career routes and decisions. The postal survey and interviews took place in late 2003 and early 2004; participants were drawn from the University's alumni database. The report also examines experiences of just under one hundred Sussex University postgraduates who came to study from the wider European Union or further overseas.

This research, funded and undertaken jointly by the Institute for Employment Studies and the University of Sussex's Career Development and Employment Centre, was designed to inform curriculum development and to help those considering postgraduate study. It focuses on those who followed taught higher degrees and diplomas at the University.

The right result

Overwhelmingly, postgraduates enjoyed their experience at Sussex University. Postgraduates expect a great deal, given the personal financial investment in their study (over half contributed towards their own course fees). They want the right course with good content, quality teaching and tutorial support, academic support facilities, and an institution with an excellent reputation and image. Sussex University provides them with a high quality learning environment that fits with their lifestyles:

'It was definitely worth it - I enjoyed the whole year - wonderful people especially the other students'.

Postgraduates tend to find relevant and rewarding work soon after completing their studies. This includes a significant minority (almost one fifth) who remained in the same job they were doing before they finished their course. At the time of the research, most respondents work in high level occupations that use their postgraduate knowledge, build on past work experiences, place them alongside other postgraduates and enable them to earn largely what they were expecting. Teaching and research, health and social welfare, and business and public service professional occupations are common and fixed term contracts are not unusual in the postgraduate labour market.

Most respondents report that undertaking their postgraduate course has had a positive impact on their lives, giving them a sense of great personal achievement. As one individual noted 'Once you have done the Masters, you can do anything'. Postgraduate study is also considered to have a positive impact on future career and salary. Indeed financial benefits become more apparent in the medium to long term. Most are confident that postgraduate study has been, and will continue to be, a good investment of time and money:

'I felt that the course helped me move up the pay scales at an accelerated rate, and that my MA will bring results in job promotions and applications in the long term'.

Taking the plunge

Respondents make active and positive decisions to undertake their postgraduate studies, commonly to follow a personal interest or to enhance specific or more general career prospects. Rarely does anyone make the decision in reaction to their short term labour market experiences.

Considering when, at what stage in life, to undertake postgraduate study is important; and the implications of timing should not be underestimated by potential students. Some respondents feel they should have delayed their postgraduate study until they had a clearer idea of career plans. However others feel that gaining a higher level qualification later in life is perhaps too late to give much of a boost to their careers:

"In hindsight I wish I had done something more relevant to my chosen career in environmental lobbying".

Horses for courses

Postgraduates are not a homogenous group, they differ in background and in motivations to study. Higher degree study is a popular choice among new graduates (staying on in higher education) but it is also an option for those further into their careers or thinking of changing career direction and lifestyle.

'I was passionate about the Renaissance and found sheer pleasure in thinking in renaissance terms and immersing yourself in another age'.

The range of postgraduate courses available can ensure that individuals find their own niche. However, some may need help in choosing from the array of options, particularly in deciding between vocational or employment oriented courses and those courses with less visible career paths. Timely and realistic advice in relation to course and likely labour market outcomes is critical, and advice on the likelihood of securing sources of funding for studies could also be helpful.

Just as there are different postgraduates and different postgraduate courses, there appear to be many different postgraduate labour markets. Moving on from study and into these is perhaps easier for some postgraduates: those returning to established careers, those who have studied more vocationally oriented courses (such as education), those with clear career goals and those able to access national vacancies. Others may need more help making the transition and could benefit from modules in the curriculum aimed at building confidence and at labour market preparation. They could also benefit from earlier access to the University's career guidance services (something that is often overlooked whilst studying). There is a danger that postgraduates may underestimate the value of these services and only seek to use them as remedial action when they encounter labour market difficulties. The University however may need to promote the full range of services more widely, marketing those specifically targeted towards postgraduates.

Getting the bug

Respondents appreciate and recognise the learning process involved in postgraduate study. For many this process has awakened a love of learning which they hoped to sustain through their careers:

'The more you study, the less you seem to know'.

Some postgraduates have considered further formal study at Masters or PhD level but combining study with employment was a more common intention following postgraduate study, than further formal full time study. Many respondents report that their current employment offers continued skill development but there appears to be limited opportunities for further skill development and training that would lead to formal qualifications or accreditation. Looking to the future, learning while working still features high on postgraduates' agendas.

Hidden gems

Postgraduates feel that they develop the knowledge and skills that are important to employers during their studies such as planning and organising, analytical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills.

But it is not all good news. Many feel employers still need to be convinced of the value of postgraduate study (over and above that of graduate level study) and of what a postgraduate can bring to an organisation.

'Postgraduate study is very different from undergraduate study where you are much more spoon-fed. Employers need to realise that postgraduates bring with them the ability to just get on with it'.

The value of softer skills that are developed through postgraduate study (such as self motivation, self management, understanding and resilience) may need to be promoted to employers.

'Unless you have studied at postgraduate level, you maybe don't appreciate the strength of character it takes and the integrity required to be prepared to go that far'.

Other potential difficulties or barriers that postgraduates report are: a strong competition for jobs, a lack of roles at an appropriate level (particularly in the local labour market) and difficulties balancing work and life demands. Personal circumstances and family commitments can limit an individual's employment flexibility and geographical mobility. Respondents' longer term plans indicate that work-life balance becomes increasingly prioritised over time.

With more and more graduates choosing to continue their studies at higher degree level, this report offers a detailed insight into the diversity of postgraduate experiences both during and after courses. Key messages illustrate the richness of learning at postgraduate level but also draw attention to the need for early careers guidance to maximise opportunities.

The report comments on the fact that many employers are unaware of the value of postgraduate study and the skills these students develop. Working in collaboration with employers to understand their requirements from postgraduate students offers an exciting area for future research.

1. Introduction

This report presents the key findings of research into the factors that influenced postgraduates' choice of study at Sussex University, their study experiences and labour market outcomes. In Autumn 2003 the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) worked with the University of Sussex's Career Development and Employment Centre (CDEC) to conduct the research.

This chapter begins by outlining the aims of the research set against the current research context, then briefly describes the research methods employed and indicates how the research results are presented in the body of the report.

1.1 The research aims

The study was designed to both inform curriculum development at the University and to build a reference model for current and potential postgraduate students relating to the 'real' value of postgraduate study — particularly to individuals' careers. IES and CDEC worked together to investigate what Sussex postgraduates do after completing their studies and explored whether postgraduates from Sussex considered their studies worthwhile. More specifically the research sought to:

- assess postgraduates' employability, examining the impact of their course and its role in their career decisions and motivations
- find out how long it takes to settle into a career
- formulate and measure soft and hard outcomes from postgraduate study
- identify barriers to career development
- evaluate whether postgraduates' expectations about the course and their subsequent career options have been met.

The research focussed on those who had followed taught higher degrees and diplomas, courses that usually require entrants to have already qualified to degree level. These included individuals who had taken Masters courses, such as Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MSc) and Master of Education (MEd) courses; teaching diploma courses such as Postgraduate Certificate of

Table 1.1: Numbers undertaking postgraduate study (compared with undergraduate study)

Year	2002-03 (b)	2001-02	2000-01	1999-00	1998-99 (a)	% change (a to b)
Postgraduates						
Full time	206,755	186,345	172,285	151,330	146,367	41
Part time	290,745	283,505	276,410	257,290	256,973	13
<i>Total</i>	<i>497,500</i>	<i>469,850</i>	<i>448,695</i>	<i>408,620</i>	<i>403,340</i>	<i>23</i>
Male	*	225,760	219,305	206,010	206,485	9
Female	*	244,090	229,390	202,610	196,855	24
Undergraduates						
Full time	1,111,310				1,032,897	8
Part time	566,305				409,520	38
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,677,615</i>				<i>1,442,417</i>	<i>16</i>

(Table 2e – 1998-99 to 2002-03)

* not available (% change 1998-99 to 2001-02)

Source: HESA Student in Higher Education Institutions

Education (PGCE) courses; and a small group of postgraduate diplomates.

1.2 Research context

Trends in postgraduate study

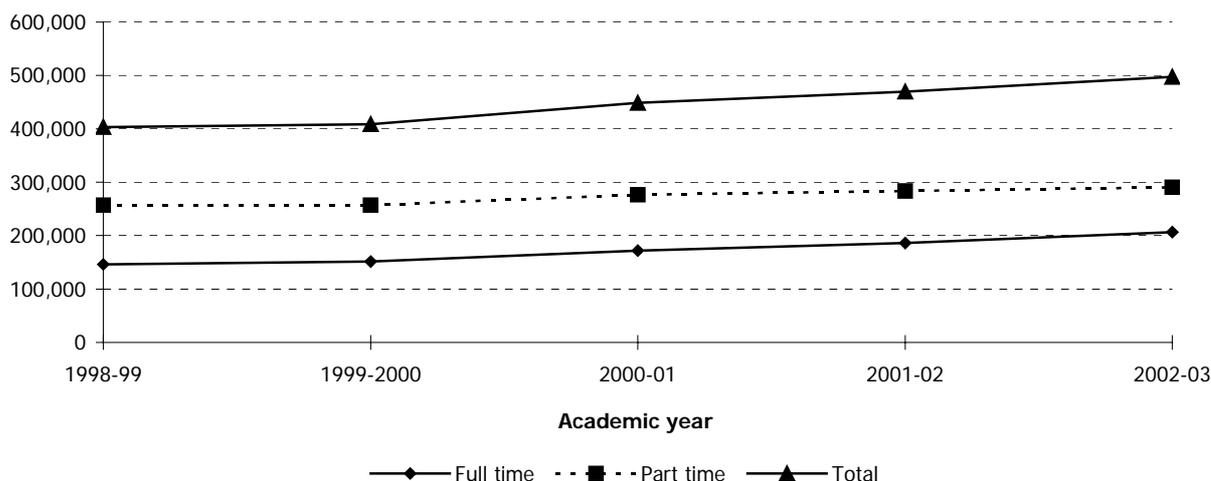
Postgraduate study¹ remains a popular choice among graduates. Over the past few years, a steady stream of new graduates have continued to study in higher education. Approximately one-fifth moved from first degrees to further study or training (HESA, first destination statistics 1998-99 to 2001-02).

The numbers undertaking postgraduate study are increasing (Figure 1.1) and at a faster rate than undergraduate study (Table 1.1). Over the past five years the numbers studying at postgraduate level have grown by almost a quarter to just under half a million. The growth is particularly pronounced in full time study and among women. Indeed the numbers of women studying at postgraduate level now surpass the numbers of men.

The most common subjects studied at postgraduate level are business and administrative studies (mirroring undergraduate study patterns) and education, yet the courses which have seen the greatest growth over the last five years are: subjects allied to

¹ Study that usually requires entrants to be already qualified to degree level, involving programmes leading to higher degrees, diplomas and certificates.

Figure 1.1: National trends in postgraduate study – mode of study 1998-99 to 2002-03



Source: IES Survey, 2003

medicine, mathematical sciences, computer science, law, and mass communication and documentation.

Postgraduates are an increasing presence in the labour force. In 1999 just over one hundred thousand individuals (116,000) qualified with postgraduate qualifications and last year (2003) this had increased to over one hundred and fifty thousand (164,000), an increase of 42 per cent. The most recent figures (Labour Force Survey, winter quarter 2003) indicate that there are almost 1.7 million people in employment with higher degree or equivalent level qualifications, accounting for six per cent of the employed workforce (up from 1.2 million and five per cent at the same time in 1999).

Postgraduate experiences

The research literature regarding the experiences of postgraduate students covers topics such as motivations to study; postgraduate study intentions and funding; experiences during study; and employability and career progression after study. Often the literature concentrates on specific categories or groups of students according to study pattern, funding stream, qualification aimed for and domicile.

Motivation

In terms of motivation to continue to study at a postgraduate level, the CUDAH report (2002) shows that arts and humanities PhD students are driven by interest in the topic itself and by desire for intellectual fulfilment. They tend to view the study as part of their professional development. Financial incentives — such as better jobs and earning potential — are not seen as important. This is complemented by a survey undertaken by Sheffield University (2000) that finds that students who undertake

Table 1.2: National trends in postgraduate study: subject of study 1998-99 to 2002-03

	2002-03	2001-02	2000-01	1999-2000	1998-99	% change
Medicine & dentistry	15,415	15,880	15,645	13,670	13,621	13
Subjects allied to medicine	34,535	30,860	27,770	22,430	20,942	65
Biological sciences	25,305	20,970	20,590	19,240	18,631	36
Veterinary science	640	710	700	630	709	-10
Agriculture & related subjects	3,715	3,385	3,575	2,970	2,890	29
Physical sciences	18,360	17,760	18,340	17,220	17,700	4
Mathematical sciences	5,585	4,460	4,000	3,770	3,543	58
Computer science	24,370	23,410	21,330	17,420	15,856	54
Engineering & technology	36,540	34,495	32,975	27,760	28,813	27
Architecture, building & planning	12,720	12,535	11,975	10,780	11,107	15
Social studies *	37,660	39,010	37,830	35,720	36,088	4
Law	23,815	19,785	18,410	15,580	14,856	60
Business & administrative studies	94,435	81,795	77,005	69,810	67,206	41
Mass communications & documentation **	8,945	8,320	7,815	6,430	5,981	50
Languages	16,430	15,190	14,955	13,760	13,420	22
Historical & philosophical studies ***	16,970	15,710	15,335	14,550	14,562	17
Creative arts and design	14,040	12,600	11,970	10,840	9,862	42
Education	91,210	87,150	81,515	69,330	70,278	30
Combined	16,805	25,830	26,960	36,780	37,275	-55
<i>All</i>	<i>497,500</i>	<i>469,850</i>	<i>448,695</i>	<i>408,620</i>	<i>403,340</i>	<i>23</i>

* previously termed social, economic and political studies

** previously termed librarianship & information science

*** previously termed humanities

Source: HESA Student in Higher Education Institutions (Table 2e – 1998/99 to 2002/03)

a PhD for personal development and through subject interest outnumber those who see it as training for employment by a ratio of two to one.

Other studies, however, have found more varied influences in deciding to study, including labour market aspirations. Darwen *et al.*, (2002) found in their national survey that improving career prospects, continuing to study, personal development and secured financial backing are among the main reasons for deciding to pursue postgraduate study. The location and the reputation of the institution were also important. Reasons, highlighted in a study by Bowman *et al.* (2004) include 'powerful intrinsic motivation to continue studying their subject' which is linked to 'sense of personal identity', and the 'desire for self-actualisation'. The study also finds individuals were motivated by a dissatisfaction with previous experiences in the labour market

and a 'desire to find more fulfilling and/or high-status work'. Snape *et al.* (2001) looked at the motivations of different types of postgraduates. They found a desire to undertake further academic study and education by 'default' among PhD students but that MSc students were more motivated by a desire to further vocational or career aspirations.

An older study, 'Survey of postgraduates funded by the research councils' (1987-89), indicates that the reasons to study at a postgraduate level have not changed greatly over the past 15 years. They state that the reasons for embarking on postgraduate study include: interest in a particular subject, belief it will help in getting a suitable or better job and enjoyment of academic work/research.

The experience

Looking at the students' experiences of undertaking postgraduate courses, the CUDAH report (2002) found that PhD students in arts and humanities place great importance on the quality of supervision (advice and support beyond the framework of the scholarly project itself) and on the non-academic benefits of a PhD. An older study of postgraduates funded by the research councils (1987-89), reports that a third of respondents thought postgraduate study should be more structured and that less than half wanted more training for work during postgraduate study.

Funding

In exploring funding mechanisms, one of the findings of Darwen *et al.* (2002) is that arts and humanities students are more likely to pay their own fees, while full time research students in the sciences are the least likely. Full time taught students are also more likely to be paying their own fees compared to full time research students and part time taught students. Funding is a particularly important issue to postgraduates. Over three quarters of the full time students in their sample cite financial reasons as the main obstacle to postgraduate study.

However, Whitfield's (2000) findings indicate that even with external support, individuals need further financial assistance. The report finds the majority of Research Council sponsored students, particularly those studying for PhD/DPhil, have some additional financial support during their studies. The most common sources are taking university teaching/tutoring roles (paid), getting help from friends and family and relying on personal funds.

Careers advice

The use of careers advice and guidance services has been explored in research, but the findings are not encouraging. For example, one report indicates very few PhD students in arts and humanities reported receiving any careers advice from their institutions (CUDAH, 2002). However, most respondents would have welcomed specialist career advice and guidance. One of the suggestions in the report is that supervisors and career services liaise to advise on career prospects.

Similarly Bowman *et al.* (2004) found that no students mention using the website provided by HE careers services or Prospects (the national provider of graduate careers information). Most had not heard of Prospects. They suggest that HE careers advisers do not see Masters students as having fundamentally different needs from undergraduates and that taught Masters students remain an untargeted, unresourced group for careers services, falling between the undergraduate cohort and the postgraduate research students. They go on to suggest that a person-centred approach would produce a more varied picture of students' guidance needs depending on their degree of vocational focus and that, in general, vocationally focused students have better-developed autonomous career management skills than vocationally unfocused students.

Value placed on postgraduate study

Much of the literature focuses on the perceived and generally positive outcomes of postgraduate study.

Darwen *et al.* (2002) found that 86 per cent of their respondents felt that the money they had invested in postgraduate study would be a good investment in the future. Respondents who expected higher earnings from their postgraduate degree were more likely to be young, female, studying science or business and at a post-1992 university.

Whitfield (2000) concludes that students consider the contribution of their postgraduate studies as having greater relevance to the early stages of their careers, as higher ratings on the relevance of the postgraduate course were given in respect of first jobs rather than current jobs. He also reports that research students are more positive about the contribution of their postgraduate studies than advanced course students, in relation to their first job; but that the difference is reduced in respect of their current job.

Snape *et al.* (2001) found that there were four basic ways in which former students feel they benefited from their studies: personal development, professional development, enjoyment of learning (and the student lifestyle) and the opportunity to pursue a subject in a way that may not be possible in their working lives. A PhD was perceived to be valuable in the labour market, especially if

students had done less well in their first degree. Many felt that a PhD gave them the edge over other candidates and contacts gained during postgraduate study helped them gain employment after graduating. Oxford and Cambridge graduates mention that the institutions at which they studied gave them kudos. However, negative points reported were that employers might see postgraduates as overqualified or lacking in practical experience, *ie.* in an 'ivory tower'. Although an earlier study, of postgraduates funded by the research councils (1987-89) found just under a half of respondents felt that postgraduate study was very important to employers.

1.3 Methodology

In addition to a review of literature, the study collected qualitative and quantitative data and had two key elements: a postal survey, and telephone interviews.

The postal survey tracked the destinations and labour market experiences of taught postgraduates who graduated from Sussex University in 1999 and 2001. A selected sample of approximately 1,800 individuals drawn from the Alumni database were surveyed at the end of 2003. Responses were obtained from 471 postgraduates, however the main body of this report focuses upon the 242 responses of 'home students' (those who were domiciled in the UK when they applied for their course) who graduated in 1999 or 2001.

The data were analysed using SPSS which allowed exploration of the differences and similarities of the two graduating cohorts. Analysis of the responses from overseas students is presented in Appendix A for interest.

A representative subset of 15 survey respondents participated in semi-structured telephone interviews, designed to complement the survey data and provide a richer picture of study outcomes, labour market expectations and career routes and decisions. The interviews took place in early 2004 and the interview transcripts were analysed using content analysis to draw out underlying themes.

A more detailed description of the methodology is presented in Appendix C.

1.4 Our 'home' respondents

1.4.1 Personal profiles

Our responding sample splits roughly into two cohorts, 131 individuals who graduated in 1999 and 111 who graduated in 2001. In both cohorts the majority of respondents are women, are

Table 1.3: Personal characteristics of our ‘home’ respondents by cohort compared to the population of postgraduates at Sussex, per cent and number

Characteristics	Respondents						Sussex population			
	1999		2001		both		1998-99 *		2000-01 *	
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Male	30	39	32	35	31		41		36	
Female	70	92	69	76	69		59		64	
Age 30 or over on completion	57		45		51		39		35	
Average age at survey	38	34	34	32	36	(-)	38	34	32	30
Black and minority ethnic	5	(-)	5	(-)	5		n/k		n/k	
Have a disability	5	(-)	2	(-)	4		n/k		n/k	
Have caring responsibilities	31	40	22	24	27		n/k		n/k	
Have family experience of HE	58	75	66	73	61		n/k		n/k	
<i>Base</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>131</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>242</i>				
*	from Oracle system, Sussex University									
(-)	less than ten individuals									
n/k	'not known'									

Source: IES Survey, 2003

white and come from families with experience of higher education. The gender bias can be seen in the national profile of postgraduates and when looking at data on all Sussex University postgraduates.

A large proportion in both responding cohorts are older students, and were at least 30 years old when they completed their course. This is older than are found nationally or across Sussex University as a whole. However the more recent cohort (2001) has a younger profile.

1.4.2 Study profiles

As noted above, the research focused on those who had followed Masters, PGCE, and Diploma courses. In both responding cohorts MA students form the largest group, this is particularly pronounced among the 2001 cohort. A much greater proportion of respondents in the 1999 cohort had undertaken PGCE or diploma courses than in the later cohort.

The bias towards MA courses is stronger among our responses but is similar to that found for the Sussex University population. By subject, the most common fields of study among respondents are social science, and arts and humanities (particularly the 2001 cohort) which deviates slightly from the overall Sussex University profile.

Table 1.4: Study characteristics of our ‘home’ respondents compared to the population of postgraduates at Sussex, per cent (and number) by cohort

Characteristics	Respondents			Sussex population	
	1999	2001	both	1999 *	2001 *
PGCE	16 (20)	8 (-)	12	14	11
MA	58 (73)	70 (73)	63	51	53
MSc	18 (23)	19 (20)	19	15	18
Diploma	9 (11)	4 (-)	7	19	18
Science	22 (27)	20 (21)	21	14	16
Social Science	33 (41)	31 (32)	32	48	50
Arts/Humanities	20 (25)	36 (38)	28	15	16
Education	25 (31)	13 (14)	20	22	18
Part time	42 (76)	37 (70)	40	n/k	n/k
Full time	58 (55)	63 (41)	60	n/k	n/k
<i>Base</i>	<i>100 (131)</i>	<i>100 (111)</i>	<i>100 (242)</i>		

* from Oracle system, Sussex University
 (-) less than ten individuals
 n/k not known

Source: IES Survey, 2003

1.5 Report contents

Throughout the report the survey results are presented together with any variation between or within the cohorts or at a subgroup level. The themes that emerged from the telephone interviews are grouped and presented as ‘pen-pictures’ and follow the relevant survey statistics reported. For further interest other comments volunteered by interviewees appear throughout the report to add context to the survey data. For ease of reading, key messages **which have implications for future policy** are reported at the beginning of each chapter:

The following chapters present the findings of the study and highlight key issues which have been investigated.

Chapter 2 maps out the routes to and decisions about postgraduate study at Sussex University.

Chapter 3 focuses on postgraduates’ experiences in the labour market, including exploring characteristics of their current jobs.

Chapter 4 reflects on the perceived added value of postgraduate study.

Chapter 5 looks at postgraduates’ plans for the future.

Chapter 6 reflects on choices made and postgraduates' satisfaction with their careers to date.

Finally, chapter 7 draws some conclusions and implications from the study.

The appendices include further information regarding the sampling, a short bibliography, and information on the experiences of Sussex University postgraduates who came to study from the European Union or further overseas.

2. Postgraduate Study at Sussex University

In this chapter, we explore the reasons or motivators behind, and the routes to, postgraduate study. We also consider how individuals funded their postgraduate studies. Lastly we look at the factors which initially attracted respondents to study at Sussex University and examine Sussex University's performance against these factors. The chapter begins by reporting the statistics from the survey then describes the themes that emerge from the telephone interviews.

Key messages

- Overall the demand for postgraduate study continues to grow despite the decline in financial support from employers and increasing costs incurred to those who are self funding. Over half contribute at least some of their own money towards their course fees.
- A commitment to continued (or lifelong) learning and a self managed career is evidently a key factor in undertaking postgraduate study. Individuals are making decisions based on their interests and their long term careers rather than reacting to short term labour market experiences.
- Timely advice about study options and information about access to funding would be valuable for those considering postgraduate study. A good class of degree at undergraduate level may advantage individuals in the labour market and also may advantage them in securing funding for further study.
- Advice on the curriculum could be critical to widening access to, and diversity within, postgraduate study especially for some who may not have informal support or guidance available to them.
- Although improving employability was not a key driver for postgraduate study there is a need for realistic careers advice or counselling in relation to course and labour market outcomes, particularly for those whose choice of study is non-vocational. Postgraduates need to be prepared for the labour market they will encounter.
- Term-time working has become an integral part of postgraduate study and has implications for future curriculum design, particularly in relation to options for combining part time study with existing work/life balance or other commitments.
- Individuals look for different things from Sussex University but many place importance on the learning environment indicating that postgraduates are becoming informed and demanding a quality

learning experience. Generally Sussex University delivers this, though there are concerns for those studying social science courses.

- There appears to be a local demand for postgraduate study with a range of study options. The 'Sussex brand' has a strong image of being receptive to diverse groups. This has implications for future curriculum development and marketing of courses to widen access and diversity.
- Support from academics while studying appears patchy. Postgraduates need to be pro-active in securing attention which could disadvantage the less assertive or less confident.

2.1 Why do a postgraduate qualification?

“ I was passionate about the Renaissance and found sheer pleasure in thinking in renaissance terms and immersing yourself in another age.

The most important reasons for undertaking postgraduate study among our respondents (Table 2.1) are:

- personal interest
- and to enhance specific or more general career prospects.

The decision had little to do with striving to overcome labour market disadvantage or a lack of suitable employment opportunities (*ie.* negative perceptions of the labour market) or with the wish to earn more or delay career choice, as often cited in the press.

‘There is still a popular perception that a postgraduate student is a genius whose university begged them to stay on after their undergraduate degree. Either that, or it’s someone who can’t think of a “real job” to do and stays on because it’s the easiest option’ (Guardian, 17 June 2003).

Table 2.1: Importance of factors to home students when deciding to undertake postgraduate study at Sussex University (mean score) by cohort

	Both	1999	2001
Personal interest	4.3	4.2	4.5
Enhance general career prospects	3.8	3.8	3.8
Enhance specific career prospects	3.8	3.7	3.8
Formal entry requirement for specific career	2.9	3.0	2.7
Change career direction	2.5	2.6	2.3
Lack of employment opportunities	2.0	2.0	2.0
Financial returns	1.9	2.0	1.8
Overcome labour market disadvantage	1.8	1.9	1.8
Postpone/delay career choice	1.6	1.6	1.6

NB: Scores range from one (not important at all) to five (very important)

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Those who graduated in 1999 place greater importance on postgraduate study as a formal entry requirement to a career than those graduating later (in 2001). The 1999 cohort are also relatively more likely to cite changing career direction (reflecting their older age profile — see below) and financial reward as motivators. For the later cohort, personal interest is by far the most important reason for postgraduate study and scored significantly (statistically) more highly than for the previous cohort.

Women tend to place greater importance on many of the given motivators, particularly enhancing their careers prospects and personal interest. However, men are more likely to note the importance of changing career direction in their decision to undertake further study. For older respondents, postgraduate study is more about personal development, interest and making changes in their lives and career. Younger postgraduates are significantly more likely than their older peers are to choose further study because of a perceived lack of graduate employment opportunities or to postpone career choice.

There are significant differences in motivators by subject of study. For arts and humanities postgraduates, personal interest far outstrips any other reason for undertaking further study whereas enhancing specific career prospects is also an important motivator to those studying other subjects. In particular for postgraduates in education, the need to gain a formal entry requirement is placed on an equal footing with personal interest. Personal interest is a statistically significant motivator for those who studied part time, possibly reflecting the degree of attention required to fit study around other commitments. Full time postgraduates on the other hand, are significantly more likely to be motivated by a perceived need to gain formal entry requirements, to postpone making decisions about careers or to change career direction.

Other studies (Pollard *et al.*, 2004) highlight the importance of personal interest in motivating further study but also point out the advantages gained during the process of higher level study including developing specialist skills and knowledge and broadening experiences.

2.1.1 Qualitative evidence

Two key themes around motivations to postgraduate study emerge from the telephone interviews:

- the importance of timing (in deciding when to study)
- the real love of learning shared by postgraduates.

Timing is everything

The interviews indicated that choosing when, and at what stage in life, to do a postgraduate course is a decision many undergraduates

discuss with their friends, family and careers advisers. A range of opinion as to the right time to undertake further study is reported.

However here are some of the different stories:

- **Too quickly?** One interviewee (older male, 1999 cohort, studied science full time) did his masters a year after his History and Sociology degree and chose to continue his studies in the same discipline. At that time he had no clear career direction and was keen to pursue his current area of interests. He currently works as an Environment Lobbyist and in hindsight wishes he had waited and taken a course more relevant to his chosen career area. Indeed he is now considering doing another masters in an environmental specialisation to improve his career progression.
- **Too late?** Another interviewee (older female, 1999 cohort, studied science full time) chose her masters to enable a career change. Previously a nurse with a health degree, she wanted to retrain as a Clinical Psychologist and studied Experimental Psychology at Sussex to qualify her for this profession. She was in her forties when she completed the course. Applying for Assistant Psychology jobs (the next stage of Clinical Psychology training), she has been unsuccessful, despite being short listed, and the feedback she received confirmed her suspicion that age was a barrier. She is still not over this disappointment and feels she has been forced into lecturing because there are no other options for her.
- **Just right?** One interviewee (older male, 1999 cohort, studied science full time) did his masters because he was 'stuck in a rut'. After 12 years of working in engineering, he wanted a shift in career direction. As a result of the course he is now much happier and more confident about his career and has found work with a small IT start up company. He would not swap his experience for anything. He feels the course gave him a 'can do' attitude which has reinvigorated his attitude to work.

Love of learning

Many interviewees speak of how much they have enjoyed the learning process: *'using my brain in that way, not like you do at work'*. They describe how their courses had reawakened their love of learning and their curiosity, something they want to sustain through their careers. Several mention considering studying further at masters and PhD level.

- For several interviewees the freedom to study subjects which interest them was paramount. *'Being given the freedom to explore your own topic, being given a free reign to study exactly what you wanted,'* summarises one interviewee (younger male, 2001 cohort, studied arts/humanities part time), who thinks that

this was what made Sussex the ‘right place’ at which to study. He observes that the more you study the less you seem to know hence the desire to continue learning.

- Asked about the best things on the course, another interviewee (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied arts/humanities part time) includes *‘reading and exploring new things. I loved the seminars, discussing things with others. The discipline of structuring your essays (although it seemed hard at the time) was good for me’*.
- One individual (older male, 1999 cohort, studied science full time) is adamant that the role of university — in his opinion — was not about vocational training but *‘about learning to learn’*. He says *‘a good university experience is not about what someone knows but how they can find out. The learning process should be about teaching students to find the answers for themselves.’* He believes that if universities decide to become vocational trainers then they lose sight of the breadth of education that students want; what he wanted was to learn — to learn in its broadest sense with all that goes with it — which incorporates being excited, interested and inspired.

2.2 Routes to postgraduate qualifications

2.2.1 What had our postgraduates studied before?

Home respondents tend to have studied at first degree level before embarking on their postgraduate course. Bachelor of Arts (BA) courses are the most common, however almost one in ten (nine per cent) have already studied at a higher degree level before starting another postgraduate period of study (Table 2.2). A substantial group, two-fifths, of respondents moved to (their current) postgraduate study from arts and humanities courses (particularly linguistics, classics, historical and philosophical studies).

Generally respondents stay within their broad area of previous study when undertaking postgraduate courses: 62 per cent of science graduates moved to science postgraduate courses; 66 per cent of social science graduates moved to higher level social science courses; and 71 per cent of those who had previously studied education, continue in this field. However, those who followed arts and humanities undergraduate courses are more varied in their postgraduate choices, with only 53 per cent continuing to specialise in this area.

2.2.2 Where had our postgraduates studied before?

Almost one-quarter (22 per cent) of respondents have previously studied at Sussex University, and a further 20 per cent have studied in neighbouring universities and colleges of higher

Table 2.2: Previous higher education of home respondents (per cent by cohort)

Characteristics	1999	2001	Both
BA	55	62	58
BSc	22	19	20
BEd	9	2	6
Diploma (incl PGCE)	6	7	7
Higher degree	9	10	9
Science	26	27	26
Social Science	29	23	26
Arts/Humanities	38	44	41
Education	7	6	7
Part time/distance	18	6	12
Full time	82	94	88
Finished before 1970s	2	4	3
Finished in 1970s	13	5	10
Finished in 1980s	15	8	12
Finished in early 1990s	18	16	17
Finished in late 1990s/2000	52	67	59
First class degree	12	24	17
Upper second	54	55	54
Lower second/third/pass	29	13	22
Other	5	9	7
Previous study at Sussex	21	23	22

Source: IES Survey, 2003

education (in London, Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire) including six per cent at Brighton University. Six per cent have studied with the Open University to gain their previous higher education qualification. The majority have moved some distance from where they studied their first degree and their postgraduate degree including five per cent who have previously studied at Oxford University and four per cent at Cambridge University.

2.2.3 When had our postgraduates studied before?

Respondents completed their previous higher education qualifications between 1958 and 2000 (this latter group moving directly to a one year postgraduate course which finished in 2001). The majority (60 per cent) of respondents completed their previous study in the late 1990s or in 2000.

2.2.4 How well had they done?

Other studies (eg Pollard *et al.*, 2004) show that those with higher level outcomes from their previous study (*ie* first or upper second class first degrees) have a greater propensity to further study in the short term than those with lower level outcomes. Higher level outcomes also tend to be a requirement for further study. Therefore, we would expect that our responding group would have better degree classifications than the graduate population as a whole. Indeed, 72 per cent of respondents have a first or upper second class degree (17 per cent first, and 54 per cent upper second). Comparative national data (HESA) indicate only eight per cent of all first degrees were classified as first class and a further 46 per cent as upper second class in 1998-99. Figures for 1997-98 and 1999-2000 are similar.

2.3 Who studies what?

As noted earlier, the most common taught course is an MA, which almost three-quarters (63 per cent) of respondents have undertaken. The most common fields of study are social sciences (32 per cent) and arts and humanities (28 per cent). Indeed qualification and subject of study are significantly statistically correlated.

Table 2.3 indicates who studies what subject and in what manner. The following points are of particular interest:

- There are significantly (statistically) more arts and humanities postgraduates in the 2001 cohort than previously, and more education respondents in the 1999 cohort.
- Though the majority of education postgraduates studied for a PGCE, a substantial minority followed a MA.
- Part-time study is most prevalent among arts and humanities respondents (and least so among scientists).
- There are very few (statistically significant) male education postgraduates, and education postgraduates are the most likely to have caring responsibilities (although gender and caring responsibilities were not found to be correlated).
- Scientists are the youngest group, and education postgraduates the oldest.
- The best representation of minority ethnic groups is found among arts and humanities postgraduates.

2.4 How did they fund their postgraduate courses?

“ *Having both the financial and emotional support of my parents while studying made me feel confident in career decisions.* ”

Table 2.3: Characteristics of home respondents by field of postgraduate study (per cent)

Characteristics	Science	Social Sciences	Arts and humanities	Education	All
1999 cohort	56	56	40	69	54
2001 cohort	44	44	60	31	46
PGCE	–	–	–	56	12
MA	15	79	100	44	63
MSc	83	4	–	–	19
Diploma	2	17	–	–	6
Full time study	69	60	56	60	60
Part time study	31	40	44	40	40
Male	50	32	25	11	31
Female	50	68	75	89	69
less than 30 (on completion)	56	49	49	44	49
30 or over	44	51	51	56	51
White	94	97	87	100	95
Black and minority ethnic	6	3	13	–	5
Have a disability	6	3	3	2	4
Have caring responsibilities	17	30	24	34	27
Have family experience of HE	50	67	66	62	62
<i>Base</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>242</i>

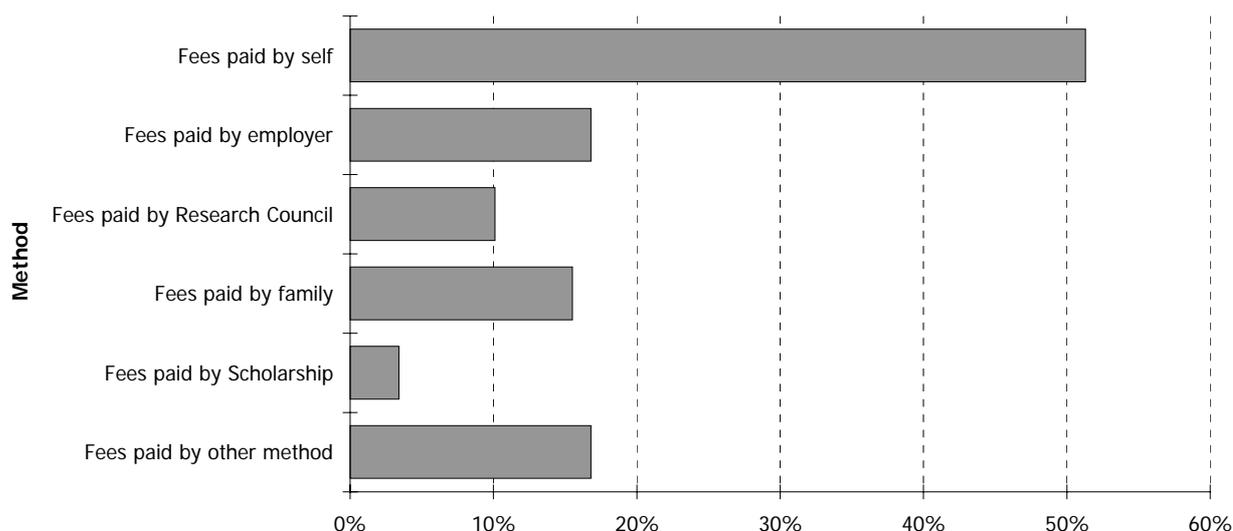
Source: IES Survey, 2003

2.4.1 Who paid the course fees?

Just over half (51 per cent) of our postgraduates contributed towards their own course fees. Some respondents gained support for fees from their employer or their family: about one in six respectively (as Figure 2.1 shows). A similar, and substantial, minority also gained fee support from other bodies including: government and local authorities (particularly for PGCE study), Sussex University itself (through reciprocal agreement for Brighton University employees or fee reduction for former Sussex students) and loan organisations.

For the 1999 and 2001 cohort, self funding is equally common, yet the earlier cohort are more likely to have gained support from

Figure 2.1: Who contributed towards home respondents' course fees?



Source: IES Survey, 2003

their employer than the later cohort.¹ The later group instead are, relatively, more likely to have gained support from family and are statistically significantly more likely to have gained support from research councils.

Men are marginally more likely than women to have self funded and to have been supported by their families. Greater and statistically significant differences are found according to age. Older students are relatively more likely to have self funded and to have been supported by their employers (which we would expect) while younger students are more likely to rely on their families and research councils.

Those with family experience of higher education are much more likely (this is statistically significant) to gain research council funding than those with no familial experience of higher education. This suggests that those with no family experience may feel that it is too competitive and need help to access this form of funding.

Those who gained a high class degree during their initial higher education studies were significantly more likely to have gained support for their postgraduate study from a research council, whereas those who gained a lower class degree were significantly more likely to be supported by their employer.

Very few (only 12 per cent) of those who had undertaken postgraduate study in education are self funded, most are funded by their employer (generally those studying at MA level) or by

¹ This fall in employer support mirrors the national picture. See HESA first destination statistics, which show that 36 per cent of taught postgraduates in 1998-99 were sponsored by their employer and only 22 per cent were in 2001-02.

their local council/education authority (generally those undertaking PGCE study). Research Council funding is more common among those who took a science based postgraduate course. Those who studied part time are much more likely to be funded by their employer than those studying full time — indeed two in five part time postgraduates gain support for fees from their employer (employer support was stronger in 1999 than in 2001). All these relationships are statistically significant.

2.4.2 Other activities to help with costs

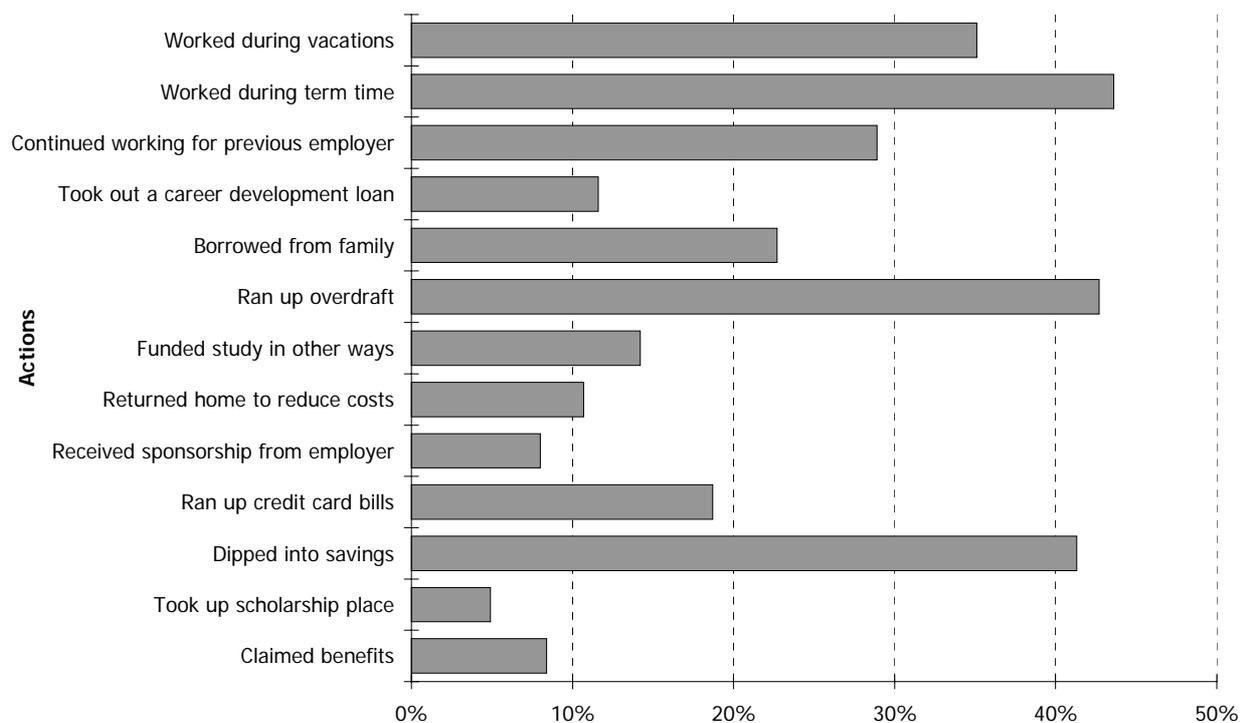
Postgraduates also undertake a range of activities to fund their studies (Figure 2.2). The most common methods are to:

- work during term time (44 per cent)
- run up an overdraft (43 per cent)
- dip into savings (41 per cent).

Also popular (reflecting the methods used to pay for course fees) are to:

- work during vacation periods (35 per cent)
- carry on working for their employer (29 per cent)
- borrow from family (23 per cent).

Figure 2.2: Actions taken by home respondents to fund studies



Source: IES Survey, 2003

Very few receive formal employer sponsorship (*ie* to help with the costs of studying), have a scholarship or claim some form of benefits.

Differences in funding strategies exist according to mode of postgraduate study. Those studying part time are much more likely to work during term times, receive employer sponsorship, and carry on working for their employer; while those studying full time are comparatively much more likely to borrow from family or banks or use savings to help with costs. Similarly, female and older postgraduates (who have a greater propensity to study part time) tend to use regular work with their previous employers to help cope with costs. Those studying science postgraduate courses are the most likely to use their savings and least likely to work during term time. These findings are all statistically significant.

2.5 What attracts people to Sussex University?

2.5.1 Important factors in choosing Sussex

“ *I expected that Sussex would be the right place for me to study literature. I thought the students would be buzzing, I knew it was a campus university and I was up for getting to know Brighton.* ”

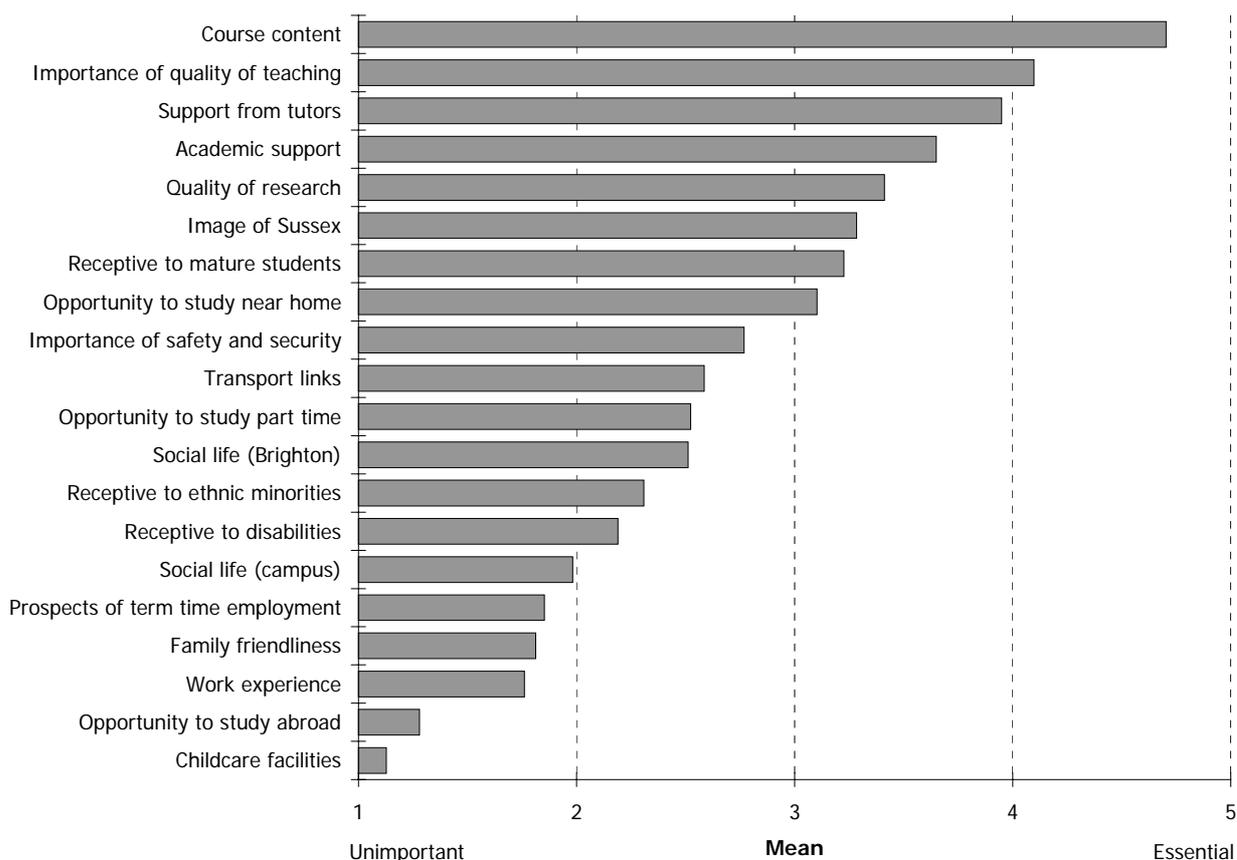
The most important factors to survey respondents when choosing to study a postgraduate course at Sussex University are: the subject or course content (mean score of 4.7), quality of teaching (4.1) and support from tutors and lecturers (4.0) (Figure 2.3). These are followed by academic support facilities (3.7), quality of research (3.4), overall image of Sussex University (3.3), receptivity to mature students (3.2) and opportunity to study near to home (3.1), all scoring above the mid point (3.0). Factors considered least important (overall) are: campus childcare facilities, opportunity to study overseas/abroad, family friendliness, and work experience or placement opportunities, all scoring less than 2.0 on average.

These factors can be grouped into themes which allow for further analysis and understanding.

Learning environment

Generally the learning environment is considered to be key *ie* the subject or course; the teaching and research quality and the support provided by tutors/lecturers and via academic facilities. Postgraduates from the 2001 cohort, more than the 1999 cohort, consider the learning environment most important, particularly (and statistically significantly) the course content and research quality. Research quality is of greater (and statistically significant) importance to respondents who followed arts and humanities

Figure 2.3: Importance of factors to home respondents when choosing postgraduate study at Sussex University (mean score)



NB: Scores ranged from one (unimportant) to five (essential) – the higher the mean score the greater the importance attached to that factor.

Source: IES Survey, 2003

courses, more so than respondents on other courses. Teaching quality is of marginally greater importance to those on education courses, which may reflect the different structure and focus of the vocational courses. Tutor support is more important (statistically significantly) to female than male postgraduates.

Location

“ I achieved my long term ambition of moving out of London by coming on the course and staying on afterwards at Sussex.

Aspects relating to the location or geography of their postgraduate study are of middling importance to respondents *ie* safety and security on campus, social life on campus and in the city, the transport links and proximity to home.

Location issues are relatively more important to female postgraduates, especially safety and security, and the ability to study near home. Studying close to home is also much more important to older than younger respondents, to those studying part time, to those with dependants, and to those following

education courses. Younger and full time postgraduate students are relatively more concerned than others with the social life offered both on campus and in the city, and full time respondents also place relatively greater importance on transport links. All these findings are statistically significant.

Image and culture

Of middling importance are aspects relating to the culture of Sussex University *ie* its overall image, how receptive it is to diversity (including mature students, individuals from black and minority ethnic groups, and individuals with learning difficulties or disabilities).

Image is relatively more important to males than females, whereas females feel more strongly about the University's receptivity to diverse groups but these relationships are not statistically significant. A significant difference, however, is that respondents from minority ethnic groups are more concerned about the University's receptivity to black and minority ethnic groups. Those who consider themselves to have a disability are more concerned about the receptivity to students with disabilities. Also older, part time postgraduates and those with dependants are more concerned about how receptive the University is to mature students.

Employability

Lower importance is given to aspects relating to employability than other factors, such as opportunities for work experience or work placement, to study abroad, or for term-time employment. This is not really surprising as our respondents are not attracted to postgraduate study by a reaction to harsh labour market conditions (see Section 2.1 above). Stronger motivators are longer term career prospects and personal interest.

However, work experience is considered relatively more important to the 1999 graduating cohort, and statistically significantly to female respondents and those following education courses (particularly those studying for PGCE) than others. Younger home postgraduates consider the opportunity to study abroad more important than older graduates, which highlights their greater mobility.

Work life balance

Work life balance issues are of low importance, including aspects such as campus childcare facilities and family friendliness. However, the opportunity to study part time, which could be considered a work life balance factor, is considered to be of middling importance.

Interestingly there is little difference between male and female respondents (including those with dependants) who both give childcare facilities similar scores in terms of importance. However female postgraduates consider family friendliness and particularly (significantly) the opportunity to study part time more important than male postgraduates. These aspects are also statistically significantly more important to older respondents, those with dependants (who may have responsibilities for children) and those who actually studied part time.

In an earlier IES study of undergraduates (Connor *et al.*, 1999) the most important factors in choosing a particular **undergraduate** programme are:

- that it offered the relevant subjects
- the overall image of the university/college
- the teaching reputation
- the graduate employment prospects
- the entry requirements.

Again subject on offer and the quality and image of the institution are paramount. Quality of research and receptivity to mature students, which are relatively important to our postgraduates, are much less important to these undergraduates.

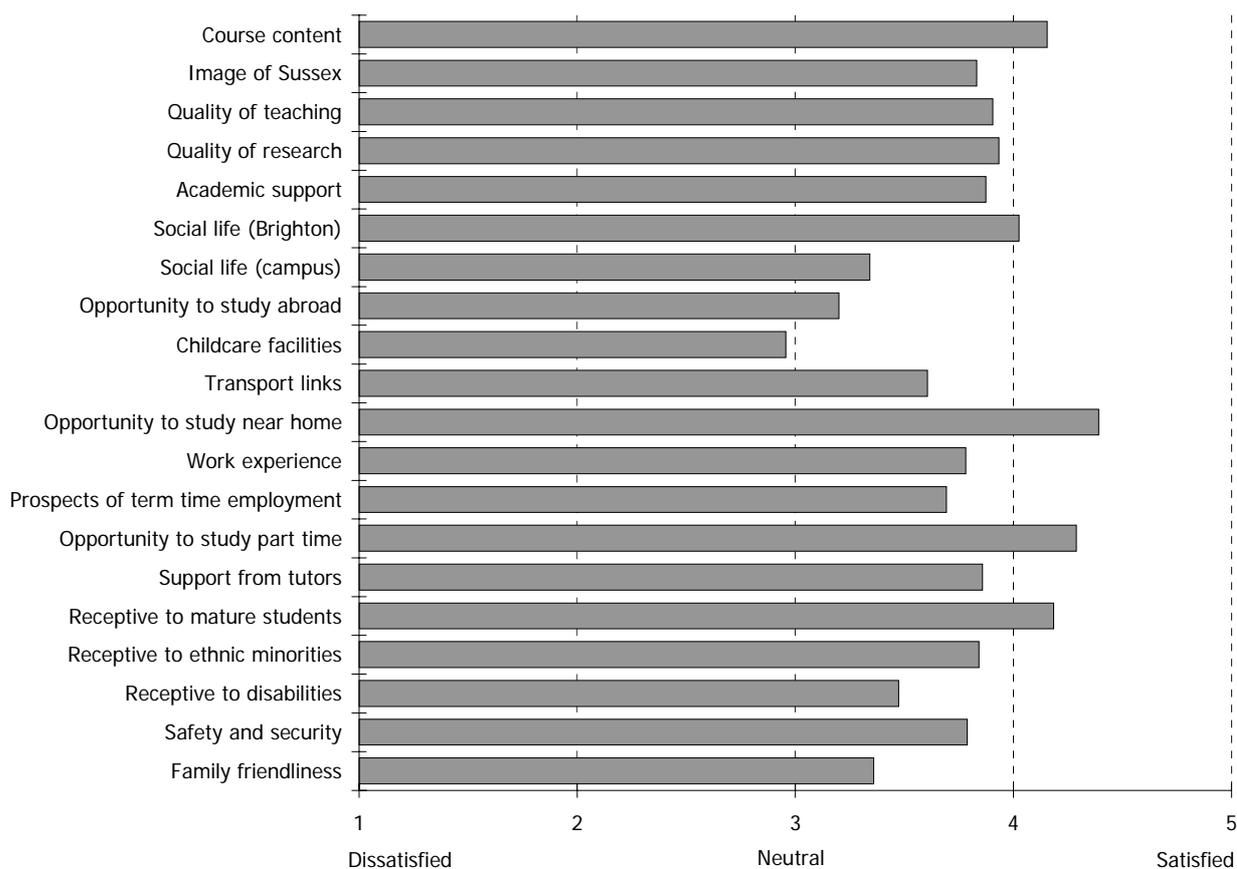
2.5.2 Does Sussex University deliver?

“ *It has been worth it, particularly in the light of comparing the Sussex masters with those of my friends who have studied elsewhere.*

Overall Sussex University delivers well across all of the given factors (Figure 2.4). All of the factors score an average of above the mid point, with the exception of childcare facilities which achieves an average satisfaction score of 3.0 (which is the mid point). Respondents are particularly satisfied with: opportunity to study near to home (4.4), opportunity to study part time (4.3), receptivity to mature students, the subject/course content (4.2) and the social life in Brighton and Hove (4.0). On the whole, respondents are pleased with the convenience and ‘fit’ of their experience. These aspects could be used to market the University to potential postgraduate students.

Women are generally more positive about their experience at Sussex University than men, though these are not statistically significant differences. Younger postgraduates are statistically significantly more satisfied with the social life in the city and their older peers are more satisfied with the opportunities to study close to home and to study part time. Respondents from minority ethnic groups and those who consider themselves to have a disability are marginally more satisfied than other groups with the University’s receptivity to students from diverse groups. Factors that

Figure 2.4: Home respondents' satisfaction with aspects of postgraduate study at Sussex University (mean score)



NB: Scores ranged from one (dissatisfied) to five (satisfied) – the higher the mean score the greater the satisfaction experienced

Source: IES Survey, 2003

individuals rate as important are given high satisfaction levels, suggesting that the University is meeting the tailored needs of individuals. However, the exception here is the group of respondents with dependants. This group are on the whole dissatisfied with the University's childcare facilities, and with its family friendliness.

Looking at subject of postgraduate study highlights some significant differences in the student experience. Social science postgraduates, although satisfied with teaching quality and tutor support, are less so than other respondents whereas education postgraduates are the most satisfied group in these respects. Science postgraduates scored work experience lower than other groups, in terms of satisfaction. Yet again, education postgraduates are the most satisfied with work experience. Overall those who followed education courses are the most satisfied with their experience at Sussex University.

“ I enjoyed the shift from my experience as an engineering student where I was used to learning through lectures with black and white solutions and the experience at SPRU where the style was much more discursive, lots of discussion, issues were ambiguous and open to interpretation.

2.5.3 Qualitative evidence on Sussex University

Again the telephone interviews provide greater detail about the experiences of studying at Sussex University. Discussions uncover areas both where the University is felt to excel and where improvements could be made.

Group dynamics

Contrasting experiences are reported about fellow participants on courses. While some interviewees were disappointed by the small numbers of other students, believing this weakened the learning experience, many had positive stories to tell about the social nature of their study groups:

- One interviewee (older female, 1999 cohort, studied arts/humanities full time) speaks of only one fellow student and says she wanted *'much more of a sense of group, of cohesion, of learning all these wonderful things together'*. As a postgraduate student she felt quite alone. She comments: *'instead of coming out of a lecture or tutorial, full of enthusiasm and wishing to share these experiences, I had no one to talk to – my natural enthusiasm fell flat'*.
- However, one interviewee (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied education part time) notes that a real solidarity built up on the Masters with a great sense of mutual support among the participants: *'this really added value to the learning environment, being able to meet others and discuss theory with them – such a bonus when the workplace can be so isolating'*.
- Another interviewee (older female, 1999 cohort, studied science full time) talks about the close bond which formed on her course and she particularly enjoyed belonging to such a close group. In her previous job she comments that the people *'were very dull'* so she really enjoyed meeting a new group of people -- a real plus.
- The diversity of fellow students is mentioned by an older male interviewee (1999 cohort, studied science full time) who loved the fact that everybody came from different backgrounds: from arts and sciences. In his opinion this interdisciplinary environment is the epitome of what makes a good university education. Being the oldest participant never struck him as an issue.
- Similarly, a younger male (1999 cohort, studied social sciences full time) confirms that the course had given him a fantastic network of friends which made the experience unforgettable.

Relationships with academics

Interviewees also comment on the support they received from tutors. For some it was difficult to build relationships, while

others feel they would have given up without the encouragement they received from academics.

- One individual (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied arts/humanities full time) observes that it was possible to get a lot out of the course if you knew how to demand it: *'you had to ask the faculty, you had to hunt it down'*. In her opinion this inaccessibility did not suit all students and might disadvantage some. Similarly, another interviewee (older female, 1999 cohort, studied arts/humanities full time) comments that some lecturers did not make time for students: *'they were always bowed down with work with no time to give to students'*. She herself was lucky with an excellent supervisor for her dissertation who was able to give her plenty of time.
- One interviewee (older female, 1999 cohort, studied education part time) describes how her demoralised state was reversed once she was able to talk to her tutor. The academic, she felt, had *'faith in her'* and encouraged her to believe she could do the work and write effectively.

As well as the issue of learning support from academics, several interviewees talk about how the tutors did not introduce students to the links between their course projects, and external networks that might help with individual career development.

- The range of organisations that academics work with is mentioned by one interviewee (younger male, 2001 cohort, studies science full time). He feels that none of the tutors thought to emphasise to students how they could make use of this information for their future career development *'no-one seemed to make the connections for the students between the projects and modules we did, and the networks we could use to find jobs in the future'*.
- Another (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied science full time) agrees with this experience stating that she is *'surprised that, through the academics, I did not get more involved in conferences and events related to my subject'*. She would have liked to have heard from alumni and in particular those who had started their own businesses.

'I would send my kids to Sussex'

All the interviewees are positive about their postgraduate experience at Sussex. It lived up to their expectations and more often surpassed them. Unanimously they think it was worth it and most would do it all again. The respondents all enjoyed the intellectual rigour, the reading and the learning, and one student (younger male, 1999 cohort, studied social sciences full time) enthuses *'I would send my kids to Sussex'*.

3. Postgraduates in the Labour Market

In this chapter we explore postgraduates' experiences in the labour market, comparing their activities and experiences before their course, immediately after their course and at the current time. We also explore the barriers experienced by postgraduates in accessing and progressing in the labour market. Lastly we look at what our postgraduates are doing now and explore what types of jobs postgraduates do.

Key messages

- Most respondents are employed. Many are in established postgraduate roles and working in high level occupations. However, fixed term working is a common aspect of the postgraduate labour market experience.
- Postgraduate study is generally viewed as a passport to prestigious jobs and to career mobility and progression. Financial gains are likely to appear in the longer term after gaining access to higher level/quality work.
- Guidance and advice may be needed to prepare and manage the expectations of those considering postgraduate study, in terms of the postgraduate labour market and how to enter/access it. In particular, individuals need to appreciate that salary progression is a likely benefit only in the longer term. However, postgraduate salary levels do outstrip those of graduates.
- Although motivation to study is generally not driven by reactions to labour market conditions, as time progresses many begin to seek to maximise a return on their investment in study.
- Frequent job movers appear to be moving further from their postgraduate specialism, either out of choice or necessity. Again pre-study guidance could help individuals understand the implications of their subject choice (including currency in the labour market). Continued support after completing the course may be needed to help postgraduates access relevant jobs.
- There may be a need to promote the benefits to employers of softer skill development that arises from postgraduate study, and to raise awareness of the value of these in addition to domain specific knowledge/skills gained. These softer skills such as self motivation, self management, understanding and resilience fit with what employers seek and have become known as 'emotional intelligence'.
- Educational courses (particularly PGCE courses) are repeatedly viewed more positively and these studies are seen as a direct stepping stone to career development and progression. Education

postgraduates were more satisfied with their courses and their labour market experiences and outcomes.

- The postgraduate labour market, particularly the local one, is viewed as being tight for many; this presents a barrier to those who are seeking to further their careers while satisfying work life balance needs or to those studying non-vocational courses.
- Individuals could benefit from modules within the curriculum aimed at building confidence and labour market preparation, particularly those on non-vocational courses with no clear career paths and those who tended not to be concerned with labour market outcomes before their studies.
- Individuals are motivated to postgraduate study through a love of learning, and postgraduates continue to learn beyond their course. However, opportunities for further skill development and training on offer by employers do not generally lead to formal qualifications or accreditation. Employers might consider the value of offering such opportunities as part of attracting and retaining talent and as part of lifelong Learning.
- Differences within the cohorts reflect that there are multiple postgraduate labour markets — this should be a part of the pre-course advice.

3.1 What are postgraduates' labour market experiences?

3.1.1 Activities after postgraduate study

We were able to track the activities and labour market experiences of individuals up to four years (1999 cohort) and up to two years (2001 cohort). Table 3.1 indicates that after a period of postgraduate study, the likelihood of employment (particularly permanent employment rather than temporary work) increases and continues to do so over time.

Fixed term working¹ is a common aspect of the postgraduate labour market experience especially immediately after study. This probably reflects the fact that a large proportion of respondents were working as teaching and research professionals where fixed term contracts are common. As Bryson and Scurry (2002) note:

'At least half of employees carrying out the academic roles of teaching and/or research are employed on temporary contracts. Nearly all those in research posts are on fixed term contracts and about 20 per cent of those in lecturing posts are employed on fixed term contracts.'

The likelihood of continued study (as a main activity) falls after a period of postgraduate study and continues to do so as individuals move further into their careers. However, our respondents appear more committed to lifelong learning via further formal study than others in the UK. Comparing our

¹ Working on a contract with a specified end date of less than two years duration.

Table 3.1: Activities of home respondents before and after postgraduate study (per cent)

Activity	-2 years	-1 year	1 year on	2 years on	3 years on *	4 years on *
Temporary work	6	12	6	6	1	3
Fixed term work	8	13	20	16	15	13
Permanent employment	39	42	48	53	60	59
Self employment	5	4	4	5	2	4
<i>Total in Employment</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>78</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>78</i>	<i>79</i>
Studying	35	22	13	13	9	8
Time out/career break	5	6	6	4	6	3
Other	2	2	4	3	7	10
<i>N</i>	<i>233</i>	<i>230</i>	<i>227</i>	<i>227</i>	<i>123</i>	<i>120</i>

* 1999 cohort only (other columns present data for 1999 and 2001 cohorts together)

Source: IES Survey, 2003

respondents' activities with national data¹ finds respondents are more likely to undertake further study (13 per cent compared with eight per cent nationally), but consequently are less likely to be employed (78 per cent compared with 86 per cent nationally).

A large proportion (77 per cent) of respondents also report that their current employment offers continual skill development indicating that as they move further into their careers their learning is likely to be offered on the job and via in-house development schemes rather than through formal block programmes hosted by higher education institutions (see section 3.2.5 'Job characteristics – soft outcomes').

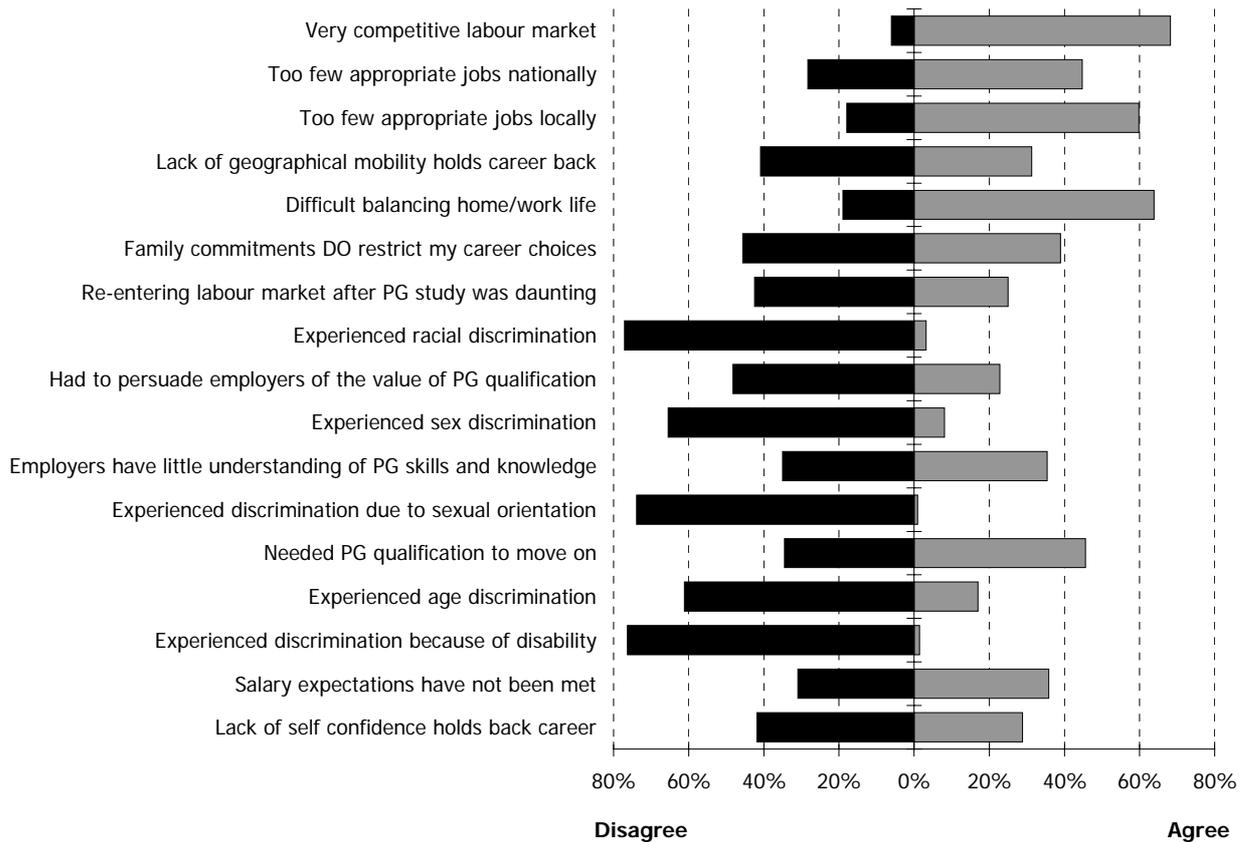
3.1.2 Experiences of the labour market – barriers to career development

Our postgraduates experience a range of barriers accessing and progressing in the labour market (Figure 3.1). The barriers most commonly experienced are related to:

- **demand:** strong competition for jobs (68 per cent) and lack of jobs at an appropriate level either nationally (45 per cent) or particularly locally (60 per cent)
- **quality of life:** issues such as difficulties balancing work and life (64 per cent)
- **career passport:** feeling that a postgraduate qualification is needed to move on in their careers (46 per cent).

¹ HESA First Destinations Survey, 2000-2001, Table 1a, UK domiciled only compared with our 2001 cohort.

Figure 3.1: Home respondents' experience of potential labour market barriers (per cent)



NB: Percentages do not add to 100 as some respondents neither agreed or disagreed with the statements about the labour market.

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Demand

“ *The IT labour market was in a bad way...I could not even think about changing jobs when I returned to my employer – survival was the only thing.* ”

Male and younger respondents, and particularly those graduating in 2001 or from science courses, are more likely to cite demand issues as barriers *ie* too much competition for jobs and too few jobs. This is not generally regarded as a problem for respondents who followed education courses. However, those who studied for a PGCE qualification are much more likely to feel they needed the qualification in order to move on. It must be remembered that the different nature and structure of PGCE courses offers a visible stepping stone to employment opportunities. Those from arts and humanities courses are the least likely to feel they needed a postgraduate qualification to move on in their careers.

Table 3.2: Home respondents' experiences in the labour market (mean score of agreement) by cohort

Aspect of Labour market	Both	1999	2001
Very competitive	3.9	3.8	4.0
Too few appropriate jobs (locally)	3.7	3.5	3.9
Balancing work and life is difficult	3.6	3.7	3.5
Too few appropriate jobs (nationally)	3.3	3.1	3.5
Needed postgraduate qualification to move on in my career	3.2	3.2	3.1
My salary expectations have not been met	3.1	3.0	3.2
Family commitments restrict my career choices	2.9	3.0	2.8
Employers have little understanding of postgraduate skills/ knowledge	2.9	2.8	3.0
Lack of geographical mobility holds me back in my career	2.8	2.9	2.7
Re-entering the labour market was daunting	2.7	2.7	2.8
Lack of self confidence holds me back in my career	2.7	2.7	2.7
Had to persuade employers of value of qualification	2.5	2.4	2.6
Experienced age discrimination	2.2	2.3	2.2
Experienced sex discrimination	2.0	2.0	1.8
Experienced racial discrimination	1.7	1.7	1.6
Experienced sexual orientation discrimination	1.7	1.7	1.6
Experienced disability discrimination	1.6	1.7	1.5

NB: scores ranged from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree)
Mean score less than three = disagree
Mean score greater than three = agree

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Employer attitudes

“ Postgraduate training is very different from undergraduate study where you are much more spoon-fed. Employers need to realise that postgraduates bring with them the ability to ‘just get on with it’.

Employer attitudes are perceived to be a barrier for a substantial group of respondents. Over one-third (35 per cent) report that employers have little understanding of what postgraduate level study offers in terms of skills and knowledge acquired, and just under a quarter (23 per cent) note that they had to persuade their employer of the value of their postgraduate qualification. Over a third (36 per cent) also report that their salary expectations have not been met.

Employer attitudes are a problem for male postgraduates, particularly (statistically significantly) lack of understanding of postgraduate skills. They are also a problem for those who studied part time (even though this group is most likely to have been supported financially by their employers, see 2.4.1).

Salary expectations

Younger respondents are relatively more likely to be disappointed by their salaries. Perhaps this indicates unrealistic expectations or a lack of understanding of the labour market and the elapsed time taken to gain a return on their investment. This is supported by findings from the group with no family experience of higher education, who are also more likely to report that their salary expectations have not been met, (they also have little guidance and support from informal networks regarding further study). Interestingly 2001 respondents are also more likely to experience salary disappointment. None of these relationships is statistically significant.

Inflexibility

“ *Lack of confidence had held me back. Being unemployed initially after the course made it difficult to be optimistic about my career prospects but once I got the break for my first job I felt much more confident.* ”

Respondents report some degree of inflexibility due to family commitments (39 per cent) or limited geographical mobility (31 per cent) which they feel are holding them back or restricting their career choices. There is also some degree of personal inhibition experienced with 29 per cent reporting that their lack of self confidence is holding them back and 25 per cent reporting that entering the labour market after their studies is daunting.

Female postgraduates, older respondents, those with dependants and those who studied part time are much more likely to suffer from inflexibility which restricts their choices, and with difficulties balancing work and life (most of these differences are statistically significant). In terms of personal inhibition — part time, older respondents and those who studied arts and humanities courses are more likely to feel their self confidence is holding them back whereas those who studied social sciences are most likely to feel daunted by re-entering the labour market. Those from education courses are the least likely to have difficulties with self confidence or with re-entering the labour market. These findings suggest some courses, particularly non vocational, would benefit from modules aimed at enhancing confidence within the labour market via the curriculum.

Discrimination

There is little evidence of discrimination being reported with about one in ten (11 per cent) experiencing some form of perceived discrimination including: racial (three per cent), sex (eight per cent), sexual orientation (one per cent), and disability (one per cent). However, there is a substantial minority (17 per cent) who report experiencing age discrimination. This brings the

proportion experiencing some form of labour market discrimination up to almost a quarter (23 per cent).

Female and older respondents are more likely to report experiences of both sex and age discrimination. Interestingly, age discrimination is also suffered by the youngest age group (those under 25 on completion) which indicates it is not just a problem for older individuals. These differences are all statistically significant. The small group of respondents from minority ethnic groups is the most likely to report racial discrimination.

3.1.3 Qualitative evidence of labour market barriers

The survey evidence is again supported by experiences volunteered by individuals in the telephone discussions, particularly with regard to employers' lack of understanding of postgraduate study and qualifications.

Barriers in the work place

Although most telephone respondents did not suffer any discrimination in the work place, there are some examples of sex, age and even qualification level discrimination.

- Being a woman in a male dominated IT environment has been a barrier for one woman (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied science full time). In her words: *'they think differently, treat you differently and that makes it more difficult to put your point across. It means you almost have to be better than them to be on a level'*.
- An older female interviewee (1999 cohort, studied science full time) feels she was disadvantaged in the labour market through age. Despite being suitably qualified, she is unable to secure a job in the profession she was retraining for. She argues: *'maybe it was my fault for leaving it too late to retrain'* but she had no idea that her age would be a problem. In many ways she expected that experience and maturity would be seen as benefits and employers would be interested in someone with her background.'

Other labour market barriers include difficulties gaining access into competitive sectors. Those who are unemployed for a time after their postgraduate studies (as is typical for the longer term unemployed in general) lost confidence.

- One interviewee (younger male, 1999 cohort, studied social sciences full time) describes how tough competition was for jobs when the economy was slow in 1999. Now successfully working in investment banking, he estimates that he received over two hundred rejection letters when he first left Sussex after his masters. He cites one employer who turned him down because of his GCSE results.

- Similarly, the competitiveness of the local labour market in Sussex is mentioned by another interviewee (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied arts/humanities part time) who notes that *'graduates and postgraduates are vying for the same jobs'*.

Employers do not value postgraduates?

Many interviewees judge that employers, with the exception of the education sector, are not well informed of the benefits of postgraduate study and how different it is from undergraduate study. Different viewpoints include:

- A younger male (1999 cohort, studied arts/humanities full time) who feels that employers *'do not full appreciate the self management and motivation required to study at this level'*. He realises that employers do not want him necessarily for his specialist knowledge but he senses that they do not understand the discipline required in producing a 20,000 word piece of research.
- A similar thought is voiced by another interviewee (older female, 1999 cohort, studied arts/humanities full time) who proposes that *'unless you've studied at postgraduate level, you maybe don't appreciate the strength of character it takes and the integrity required to be prepared to go that far'*.
- *'It is important that employers appreciate the value added aspects of postgraduate training'*, says one interviewee (older male, 1999 cohort, studied science full time). He goes on to say: *'if a student can get through that level of intense study, fend for themselves, manage time and survive, then they will be much more self reliant in a job than someone with just undergraduate experience. Employers need to realise that postgraduate study, unlike undergraduate study, gives students the confidence to tackle the unknown, to have a go, although you might not know anything about the problem or a possible solution'*.
- A further interviewee (younger male, 1999 cohort, studied science full time) agrees that *'many employers do not treat postgraduates differently from those coming off a first degree. They are not as aware as they might be of the skills and benefits of postgraduate study'*.
- Linked to this theme is the belief shared by a number of interviewees that employers should support postgraduate study. One interviewee (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied arts/humanities part time) comments that *'employers should encourage lifelong learning for their employees and so should offer study leave to all employees, regardless of how relevant the course is to an employee's job'*.

3.2 What kind of work do postgraduates get?

Respondents provided information about their circumstances prior to their period of study, immediately after their study, and their current circumstances. This allows us to look at:

- outcomes from postgraduate study, either hard (such as occupation and salary) or soft (such as an individual's perception of the quality of their work)
- how far individuals have travelled with their postgraduate qualifications.

3.2.1 Job change — settling into a career

“ *I found work through a friend at his previous company who recommended me to a small start up company.*

A minority of respondents (18 per cent) remain in the same job they were doing before they finished their postgraduate course. Others have changed jobs, and some have changed numerous times (one respondent had changed jobs nine times). Just under a quarter (23 per cent) are in their first job since completing their higher qualification, 32 per cent are in their second job, and 27 per cent are in at least their third job after graduating from their postgraduate course.

Women are more likely to be in the same job (22 per cent compared with only nine per cent of men), however they are also more likely than men to have changed jobs more than twice, suggesting they are using their postgraduate qualification as a vehicle for career change (though these differences are not statistically significant). Significant differences found are that older respondents (those over 30 on completion) are much more likely than younger respondents to still be in the same job that they had before starting their course, as are those with dependants. Those with no dependants are much more likely to experience job changeability than those with dependants.

The 2001 cohort have experienced less change than the earlier 1999 cohort, with a quarter still in their previous job and a further third in only their first jobs since their studies. In comparison, two-fifths of the earlier cohort (38 per cent) are in at least their third job. This is to be expected given their comparatively shorter time in the postgraduate labour market. Social science postgraduates seem to have experienced the most job turbulence in their careers, whereas those who followed education courses are the most stable, with 61 per cent either in the same job or in the first job since graduating from their higher level course. A much greater proportion of those who studied part time are likely to be in the same job as before their studies than those who studied full time — this part time group tend to remain employed

throughout their studies as shown by their responses concerning how they financed their studies (see chapter 2).

Interestingly those working part time are more likely to have experienced turbulence (*ie* to be in at least their third job) but we are unable to identify any possible causes.

3.2.2 Occupation

Before starting their courses, respondents had a wide range of jobs but the vast majority (77 per cent) were already working in high level occupations either at managerial, professional or associate professional or technical level (Table 3.3). The most common occupations are: teaching and research professionals (28 per cent), admin and secretarial occupations (16 per cent), health and social welfare associates (15 per cent) and other business and public service associates (six per cent).

Table 3.3: Occupation before and after course, and currently of home respondents (per cent)

	Before course	After course	Current: 1999 cohort	Current: 2001 cohort
Manager	5	3	5	5
Professional (incl teaching)	41 (28)	52 (34)	58 (40)	54 (41)
Associate Professional (incl health)	32 (15)	27 (13)	32 (12)	36 (13)
Other	23	17	5	7
<i>N</i>	173	197	113	84

NB. 'Current' = 2004

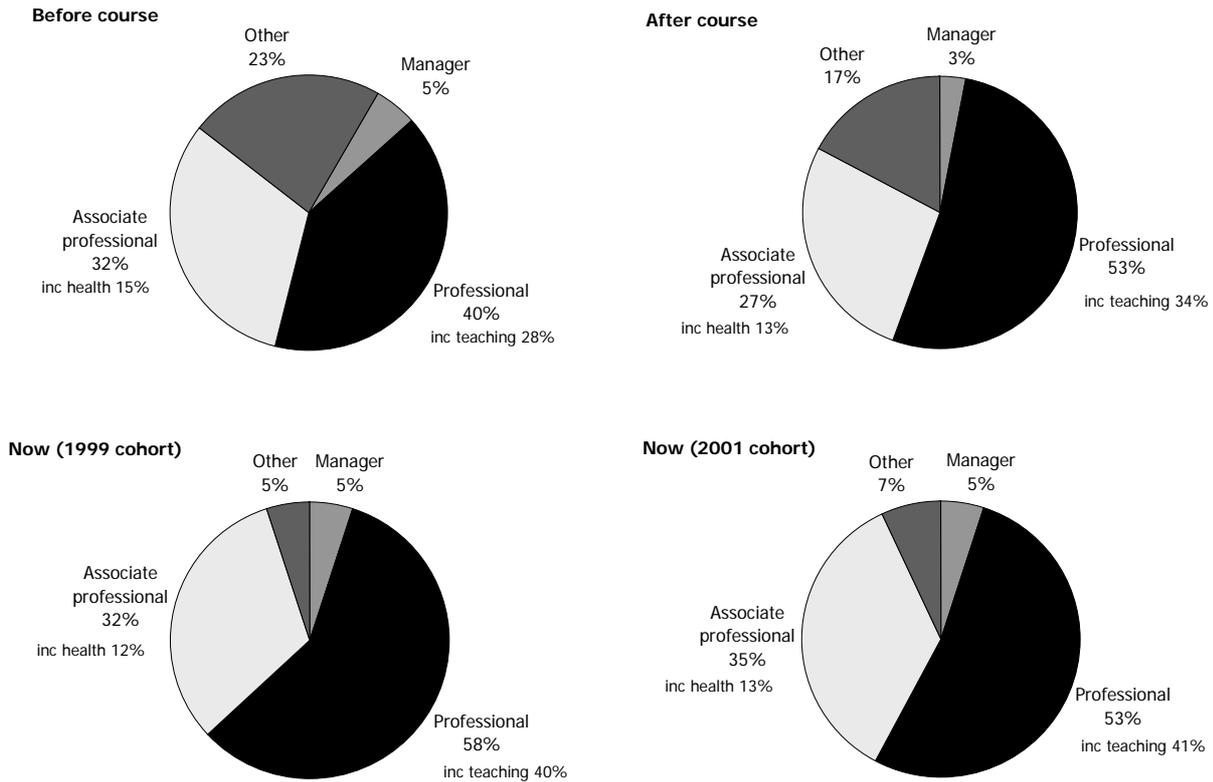
Source: IES Survey, 2003

Immediately after their courses, the proportion working at a high level has increased to 82 per cent but still the most common occupations are: teaching and research professionals, health and social welfare associates, admin and secretarial occupations, and other business and public service associates.

Currently (at the time of the survey, either two or four years after graduating from the postgraduate course) 80 per cent of the 1999 cohort and 77 per cent of the 2001 cohort are in employment (including self employed) (see section 3.1.1 'Activities after postgraduate study'). Of those in employment 94 per cent are working in high level occupations and the proportion working in administrative and secretarial occupations has dropped dramatically to a level of five per cent. This again shows that the value from postgraduate study, in terms of securing higher level or quality work, occurs over time.

Gender differences mirror traditional patterns of work. Female respondents are over-represented in teaching and research

Figure 3.2: Occupations before, after and currently of home respondents (per cent)



Source: IES Survey, 2003

professions, and health and social welfare associate professions. Men are more likely than women to be in managerial or senior official positions or other business and public service associate roles. Overall, older respondents are more likely to be in managerial or professional occupations, particularly teaching and research professionals, whereas those aged under 25 on completion of their postgraduate studies are the most likely to be in lower level occupations. Those with dependants are most likely to be in teaching and research professions, and health and social welfare associate occupations.

A greater proportion of the 1999 cohort (who were in the labour market for longer) are in managerial or professional level posts than those who graduated more recently (63 per cent compared with 57 per cent of the 2001 cohort). As would be expected, subject of study and type of qualification influences occupation, with:

- science and MSc postgraduates over-represented in engineering, ICT and technology professions
- social science postgraduates and diploma respondents over-represented in health and social welfare occupations
- arts and humanities, MA, education and PGCE postgraduates clustered in teaching and research professions reflecting the more domain specific or vocational focus of these courses.

3.2.3 Working hours

Three-quarters of our working postgraduates work full time hours. The small group (25 per cent) of respondents working part time work on average 20 hours a week. A similar proportion work part time across the cohorts; however, the earlier 1999 cohort has, on average longer part time hours than the later 2001 cohort (22 compared with 16, which is a significant difference). Female respondents are twice as likely to work part time as male respondents (30 per cent compared to 14 per cent) and older postgraduates and those with dependants are also much more likely to work part time than other respondents (all statistically significant differences).

3.2.4 Current salaries

“ I felt that the course helped me move up the pay scales at an accelerated rate, and that my MA will bring results in job promotions and applications in the long term.

Salaries range from less than £1,000 to over £50,000¹ a year and the median was £24,000.

Across the respondents, male postgraduates earn more than female postgraduates (£25,000 compared with £23,000), however this difference disappears when comparing full time salaries. Older respondents earn most, particularly when comparing full time salaries, and this probably reflects their greater labour market experience (those over 30 on completion are currently earning a median average £30,000 for a full time salary).

Looking across all working patterns, as would be expected, those who graduated from their courses earlier in 1999 have higher average current salaries (average of £25,500) than those graduating later in 2001 (average £21,225). Those who followed arts and humanities courses are earning the least (average of £18,000) whereas average salaries of science, social science and education postgraduates are very similar (averages of £25,000, £24,500 and £26,000 respectively). Those who studied part time have the highest average salary. As noted above, this group tend to have worked throughout their study period with their existing employer, so their continued employment and experience in the labour market is likely to have positively influenced their earnings potential. These are all statistically significant differences.

Those working in managerial or professional level jobs earn most (£25,000) (Table 3.4). The highest earning occupations are managerial and senior officials, engineering, technology and ICT professions, legal professions, finance professions and protective

¹ Only two respondents indicated current salaries of over £50,000.

Table 3.4: Median salary level at the time of the survey of home respondents

	1999	2001	Both
All	25,500	21,225	24,000
Managerial or professional	28,000	24,000	25,000
Associate professional	25,000	19,750	21,000
Other	12,000	16,000	14,000
Full time	28,000	24,000	25,000
Part time	19,000	14,500	14,750
Same job	25,000	25,406	25,406
One job since course	28,000	19,875	24,525
Two jobs since course	26,500	21,950	25,000
More than two jobs since course	23,000	19,000	21,225

Source: IES Survey, 2003

service officers. Respondents in these occupations earn, on average, at least £28,000.

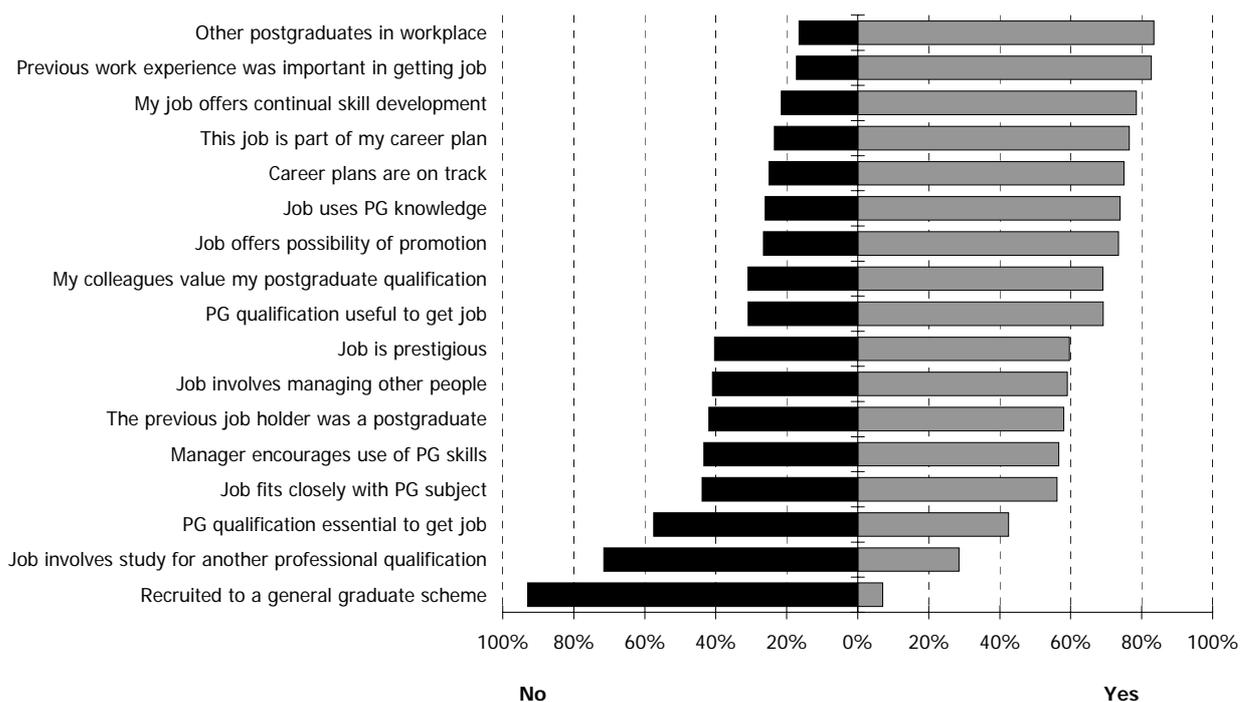
Those working part time, as would be expected, earn less than those working full time, though the differential is slightly smaller for the 1999 cohort who tend to work longer part time hours than the 2001 cohort. Interestingly, those who change jobs more frequently have the lowest average salary levels (perhaps indicating that individuals are experiencing difficulties in the labour market and not getting a return on their studies). Also the pattern for the 2001 cohort indicates that those staying in their previous job do best, in terms of salary, indicating that in the short term it pays to build up a profile/CV with one employer.

As you would expect, salaries here are considerably higher than the starting salaries of undergraduates. Indeed, research into undergraduate experiences in the labour market (Pollard *et al.*, 2004) puts the median starting salary for a new graduate at £16,000; although individuals perceiving themselves to be in good quality 'graduate' jobs (*ie* with strict entry criteria, with development opportunities and well regarded) attracted a higher median salary of £18,300. These figures are well below the salaries our respondents obtained, suggesting that the investment in postgraduate study, both in terms of time and money, was well spent.

3.2.5 Job characteristics – soft outcomes

The most common positive aspects associated with respondents' current employment includes: having other postgraduates in the workplace (83 per cent), having used work experience to gain the job (83 per cent), offering skill development (79 per cent), using postgraduate knowledge (74 per cent), offering promotion opportunities (73 per cent) and fitting in with career plan (75 per cent).

Figure 3.3: Characteristics of the current job of home respondents (per cent)



NB: 'not applicable' responses were excluded

Source: IES Survey, 2003

cent). However, rarely do respondents report their job involved further study towards another professional or recognised qualification (only 28 per cent), or that their job was part of a general graduate entry scheme (seven per cent). These findings are of interest because although graduates are positive about their opportunities for further skill progression, development and training offered by employers does not lead to formal qualification or accreditation.

Overall female postgraduates are much more positive about their jobs. Those who studied education subjects are also more positive. As discussed in earlier chapters and sections these respondents tend to undertake highly vocational courses with established career paths. However, those who had followed arts and humanities courses are the least likely to cite many of the positive characteristics in relation to their current jobs. Unsurprisingly, those in higher level occupations, particularly in managerial and professional level roles, are the most positive about their jobs.

We will now look more closely at groups of job characteristics.

Entry to the labour market

“ I left my first job after my course and I went to work for one of the company’s customer — through my contacts I was able to fit that niche.

The majority of respondents report the importance of work experience and postgraduate knowledge both in getting into and once in their jobs (83 and 74 per cent respectively). Also more report that their postgraduate qualification is useful, rather than essential, in getting their jobs (69 per cent compared with 42 per cent). Just over half (56 per cent) feel their job fits closely with their postgraduate subject.

Female postgraduates are relatively more likely to feel their qualification is essential and their work experience important for entry to their jobs (this may mean that women feel they need 'extra' evidence to gain entry to the postgraduate labour market). They are also more likely (and this was statistically significant) to see direct relevance of their subject and knowledge to their current work. Older respondents too find work experience relatively more useful than their younger peers, and significantly find their studies more relevant to their current activity. Those with some family experience of higher education too report the importance of work experience.

The 1999 cohort cite the importance of work experience (unsurprising given their greater labour market experience) and the degree of subject 'fit' and use of postgraduate knowledge -- more so than the 2001 cohort. Arts and humanities postgraduates are the least likely to report needing or finding their qualification useful for entry to their job and are least likely to find subject fit or their knowledge useful. However, education postgraduates are the most likely to find their qualification and subject to have helped them into their jobs, including gaining access to graduate recruitment schemes. Whereas work experience is found to be particularly useful to social science postgraduates.

Part time postgraduates are more likely to see the relevance of their studies to their jobs; as are those who are still in the same job they had before their studies. (This group worked while studying so perhaps they are likely to see links more clearly between the world of study and work and they can apply skills and knowledge directly to the workplace). However, full time postgraduate students are relatively more likely to use their qualification as a 'passport' to the postgraduate labour market.

Frequent job movers (those in at least their third job) are relatively more likely to cite the importance of work experience but least likely to see a close fit between their postgraduate subject and their current job. This could suggest that this group are either moving frequently in order to change career (thus moving further from their postgraduate specialism), or that this group are underemployed. Those in their first job since completing their postgraduate studies are the most likely to have been recruited on a graduate scheme, suggesting that employers take people directly from postgraduate courses with little work experience.

Status

Three-fifths (60 per cent) feel their job is prestigious, and almost as many have responsibilities for managing people (59 per cent). Many are working in jobs that have been held previously by postgraduates (58 per cent) or are usually held by postgraduates (53 per cent).

Women and older respondents are more likely than other groups to feel that theirs are established postgraduate jobs, in that their jobs have been previously held by postgraduates or are usually undertaken by graduates. However, younger respondents are more likely than their older peers to report that their job was prestigious.

The earlier cohort (completing in 1999) are more likely to be in roles where they had responsibility for managing people, or where the previous incumbent has been a postgraduate. The 2001 cohort are relatively more likely to report that their type of job is usually undertaken by postgraduates. Statistically significant differences are found by subject of postgraduate study. Social science postgraduates are more likely than others to regard their jobs as prestigious. However, education postgraduates are the most likely to be in established postgraduate jobs and have management responsibilities. Management responsibilities are relatively rare among science postgraduates.

Those who have continued in the same job (as before their studies) are most likely to manage other people and to regard their jobs as prestigious, so are those working full time. The group in their first job since graduating are least likely to view their job in these ways, although tend to see their jobs as established postgraduate roles.

Working environment

“ *In my current job I am respected by my colleagues and definitely in an environment where there is scope for progression, for learning new skills and being acknowledged.* ”

The majority are working in a supportive environment, alongside other postgraduates (83 per cent), with colleagues who value their postgraduate qualification (69 per cent) and with managers who encourage them to use their postgraduate skills (57 per cent).

Again, it is female respondents who are more likely to report that they are working in a supportive environment in that their colleagues value their qualification and they are encouraged by their manager. These factors are also more common for those who graduated in 2001 and those in their first job since graduating. Again statistically significant differences are found by subject. Education postgraduates are the most likely to associate their jobs with a supportive working environment. Arts and humanities are

the least likely of all groups to report that their work colleagues value their qualification.

Future development

In hindsight I wish I had done something more relevant to my chosen career in environmental lobbying.

Around three-quarters feel they were moving in the right direction, they are in posts that offer skill development and promotion (see above) and feel that their careers are on track. However, as noted above, few are in jobs that involved further formal professional study.

Women again are the most positive; they are more likely to feel their job involve skill development and that their job is part of their career plan. Older respondents tend to be less positive in this respect and are particularly less likely to see promotion opportunities or feel that their job forms part of a career plan.

Those who have spent more time in the labour market (graduating in 1999) are more likely to feel that their job offers promotion. More recent postgraduates are relatively more likely to associate their jobs with development, either in terms of professional study and training or continual skill development. Science postgraduates are least likely to feel their work offers skill development and very few education postgraduates note their job involves further professional study. However, this latter group are the most likely to report promotion opportunities. Science, and arts and humanities graduates are least likely to feel their careers are on track or that their job is part of their career plan (again all these subject differences are statistically significant).

Frequent job movers are the most likely to note their jobs involved further professional study but least likely to perceive promotion opportunities (again indicating change of direction and early stages of career ladder, or poor quality work). Those in their first postgraduate positions note the on-the-job development aspects of their jobs, whereas those who stayed in the same job are most likely to cite that their careers are on track, and that their job forms part of their career plans. Full time workers are more likely to have promotion opportunities and see their job forming part of their career plans. Interestingly those in associate professional level occupations are more likely than those in higher level occupations (managerial and professional) to undertake further professional study and feel their job is part of their career plan (*ie* taking a longer term view).

4. Added Value of Postgraduate Study

The previous chapter tracks the careers of our postgraduates and destinations since completing their studies. This chapter now looks at their views of the benefits of postgraduate study — essentially the value added by further high level study. We firstly consider employability, looking at how individuals may have assisted their employability by taking actions while studying. We then examine the extent to which study at postgraduate level adds to an individual's skill base, and whether these skills are valued in the labour market. Next we explore how quickly individuals find work suited to their higher level skills. Lastly we look at respondents' perceptions of the usefulness and benefits of their postgraduate course.

Key messages

- Postgraduate study is considered an enjoyable experience and worthwhile, with high added value particularly for the future. Overall it is seen as a good investment of time and money.
- The majority of respondents found work relevant to their postgraduate studies by the time they graduated or immediately after graduation.
- In addition to achieving qualifications, postgraduate studies are especially valuable in improving self esteem and confidence, and act as a catalyst for lifelong Learning. For some individuals these benefits may need to be harnessed, as a perceived lack of self confidence can act as a labour market barrier.
- Future badging or marketing of courses should consider the nature and diversity of courses and sign-post their relationship to likely or typical labour market outcomes
- Training in IT and use of the internet might benefit some in their job searching – particularly women or those without family experience of higher education. Further development of these skills tend to be neglected in postgraduates studies, and IT/internet has been one of the greatest changes in the recruitment landscape
- Honest and open careers guidance is needed during study from those who are able to broker job opportunities — particularly for those undertaking non-vocational courses.
- Developing and promoting employability skills as an integral part of the curriculum rather than as an optional extra, might be of value.
- Individuals need to be encouraged to make use of the University's career facilities while still studying, to truly explore their options.

- Softer skills development might benefit postgraduates across the curriculum -- although typically cited as having improved, the greatest perceived shortfall remains interpersonal and team working skills.
- Advice is needed regarding the segmentation of the postgraduate labour market and how the curriculum fits with employer demand for skills — employers too need to understand the added value of postgraduate study in addition to qualifications in subject areas.
- Vocational courses reap earlier returns to employment, particularly in terms of salary, but other courses such as arts and humanities take longer to make a return on their investment.
- Salary progression is not a key driver for postgraduate study, yet may not be as rapid over time as postgraduates expected, suggesting that other longer term rewards may be needed to retain the interest and performance of individuals who place learning and development high on their agenda.
- The majority see an increase in their salary after their studies and salary expectations are grounded in reality.

4.1 Do postgraduate courses aid 'employability'?

Before looking at the issue of employability of postgraduates it is important to consider the degree to which individuals are proactive in helping themselves.

4.1.1 Career activities

“ *I wanted guidance about postgraduate opportunities in the local area. I did not want to move area and wanted job hunting information for local jobs.* ”

Over three-quarters of the respondents indicate that they undertook activities during their study to help them get a job or further their future career. The most common activities undertaken are largely informal and involve:

- talking to family and friends (63 per cent)
- gathering careers materials (55 per cent)
- visiting CDEC during their studies (48 per cent)
- looking at employer websites (48 per cent).

Few visited the CDEC website remotely (nine per cent). Proactive strategies are also less common, with about one in five applying for postgraduate level jobs, attending career presentations, or taking work experience placements. Such proactive strategies are more common among the 1999 cohort. In contrast, the 2001 graduating cohort are relatively more likely to visit CDEC either in person or remotely via the website, to look at employer websites and attend careers presentations. This might reflect the

developments with CDEC, IT and growth of internet use generally (Table 4.1).

Men and women adopt different strategies to aid employability. Female respondents use more socially orientated activities, most commonly talking to family and friends. Men tend to rely upon IT and looking at employer websites is their most common activity. Comparing groups, women are relatively more likely than men to apply for postgraduate level jobs, to take work experience (statistically significant) and to discuss their career with their employer, all of which reflect their greater likelihood of working while studying.

Men are more likely to visit CDEC, look at employer websites and attend careers presentations. Younger respondents are more likely than their older peers to visit CDEC and employer websites, and to talk to friends and family. Family and friends are also a more common source of advice among those of families with higher education experience. Older respondents are more likely to discuss their career with their employer and to visit the CDEC website remotely.

Arts and humanities students are the least proactive in their job search strategies during their postgraduate studies, with only just over two-thirds (70 per cent) reporting any activities to further their future career prospects. This group tend to rely on discussing their plans with family and friends. Work experience is particularly common among education postgraduates, who rarely visited CDEC or attended career presentations. Science postgraduates are the most likely to attend careers presentations, which may reflect the sectors represented by visiting employers. Those studying part time are less likely to undertake

Table 4.1: Activities undertaken by home respondents during their study to further careers (per cent)

Activity	1999	2001	Both
Talked to family and friends	60	65	63
Gathered career information	52	59	55
Visited CDEC	45	52	48
Looked at employer websites	42	57	48
Applied for postgraduate level jobs	25	18	22
Went to career presentations	16	30	22
Took work experience	26	13	20
Discussed career with employer *	16	15	15
Other	9	12	10
Used CDEC website remotely	7	12	9
<i>N</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>184</i>

* if applicable (*ie* those employed during course)

Source: IES Survey, 2003

employability activities while studying; of those that did, the most common activities are talking to family and friends and discussing their careers with their employers (as this group are most likely to have an employer *ie* be working while studying). Full time postgraduates are more likely to make use of the campus facilities such as those offered by CDEC and careers presentations. This group are also more likely to gather careers materials, visit employer websites and apply for postgraduate jobs. All these findings are statistically significant.

4.1.2 Qualitative evidence of career planning

Feedback to careers advisors indicates that many graduates in their early careers wish they had used careers services and had had a careers consultation while an undergraduate. Interviewees' stories echo these views: they wish in hindsight they had done more to progress their careers while at university. They describe how they did not have enough time or energy to prioritise or even think about careers while studying.

- One interviewee (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied science full time) states that while she was on the course she was not ready to think about careers. She said: *'I didn't really use the careers service as much as I would have liked'*.
- Another (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied social sciences full time) comments that she did not think about careers a great deal because of conflicting priorities. She comments that, looking back, she *'did not do enough to improve [her] experience during the course'*. Because she was sponsored, she felt she needed to concentrate on her studies.
- Another interviewee (older female, 1999 cohort, studied arts/humanities full time) says *'I wanted the careers adviser to do more straight talking, to explore with students some areas of work that we might not have considered. Careers advisers did not know anything, they were too airy fairy, talking about options, rather than real things.'*
- The issue of timing is also raised, for example one interviewee (older male, 1999 cohort, studied science full time) says he was so completely focussed on the course that he did not feel ready to use the careers service. Because at that point he was unclear about what career direction he wanted to take, he did not feel confident about how to express his ideas to a careers adviser.

4.1.3 Building relevant skills

“ *The course gave me confidence to rise to a challenge when before I would have ducked.*

Respondents to the questionnaire survey feel their courses improved a variety of skills and attributes.¹ Areas considered most improved are:

- analytical thinking
- planning and organising
- managing own development.

Areas of 'at least some improvement' are largely more socially oriented, aspects employers often seek in addition to subject or domain specific knowledge. These have become known as emotional intelligence, including:

- communication
- initiative
- problem solving
- interpersonal skills
- decision making.

Few feel that their courses improved on other skills that are valued by employers such as:

- team working
- computer literacy
- leadership skills
- (particularly) number skills and business awareness.

Following trends presented throughout this report, women tend to be more positive about postgraduate study and, in this case, its potential to improve skills. They are much more likely to feel their studies improved their team working, interpersonal and communication skills, and their ability to manage their own development and leadership skills. Male respondents are more likely than females to report improvements in numbers skills (reflecting the male dominance in science subjects). Younger postgraduates are more likely to feel their planning and organising abilities and numbers skills have improved, whereas older respondents are relatively more likely to feel they have improved their leadership abilities. These are all statistically significant findings.

The 2001 cohort tend to be more positive about improvements in skills, especially in terms of: analytical thinking, managing their own development, planning and organising, communication, and initiative (statistically significant). This more positive assessment

¹ We cannot be sure of the level of postgraduates' skills prior to study and therefore a low score may not necessarily reflect weak development.

may be due to the shorter elapsed time period since their postgraduate studies finished, meaning that they are better able to attribute development to this period.

Science postgraduates are least positive about improvements in their skill levels, particularly in relation to the softer skills. However, education postgraduates are the most positive particularly in terms of team working, leadership and decision making.

Relevance of skills

The above results indicate the potential of postgraduate study for skill development. It is useful to consider these results against the perceived currency of the skills in the labour market. Skills felt to be most important to respondents current activities are:

- communication (67 per cent considered this to be essential)
- planning and organising (58 per cent),
- interpersonal skills (58 per cent).

With the exception of business awareness (where 27 per cent consider this to be unimportant) all the skills and attributes are considered to be of some importance. Table 4.2 summarises respondents' scores in relation to improvement and current importance. The greatest gaps between the two scores reported concern:

- interpersonal skills
- team working.

This suggests softer skills' development might benefit postgraduates across the curriculum as their careers develop or as they move into different roles.

There tends to be consistency in the perceived relevance or importance of the skills across the respondents. Only marginal differences are noticed and these include:

- Women tend to rate most of the skills more highly in terms of importance than men do, with the exception of number skills, analytical thinking and particularly business awareness.
- Older respondents tend to rate business awareness, communication skills, analytical thinking and decision making more highly than younger respondents.

The scores are also very similar for the two graduating cohorts (Table 4.3). However, the earlier cohort score team working, leadership and decision making more highly than the 2001 cohort who place greater importance on initiative and managing their own development. These differences are likely to reflect

Table 4.2: Perceived improvement of, and relevance (in terms of importance in current activity) of skills and attributes among home respondents (mean score)

Skills	Level of improvement	Current importance
Analytical thinking	3.8	4.1
Planning/organising	3.5	4.5
Managing own development	3.5	4.0
Communication	3.4	4.5
Initiative	3.3	4.3
Problem solving	3.2	4.1
Interpersonal skills	3.1	4.5
Decision making	3.1	4.1
Team working	2.8	4.1
IT/Computer literacy	2.8	4.0
Leadership	2.5	3.5
Number skills	2.0	3.0
Business awareness	1.5	2.7

NB: Improvement scored from one (not at all improved) to five (great improvement)

mean score of less than three = low improvement

mean score of greater than three = high improvement

Importance scored from one (unimportant) to five (essential)

mean score of less than three = low importance

mean score of greater than three = high importance

Source: IES Survey, 2003

respondents' experiences of being in the labour market for longer as skill needs change over time and the need to work cross-functionally and as part of a team grows. In addition, the trend for self managed careers might account for the most recent cohort placing greater importance on this aspect.

Greater variation in responses is noticed by subject of study. This is likely to reflect the diversity and focus of courses undertaken:

- Science postgraduates are more likely to see the relevance of number skills and social sciences are more likely to see the relevance of analytical thinking.
- Both social science and science postgraduates are more likely to see the relevance of business awareness skills.
- Leadership, teamworking, communication, initiative and interpersonal skills are least important to science respondents.
- Team working, computer literacy and leadership are relatively more important to those who followed education courses.
- Problem solving, number skills, analytical thinking and decision making are least important to arts and humanities postgraduates.

Table 4.3: Home respondents' perceived improvement of, and relevance (in terms of importance in current activity) of skills and attributes by cohort (mean score)

	Improvement		Importance	
	1999	2001	1999	2001
Analytical thinking	3.5	4.0	4.1	4.1
Planning/organising	3.3	3.7	4.4	4.5
Managing own development	3.3	3.8	3.9	4.1
Communication	3.2	3.6	4.5	4.6
Initiative	3.1	3.5	4.2	4.4
Problem solving	3.1	3.4	4.1	4.0
Interpersonal skills	3.1	3.1	4.5	4.4
Decision making	3.0	3.2	4.2	4.0
Team working	2.7	2.9	4.2	4.0
IT/Computer literacy	2.7	2.8	4.0	4.0
Leadership	2.5	2.6	3.7	3.4
Number skills	1.9	2.0	3.0	2.9
Business awareness	1.6	1.5	2.7	2.7

NB improvement is scored from one (not at all improved) to five (great improvement)
 mean score of less than three = low improvement
 mean score of greater than three = high improvement.

Importance is scored from one (unimportant) to five (essential)
 mean score of less than three = low importance
 mean score of greater than three = high importance.

Source: IES Survey, 2003

As one would expect, there are differences by the nature of current employment activity. Those working outside of managerial, professional or associate professional occupations, are much less likely to consider the skills listed as important to their current activity, whereas those in managerial and professional posts, and in associate professional posts have similar scores. However, business awareness is relatively more important to those in associate professional roles, and number skills are more important to managerial and professional occupations.

Those working full time are more likely than part time workers to perceive business awareness, computer literacy and number skills as important. Those still in the same job are more likely than others to rate the importance of leaderships skills - this is likely to indicate that these individuals are further into their careers than others. Those who changed jobs more frequently (*ie* they are in at least their third job) are the most likely to cite managing their own development as highly important. Respondents in their first job are probably on the 'first rung' of a career within an organisation which will be largely managed for them; whereas those changing jobs more frequently are managing their own careers, progressing by moving between companies in the external labour market.

4.1.4 Qualitative evidence of improved skills

All the telephone interviewees talk about the skills they developed on the course and the confidence this has given them.

- *'My ability to interact with a range of different people increased through the course'*, says a younger female (2001 cohort, studied social sciences full time). Additionally the study has consolidated her writing skills and work management abilities.
- Similarly, a younger female (2001 cohort, studied science full time) says the course developed her ability to argue her point coherently, enhanced her skills in working with people from different backgrounds and improved her time management.
- A younger male (1999 cohort, studied arts/humanities full time) lists improvements in his ability to form coherent arguments, a *'can-do'* attitude, the ability to work intensively, and to sustain work towards one goal over a long period of time.
- Analytical skills increased ten fold as a result of the course for one interviewee (younger male, 1999 cohort, studied social sciences full time). He also mentions becoming quicker at assessing situations and making decisions.
- A further interviewee (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied education part time) describes how the masters heightened her analytical, creative and reflective thinking.

4.1.5 Finding relevant work

The majority (65 per cent) of survey respondents found work or a career relevant to their postgraduate studies by the time they graduated or immediately after graduation. These broke down into:

- 22 per cent who found work before the course or by staying with the same employer
- 24 per cent during the course
- 20 per cent immediately after completion.

Despite this, for a substantial minority it takes a little longer to find suitable employment. Nine per cent go on to find relevant work or career within a year of graduating, for another ten per cent it takes longer than one year, and 16 per cent at the time of the survey report that they have not yet found relevant work or career either because they were not looking or because they have been unsuccessful in their search.

This pattern remains consistent across the groups of respondents although older respondents and those who studied part time are more likely to have secured relevant/postgraduate level work

before the course or stayed with their existing employer (statistically significant). Those graduating more recently (in 2001) tend to take slightly longer to secure relevant work, as do those who have made more job moves since completing their studies. By subject, education postgraduates are more likely to have a job secured soon after graduation than other respondents (reflecting the established career paths in the education arena). Arts and humanities graduates are the most likely not yet to be in relevant postgraduate work, largely because they have not looked for such work. This reflects the importance of personal interest in motivating study in this field (see chapter 2) and illustrates that a range of drivers underpins decisions to undertake postgraduate study other than immediate labour market outcomes.

It is useful to note that those already in jobs considered to be relevant or of a postgraduate level (prior to study) are least likely to undertake actions to improve employability. This group may feel that they do not need to take actions to further their careers but it may be worth marketing some of CDEC's services to them. It could be beneficial for this group to explore the wider career options open to them now and in the future (*ie* not to be narrow in their outlook -- see chapter 5 for a further discussion of these issues).

4.2 Was it worth it?

“ *It was definitely worth it — I enjoyed the whole year -- wonderful people especially the other students.*

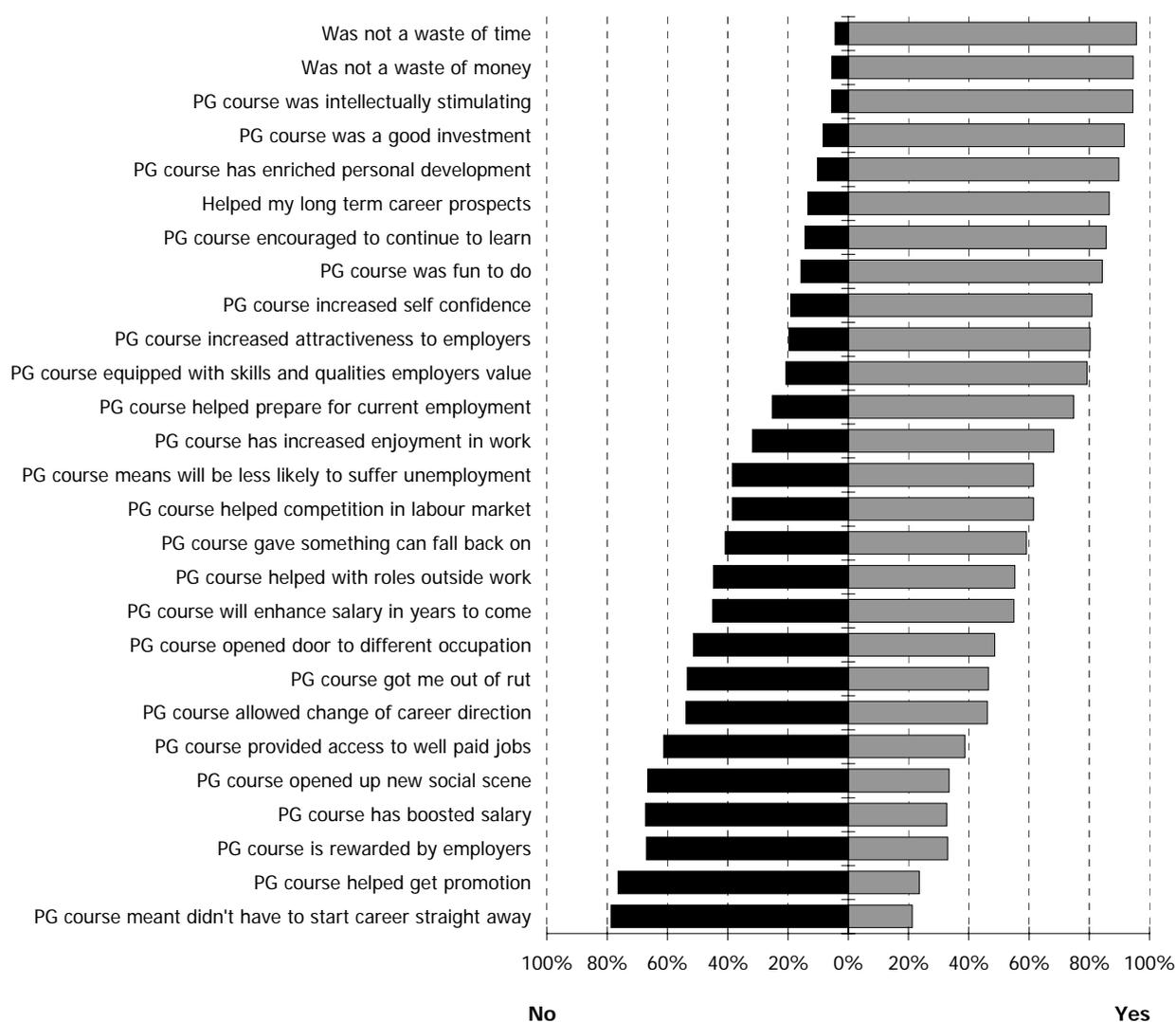
Respondents value their postgraduate study. Almost all find it was worth the time and money they invested (96 and 95 per cent respectively), and agree that it was 'a good investment all things considered' (especially those who graduated in 2001).

Positive impact

Respondents tend to feel that their studies also have had a positive impact on their lives generally. More than four-fifths feel that their postgraduate course enriched their personal development (90 per cent), encouraged them to continue to learn (86 per cent) and increased their self confidence (81 per cent). Also just over half (55 per cent) report that their course helped them with roles outside of work (Figure 4.1).

Older respondents are more likely than other groups to report that postgraduate study had a positive impact, particularly in enriching their personal development. Generally those with dependants are more likely to cite positive outcomes from postgraduate study. Increased self confidence and helping with wider life roles (outside of work) are also positive outcomes for those who studied part time.

Figure 4.1: Outcomes from postgraduate study for home respondents (per cent)



Source: IES Survey, 2003

Enjoyable experience

For many, the experience of postgraduate study at Sussex University is an enjoyable one, particularly in terms of being intellectually stimulating (94 per cent) and fun to do (84 per cent). For a smaller group it also got them out of a rut (47 per cent) and opened up a new social scene (33 per cent).

Those graduating in 2001, and younger respondents, are significantly more likely than other groups of respondents to find that studying opens up a new social scene, and to report that it is fun to do. Older postgraduates are, however, more likely to find the course intellectually stimulating and to particularly feel that their studies took them out of rut. Those who followed arts and humanities courses also point out the social aspect of their courses and that they are fun to do — both of these aspects are less likely to be cited by education postgraduates (though the differences are

not statistically significant). Full time students also make significantly greater reference to the social scene.

Enabling change

For just under half of the respondents, the course enables change, either by opening doors to a different occupation (49 per cent), or by allowing them to change career direction (46 per cent). For some it acts as a delaying tactic, preventing change, allowing them to delay starting their career (21 per cent).

Change is a more common postgraduate outcome among male respondents, older respondents, 1999 graduates and particularly for those who studied full time. Using postgraduate studies to delay entry to careers is more likely to be reported by younger respondents and more recent postgraduates (statistically significant). This tactic is also more prevalent among those who studied arts and humanities subjects.

Entry to the labour market

In terms of getting into the labour market, approximately four-fifths feel that study increased their attractiveness to employers (80 per cent) and equipped them with skills and qualities that employers value (79 per cent). Slightly fewer (62 per cent) feel that it had helped them compete in the labour market, and only a minority feel it provided them with access to well paid jobs (39 per cent).

Younger respondents are more likely to feel their studies provided access to well paid jobs, and helped them compete in the labour market. Those with no family experience of higher education and particularly those who studied full time are also more likely to perceive that their postgraduate qualification helps them compete in the labour market. Those who followed courses in education are significantly more confident that their studies provide access to well paid jobs and the 2001 cohort are also marginally more confident in this respect. Arts and humanities postgraduates are the least likely to see any labour market benefits of their postgraduate studies (a statistically significant difference).

Impact on employment

Looking at the impact of their studies on current employment, three-quarters feel it helped prepare them for their current employment (75 per cent) and over two-thirds report that it increased enjoyment in their work (68 per cent). Few feel that their course/qualification is rewarded by employers (33 per cent), has boosted their salary (33 per cent) or helped them get promotion (24 per cent).

Female postgraduates are more likely to feel that their studies have boosted their salary and are rewarded by employers; this corresponds with earlier findings where male respondents are more likely to report facing difficulties getting employers to recognise the value of their postgraduate qualification (see chapter 3) However, it must be remembered that most respondents receiving sponsorship via employers are female PGCE students which could therefore explain some of this difference.

Younger and full time respondents are generally more positive about the impact of their studies on their current employment, especially in terms of salary, and also promotion and employer reward. The group of individuals with dependants are marginally more likely to link their studies with increased enjoyment in work, as are those who studied part time.

The 1999 cohort are marginally more likely to feel that their studies have boosted their salary than the 2001 cohort. This probably reflects their greater time in the labour market and thus time in which to see a return on their study investment. Those who followed education courses see the greatest impact on their current employment, as one would expect from those following vocational courses. However, arts and humanities students are the least likely to feel their studies positively influenced this area of their lives (these subject differences are statistically significant).

Future benefits

“ *I believed the higher degree would give me the edge over other competitors.*

Respondents are more positive about the potential future benefits of their postgraduate studies to their careers: the vast majority feel it did something for their long term career prospects (87 per cent). Fewer consider that their course means they are less likely to suffer unemployment (62 per cent), that it provides something to fall back on (59 per cent) or that it will enhance salary in years to come (55 per cent, although this is a much greater proportion than those who saw an immediate salary benefit).

Female respondents are significantly more likely to view their studies as providing a safety net (something to fall back on) than male respondents are, however this latter group are marginally more likely to feel their course will enhance their future salary, as are younger postgraduates and those who studied full time. The 2001 cohort are particularly confident about the long term salary benefits of their studies. The ‘safety net’ aspect of postgraduate study is also important to those with no family experience of higher education, those who complete in 1999 and significantly to those who studied education.

4.2.1 Financial benefits — changes in earning

Around a third feel the postgraduate course benefited them financially, either through providing them with access to well paid jobs (39 per cent) or boosting their salary (33 per cent, see above). There seems to be a salary benefit to postgraduate study but this becomes more apparent in the medium rather than short term.

The median average salary level prior to starting the postgraduate course was £17,000, and across the group of respondents this remains unchanged immediately after study. However, at the time of the survey (further into individuals' careers), the average salary level was £24,000 (£25,500 for the 1999 cohort and £21,225 for the 2001 cohort).

Looking at the changes at an individual level, differences are evident. For the majority (58 per cent) of those who gave salary information, their earnings increased immediately after their studies, by an average of £4,000. However, for a small group (less than 20 per cent), their earnings decreased and this was largely because of working patterns and further study. Here individuals are in temporary work or became self employed after their studies, continued to study beyond their postgraduate course or changed careers.

Comparing current salary levels with those before study for each individual again indicates that a minority, less than 20 per cent, has lower salaries than before -- this can also be explained by working patterns (with many now working part time), further study and career change (moving from an established career to building a new one). However, over three-quarters of those giving relevant salary information are, at the time of the survey, earning more than they did before embarking on their postgraduate study.

Respondents are asked what they would have expected to be earning by now. Across the whole group, the average (median) expected salary is £25,000, which is only a little higher than the actual average salary of £24,000 (Table 4.4). Thus respondents'

Table 4.4: Average expected earnings with actual earnings (median) of home respondents by cohort

	Expected	Actual
1999	26,000	25,500
2001	22,000	21,225
Both	25,000	24,000
<i>N (all)</i>	<i>167</i>	<i>183</i>

Source: IES Survey, 2003

expectations are fairly accurate and expectations are largely met.

On the whole, younger respondents' expected earnings are less than those of older respondents. Those who completed more recently in 2001 also have lower expected earnings than those from earlier cohorts. By subject, arts and humanities postgraduates have the lowest salary expectations. All these differences are statistically significant. These predicted patterns are all borne out in practice, which again indicates that respondents' salary expectations are grounded in reality.

4.2.2 Qualitative evidence of benefits to study

Interviewees provide further evidence of the real value of postgraduate study.

'Once you've done the masters you can do anything'

Many interviewees comment positively about the great sense of personal achievement and confidence the course gives them. Often they mention how unsure they felt at the start of the course, how daunting it was, or how little knowledge they had of what was expected of them academically. Comments include being very *'at sea'* to start with and taking a while *'to find... feet.'*

- One interviewee (older male, 1999 cohort, studied science full time) observes: *'you were really thrown into it at the start and my initial response was – you must be joking – but then you gain the confidence to step out'*.
- Most are emphatic about how the course boosted confidence and self esteem. Being able to cope with the demands of the course encourages postgraduates to be positive about their behaviour in demanding situations. One interviewee (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied arts/humanities part time) questioned her ability to cope while on the course, saying *'was I up for it? Would I cope working full time, keeping my social life going and doing lots of reading?'*
- One interviewee (older female, 1999 cohort, studied arts/humanities full time) comments on the learning process by saying *'once you know that you can study at that level, write that length of dissertation, then the course would be so much more enjoyable the second time around. The first time round there was so much tension in proving to yourself that you could actually manage to do it.'*
- Another interviewee (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied education part time) still sounds surprised at her achievement *'I look at my bound thesis and still wonder that I managed to do that!'* She found the course so hard but at the same time extremely rewarding and is very proud of her success.

‘The learning process spills into everything you do’

Some of the benefits of postgraduate study are invisible to start with. Interviewees talked about how the course infected all aspects of their lives:

- *‘When you are studying’, said an older female (1999 cohort, studied education part time), ‘the process spills over into everything you do – for example, because you are writing essays, you become more aware of how you are writing and therefore how others around you are writing. Because you are doing research, you also become more aware of how others use research’.*
- This viewpoint is supported by another interviewee (older female, 1999 cohort, studied arts/humanities full time) who mentions that *‘having read so much during the course, you look at things in greater depth’*. She likes the fact that she now looks at the world differently and appreciates different ideas. The ‘flip side’ to this is that she has developed an intolerance of things that are not intellectually stimulating. She mentions that she is no longer able to watch TV since the course because it feels so dull and uninspiring compared to the enjoyment and pleasure she found in her studies.

Balancing work and life

Looking at what has changed in their lives as a result of the course, interviewees comment on the lasting change to their attitude to work.

- For example, a younger female interviewee (2001 cohort, studied science full time) states that the course put her job in perspective and made her think about her work-life balance. Throughout the course she was in control. This contrasted with being at work where she was always working towards impossible deadlines. Since returning to work she manages to be more relaxed and not let it take over her life. She feels the course taught her to be satisfied with only doing her best. Before the course she was always trying to do everything. She feels she is a more relaxed person as a result of the course.
- Another interviewee (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied arts/humanities part time) feels much better at managing her time and prioritising commitments -- not just at work but *‘the ability to juggle home and work life stayed with me after the course’*.

Taking the long view

Interviewees comment that they expect the course to bring rewards in the long term. They are quietly confident that their investment of time and money will benefit them as their careers develop, bringing gradual changes rather than immediate results and that *‘it would be a good thing in the long run’*.

- The course is seen as a stepping stone to future career progression for one interviewee (younger female, 2001 cohort, studied education part time). She is keen to see this as a long term aim and is pleased to have the MA under her belt. Asked whether she would do the course again she said: *'yes because I am optimistic about the hard outcomes for the future and am pleased with the soft outcomes I have already – personal reward, self value and pride in having done the MA.'*
- Another interviewee (younger male, 1999 cohort, studied science full time) talks about his strong belief that the course *'will make a difference career-wise later in life'*. He feels that, were he competing for a job in the future, his postgraduate qualification might well be a deciding factor in being chosen. He is sure that the course will prove even more valuable in the future.

5. Moving On

The previous chapter explores employability aspects of postgraduate studies and this chapter provides further insight into the usefulness and impact of careers advice and guidance to understand whether it enables individuals to move on and navigate the postgraduate labour market successfully. We examine the changes respondents expect to make in their work and working lives in both the short and medium term.

Key messages

- A range of careers services provided by the University, both general and targeted, are available to postgraduates. More than one-third make use of these and most are happy with the support received. Support could be improved with a dedicated postgraduate careers adviser, a greater focus on local postgraduate opportunities and business links, and with academic involvement in promoting careers.
- Those with established careers or who had studied vocational subjects tend not to make use of the services. CDEC users tend to need more support with their labour market activities and are less confident about their choices and decisions.
- Marketing and promoting the full range and benefits of CDEC services more widely would encourage a broader understanding of potential future opportunities and how to access the labour market before and after study — particularly for those who are undertaking non-vocational studies.
- CDEC services have the potential to empower postgraduates' decision making and act as a catalyst for lifelong learning via advice and support regarding forward proactive planning. However, there is a danger that many postgraduates may underestimate the value of such opportunities and only seek CDEC services as remedial action as a result of poor decision-making or a lack of information prior to study. Individuals need to be encouraged to access services before they encounter labour market difficulties.
- Career mobility may become increasingly difficult beyond the short term as individuals develop other work life balance priorities and career anchors, with expectations and plans revised accordingly. Despite this, postgraduate study is perceived as offering a passport to both internal and external labour market opportunities.
- Looking ahead five or seven years from completing postgraduate study, most expected changes are linked to labour market

outcomes, although lifelong learning, particularly learning while working, still features high on postgraduates' agendas.

- There is a pattern of male postgraduates expecting to work internationally -- this may reflect the growing demand from multinational employers seeking to resource overseas operations.
- Postgraduates plan for future career breaks reflecting the need to achieve work-life balance; this is a feature of taking responsibility and ownership for 'self managed careers'.

5.1 Is careers advice and guidance useful?

To look at the usefulness of careers advice and guidance, it is important to look at what services are provided for, and used by, respondents.

5.1.1 Use of guidance services

The Career Development and Employment Centre (CDEC) is the University's dedicated service centre providing advice and guidance with the aim of increasing the employment opportunities for current students and recent graduates. With this in mind CDEC offers a wide range of services including: an information centre, website, careers guides, contacts in work offering insiders' views of careers, drop in short interviews with careers advisers, longer careers consultations with careers advisers, workshops to encourage the development of career management skills, self presentation workshops, mock interviews, computer based career planning programmes, a vacancy listings/database, advice on employment issues, and employer presentations and briefings. The full range of services is open to students, graduates and postgraduates up to two years after leaving the University.

A number of activities is provided specifically for postgraduates at Sussex. Some of these are part of the curriculum, for example the Sussex European Institute's MA in Contemporary European Studies offers two sessions led by CDEC staff — one on career planning and the second on job hunting in Europe. Regular workshops offered for postgraduates in CDEC include: 'career planning for postgraduates', 'design a postgraduate CV for academic jobs' and 'design a postgraduate CV for jobs outside academia'. Additionally CDEC offers career planning sessions through the SciPS group (Science Postgraduate Support Group) which promotes skills training (for example 'tips for writing your thesis' and 'poster presentations') to all science postgraduate students.

We measure whether individuals used CDEC's services, however we do not measure how they used the services or indeed how the services may have helped their career development. Measuring effectiveness of careers interventions is complex and beyond the scope of this study. However, we can explore the profile of users,

Table 5.1: Home respondents' use of careers services (per cent) by cohort

	1999	2001	Both
Visited CDEC / used CDEC website	35	40	37
Did not use CDEC	65	60	63
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: IES Survey, 2003

their labour market experiences and their experiences of using CDEC's services. Also, through the qualitative telephone interviews we can explore ideas for further postgraduate support.

More than one-third of our responding postgraduates report that they used at least one of CDEC's services -- either visiting the centre in person or visiting the website. The proportion is marginally higher among the 2001 cohort (Table 5.1). Males and younger (statistically significant) postgraduates make greater use of CDEC than other groups (Table 5.2). As do full time postgraduates, and those with no dependants. Very few postgraduates who followed a course in education used the facilities (all statistically significant differences).

5.1.2 Using CDEC to find relevant work

The profile of non-users reflects the likelihood that some groups will have a job already or will have one lined up. Indeed a much higher proportion of postgraduates who did not use CDEC (compared to those who did) report:

- finding a job before the course
- finding a job during the course
- that they were working for the same employer throughout.

However, among those who visited CDEC:

- a significantly higher proportions found a job immediately after graduation, within a year after graduating and more than a year after graduating.

Nearly 20 per cent of people who used CDEC are still looking for a relevant job (at the time of the survey) or have not started

Table 5.2: Profile of CDEC users: home respondents (per cent)

	Male	Female	Age less than 30	Age 30 or over
Visited CDEC / used CDEC website	42	35	54	26
Did not use CDEC	58	65	47	74
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: IES Survey, 2003

looking. This compares with 13 per cent of those who did not use CDEC. At one level this suggests that non-users fare better in getting a relevant job more quickly, however, it is much more likely to imply that respondents using CDEC needed and sought help with their labour market activities. Similarly, we might conclude that half of the responding postgraduates did not visit CDEC because they felt they did not need to, as they had already secured a relevant job. This pattern corresponds with reported graduate behaviour (Pollard *et al.*, 2003) where individuals are *'using the career services offered at universities and colleges somewhat reactively to help with their situation, ie to try to improve their labour market situation'*.

Thus postgraduates who are self sufficient in job hunting (perhaps with greater labour market experience) or discreet groups such as part time education postgraduates do not feel the need to use CDEC. Others look to CDEC when they are worried about their futures or their choices.

5.1.3 The experience of CDEC users

“ *The best thing about the careers service was the encouragement I received.*

As noted earlier (chapter 4) most respondents highly value their postgraduate experience, feeling that it benefited their lives, current work and future careers.

Comparing CDEC users with those who did not use the services, users are less likely to feel their courses had been a good investment, worth the time and particularly worth the money. This is likely to reflect their labour market experiences, length of time in the labour market and their greater need for help with their careers. In this respect they are also marginally less likely to feel that postgraduate study: improved their self confidence; equipped them with skills employers value or that are rewarded by employers; provided them with a safety net, with a significantly lower score (*ie* protection from unemployment and something to fall back on); or provided immediate employment benefits in terms of promotion and salary.

However, users are marginally more likely to feel their courses help them with roles outside work and open up a new social scene (reflecting the age and gender profile of users). They also feel their courses encouraged them to continue to learn, allowed them to delay career decisions or change direction and help them compete in the labour market. It seems that receiving advice from CDEC successfully encourages users to examine, review and explore their options for the future. It also has the potential to inspire lifelong learning which again demonstrates the value of advice and counselling prior to study.

Satisfaction with experiences and choices

CDEC users, though positive about their choices and experiences, are marginally less satisfied with their salary progression, and marginally less certain about the course they chose, the accuracy of course information, and whether Sussex was the right choice of university, possibly reflecting their greater difficulties in the labour market. Again, this suggests that individuals look to CDEC when they are unsure of their choices or suspect they may have made the wrong choices or have difficulties in the labour market.

On the whole, CDEC users are satisfied with the support they received with 45 per cent reporting they received appropriate help and support from CDEC, which is twice as many as those who feel they had not (22 per cent). Among users, those most likely to be satisfied rather than unsatisfied with the level of support are: older, those with no dependants, and particularly those graduating in 2001 (and therefore still able to access full services).

Suggestions for improvements in service and guidance

Interviewees highlight a number of areas where improvements in service and guidance could be targeted.

- **A dedicated postgraduate careers adviser;** a number of interviewees think it would be helpful to have careers advisers dedicated to postgraduate courses and students. This would be particularly useful in highly competitive areas where individuals would appreciate help in applying for jobs and networking.

“ *I wanted guidance about postgraduate opportunities in the local area. I did not want to move area and wanted job hunting information for local jobs.*

- **More academic involvement** in promoting careers to postgraduates: interviewees comment on how some academics (though not all) do not seem to make the links between the networks they belong to and how these might be useful for the postgraduates they teach and their career development.

“ *I knew that my lecturers were involved in conference, events and start up companies but none of them seemed to think this information would be useful to us (the participants) in our future careers. This seemed a particularly blinkered view as the start-up companies were on campus.*

- **More focus on creating links with local employers;** many postgraduates prefer to stay on in the Brighton area after their studies but are often driven away (or have to commute to London) through lack of local postgraduate level opportunities. Informing local employers of the types of postgraduate degrees offered at Sussex and of the benefits in terms of skills and knowledge that Sussex postgraduates possess, may help

forge links and develop vacancies and work experience or work shadowing opportunities.

“ I picked up ‘insider’ information about the large accountancy firms which I found extremely helpful when weighing up career options.

- **Using postgraduate alumni** to inform current postgraduates; this might be in the form of careers literature or careers presentations. Learning from previous students is seen as a valuable experience. Listening to stories from one or more postgraduates about their career development and tips for entering particular career areas is highly regarded.

The survey data (reported earlier) showing a difference in the career behaviour between the genders -- women talk to people and men look at websites -- also needs to be borne in mind by careers services when developing or targeting resources.

5.2 Where next?

Respondents indicate the changes they expect to make in their lives and careers in the short and medium term (*ie* within the next year, and within three years; see figure 5.1). Each is examined in greater detail and differences in respondent behaviour are described (although differences are generally not statistically significant).

5.2.1 In the short term

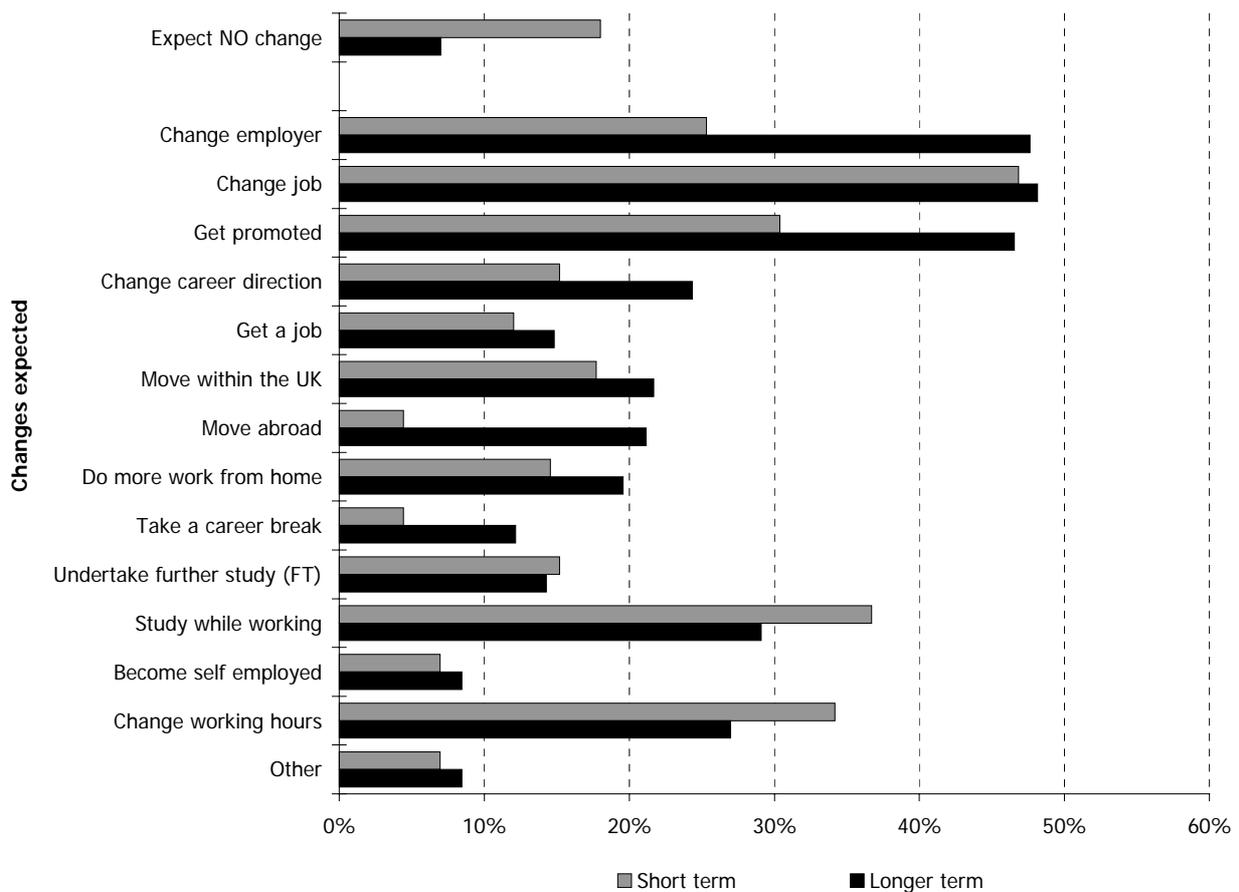
About one in five respondents (18 per cent) are not expecting to make any short term changes. The following groups are the least likely expect change in the short term: male respondents (23 per cent), older postgraduates (22 percent), those with dependants (28 per cent) and those who had studied education (29 per cent) or science (25 per cent). This is also the case for those currently in the same job (33 per cent) as they had before their studies and likely reflects the nature of career anchors as described in chapter 2.

Of those expecting change (four out of five respondents), commitment to lifelong learning is again evident; although most changes are concerned with the labour market. The most common intentions are:

- to change job (47 per cent)
- to study while working (37 per cent)
- to change working hours (34 per cent)
- to get promoted (30 per cent)
- to change employer (25 per cent).

Around 18 per cent intend to move within the UK and one in seven intend to change career direction, undertake further full

Figure 5.1: Expected changes of home respondents in the short term (by Autumn 2004) and the longer term (by Autumn 2006) (per cent)



Source: IES Survey, 2003

time study or work more from home. A small group, 12 per cent, intend to get a job within the year. Few respondents are planning to become self employed (seven per cent), take a career break (four per cent) or move abroad (four per cent).

Short-term intentions after completing postgraduate study can be grouped into four key groups. Each is examined in greater detail and differences in respondent behaviour are described (although differences are generally not statistically significant).

Relocation

“ I found commuting to London from Brighton too hard and realised that I would need to move to London to be successful in finding work in investment banking.

Though relocation is not a very common short term expectation, moving within the UK is a much more common intention than moving abroad, indeed four times more likely. Respondents with no dependants (statistically significant), males and younger postgraduates are marginally more likely than others to intend to move within the UK. Moving internationally is more likely among the 2001 cohort. Those who studied science are the most likely to

be geographically mobile in the short term, reflecting the fact that some science-based sectors such as biotechnology are geographically specific. Those currently working part time are more likely than full time employees to expect to move within the UK, as are those in their first job since graduating.

Working patterns and work life balance

Changes in this area are most likely to be cited by those with dependants, arts and humanities postgraduates, those who studied part time and those currently working part time. This highlights the importance of work flexibility and work-life balance for these groups.

In addition female respondents, education postgraduates and those currently working full time are more likely to expect to take a career break in the short term (though the numbers here are small, so the patterns are indicative only). Older respondents are relatively more likely than younger postgraduates to expect to do more work from home. Male respondents and those who made frequent job changes are more likely to indicate that they expected to change their working hours.

Lifelong learning

“ *I had a great time at Sussex and now realise the need for a PhD if I want to specialise in development or to work in any research role.*

Studying while working is a much more common intention than full time study. This is true for all groups of respondents. However, particularly (and statistically significantly) male but also younger respondents, those without dependants, and those with science backgrounds are more likely than other groups to intend to take further full time study in the short term. Female, older respondents and those with dependants are relatively more likely than their peers to intend to study while working. Postgraduate study patterns appear to influence lifelong learning intentions in that those who studied full time on their postgraduate course are more likely (than part time students) to intend to undertake further full time study, whereas part time postgraduates are more likely to expect once again to study while working.

Reflecting their time in the labour market, the 2001 cohort are more likely than others to intend to study full time in the near future (24 per cent), while the earlier cohort are relatively more likely to intend to study while working. Expecting any form of further learning is more common among those currently working part time. Those in their first job since graduating are relatively more likely than others to expect full time further study, whereas those with more frequent job changes are more likely to intend to study while working.

Employment changes

Male respondents are more likely than females to expect to change career direction and are marginally more likely to expect to become self employed. Female postgraduates however are relatively more likely to look for a job in the short term than male postgraduates. Younger respondents, and correspondingly those with no dependants, are more likely than older respondents with dependants, to anticipate changes in their employment: changing their employer, changing their job, getting promoted and (those with no dependants only) changing career direction. Older respondents expected little change in these respects although were more likely than others to expect to become self employed.

The 1999 cohort, who are experienced and established in the labour market, are more likely to expect employment changes in terms of changing jobs and moving employer. The 2001 cohort however, are relatively more likely to expect to get a job or become self employed.

Education postgraduates are most likely to expect to change jobs, suggesting that vocational courses continue to provide career stepping stones and may facilitate changing jobs more easily. Arts and humanities postgraduates are more likely than other groups to expect to get a job or become self employed. Those who studied part time are the most likely to expect to become self employed. Full time postgraduates are relatively more likely than part timers to expect to change career direction. This difference reflects the likelihood that those undertaking part time study either do so as part of their career or are already on a career ladder.

Full time workers are more likely to expect to change jobs or get promoted than those currently working part time (statistically significant difference). Those who experienced most change in the labour market (*ie* those who had more than two jobs) expect to continue do so: they are the most likely to expect to change employer. Those working at associate professional level are more likely to expect employment changes than those working at professional level.

5.2.2 In the longer term

Looking further ahead to Autumn 2006, only a few respondents (seven per cent) do not expect change in their lives. As in the short term, males, older respondents (statistically significant), and those with dependants are the least likely to expect any change; as are those who graduated in 1999, science and education postgraduates and those working full time.

In the longer term the majority expect changes and the most common changes expected are all employment related:

- to change employer (48 per cent, almost twice as many indicating this change than in the short term)
- to change jobs (48 per cent, a similar proportion to that found when looking at expected short term changes)
- to gain promotion (47 per cent, an increase on short term expectations).

Expecting to study while working (29 per cent), and to change working hours (27 per cent) are also quite common, though less popular in the longer term than short term, indicating that individuals anticipate these changes earlier in their careers rather than later or, with the passing of time, have other commitments that restrict freedom to undertake further formal learning.

Relocation

Expecting to relocate is more common in the longer term, especially internationally. Similar mobility patterns are noticed for the longer term with: those with no dependants (statistically significant), younger respondents and science postgraduates (UK only) all expecting to be most geographically mobile. Again the 2001 cohort are marginally more likely to anticipate overseas moves and this may reflect the growing demand from multinational employers for resourcing overseas operations. Male respondents are still more likely expect to be mobile than females are when looking at moving overseas (statistically significant). However in the longer term female expectations of mobility increase. Females are more likely than males to expect to move within the UK.

Working patterns and work life balance

Taking career breaks and working from home are more likely in the longer term than the short term, possibly reflecting the need to achieve work-life balance and planning ahead as part of taking responsibility for self-managed careers. Patterns in the longer term are somewhat different to the short term, especially in relation to taking career breaks. Young respondents (statistically significant), those currently with no dependants and those working full time are the most likely to expect to take a career break within three years (reflecting their expectations to make lifestyle changes in the longer term). Men are more likely to expect to do more of their work from home as are those who had made frequent job changes. Science postgraduates are the most likely to expect changes in their working hours. So too are those who are still in the job they held before studying. The earlier cohort are also more likely to expect longer term changes in their working patterns.

Lifelong learning

Undertaking formal learning appears to be less likely in the longer term (only expected by 14 per cent of respondents). Male postgraduates and those who studied science are the most likely to expect to continue learning in the longer term. Again, those with dependants are more likely than those without to expect to combine study with work. Interestingly, those currently working full time are also more likely to expect to combine study with work and those currently in their first time job are the least likely to expect to study full time in the longer term (both of these are different from the short term pattern).

Employment changes

Greater employment changes are expected in longer term, though the short term patterns tend to be replicated in the longer term. As before, younger respondents and those with no dependants are the most likely to expect employment changes, although older respondents are relatively more likely to anticipate changing career direction. Male respondents are most likely to anticipate changing their job and employer, whereas women are more likely than men to expect promotion. This suggests postgraduate study enables change within the internal and external labour markets. Again the earlier cohort are marginally more likely to expect more employment related changes than the 2001 graduating cohort (particularly promotion) and those who studied arts and humanities are generally the least likely to expect employment changes with the exception of anticipating self employment. Similarly those with greater experience of job change and those currently working full time are most likely to expect employment change. Those working part time are more likely to anticipate a change of career or to become self employed.

6. Are Postgraduates Happy?

This chapter presents respondents' reflections on their choices for study and their circumstances since completing their courses.

Key messages

- The vast majority of postgraduates had a satisfactory experience at Sussex University, and are confident of their study choices, and job and career choices.
- The benefits outweighed the costs of studying for a postgraduate degree at Sussex and the experience is viewed positively from start to finish -- this study also corroborates research undertaken on undergraduates.
- There may be a need for non-vocational courses to review the information provided to prospective students, in order to ensure choice of course is informed by accurate and realistic data.
- Vocational courses at Sussex have positive outcomes in the labour market — postgraduates from these courses are most satisfied with their careers to date.
- Career and salary progression are issues for some.

6.1 Making choices

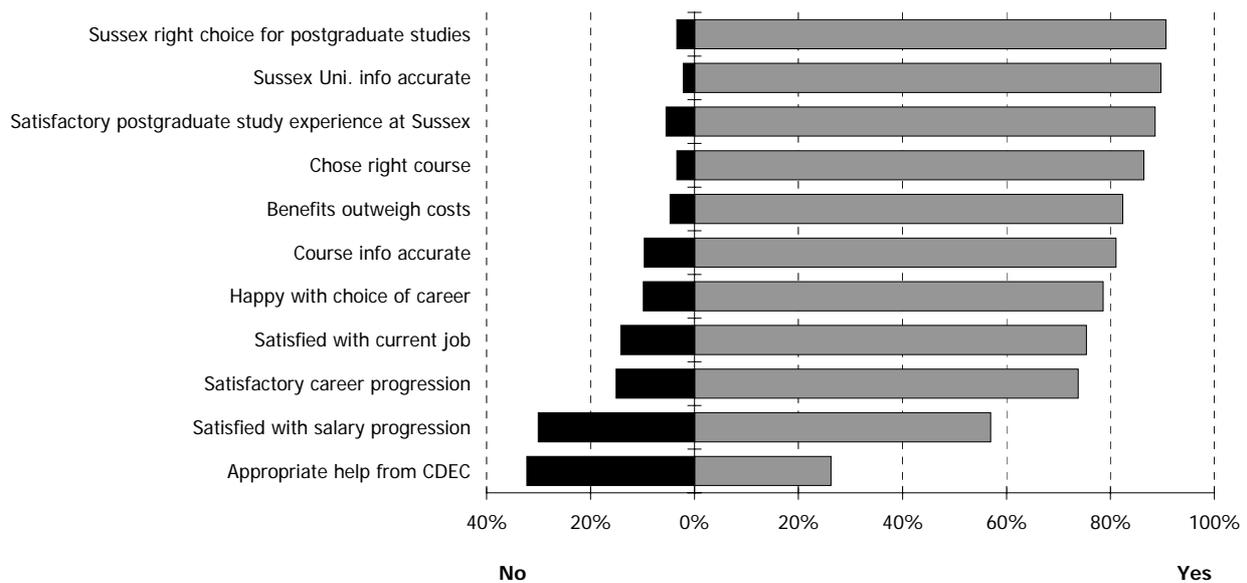
“ *The course was worth it and I would choose the same course again knowing what I now know.* ”

The vast majority (89 per cent) report that they had a satisfactory experience of postgraduate study at Sussex.

This message is further strengthened by our respondents' reflections on their choices, decisions and experiences of postgraduate study (Figure 6.1):

- Ninety-one per cent feel that Sussex University was the right choice for them.
- Eighty-six per cent believe that they chose the right course.
- Ninety per cent consider that the information provided about the University was accurate.

Figure 6.1: Home respondents' confidence in their choices and satisfaction with experiences to date (per cent)



NB: Percentages do not add up to 100 as some respondents were unsure, *ie* neither agreed or disagreed.

Source: IES Survey, 2004

- Eighty-one per cent believe the information provided about the course was accurate (however, a small group of ten per cent have some concerns about the course information).

At least four-fifths of all respondents are confident in their decisions and choices about postgraduate study. Similarly, all interviewees report that they are pleased with their choices and this is reflected by the quotes included throughout this report. Generally there is very little difference in confidence between the groups of respondents to the survey and differences are not statistically significant. However some interesting points arise:

- Those who studied education courses are marginally more confident about their choices and experiences at Sussex; whereas those who followed social science or arts and humanities based courses are less sure of both their course choices and of the information provided about their courses. The results are corroborated with other research focusing on undergraduates (Pollard *et al.*, 2004) where education undergraduates (along with those from health and medicine) are found to be more confident than students from other disciplines about their choice of subject and institution.
- Male respondents are marginally more confident about the accuracy of their course information.
- Older respondents and those with dependants are marginally more likely to feel they made the right choice of course and that their experience at Sussex was satisfactory. These groups tend to be most restricted in their higher education choices as they are less geographically mobile, so Sussex University is

likely to be their local higher education institution. Again these patterns are echoed in undergraduate research (Pollard *et al.*, 2004) where mature respondents are found to be more confident in their choice of institution and subject than their younger peers (but are significantly less confident about their timing of entry).

- The more recent postgraduate cohort (2001) have greater confidence in their choice of Sussex University and in their study experience at the University than the 1999 cohort.
- Those who studied full time are more sure than those who studied part time of the accuracy of their course information.
- Those currently working part time, those with less job turbulence (*ie* in the same job or in their first job since graduating) and those in professional occupations are most sure of their choices and study experiences.

“ *I have no regrets about the course and I would advise anyone else to go for it.*

6.2 Experiences beyond postgraduate study

Generally respondents are happy with their careers to date:

- Approximately three-quarters are satisfied with their current job (75 per cent).
- Over three-quarters are happy with their choice of career (79 per cent), and with their career progression (74 per cent).
- Over half (57 per cent) are satisfied with their salary progression, although a substantial minority (30 per cent) are not satisfied with it.

Looking at groups of respondents:

- Female respondents are more likely than males to be satisfied with their careers to date, particularly with their career progression (statistically significant).
- Younger respondents are also more likely than older respondents to be satisfied with their jobs and career progression, whereas older postgraduates are marginally more confident in their choice of career than their younger peers.
- The earlier cohort are marginally more satisfied with their current job and choice of career than the 2001 cohort, possibly reflecting their longer time in the labour market, enabling them to settle into their careers.
- Arts and humanities postgraduates are the least satisfied with their salary progression (this is unsurprising as these graduates are earning the lowest salaries, on average, at the time of the survey, see chapter 3).

- Again, education postgraduates are most satisfied with their careers to date, particularly their salary progression; although social science postgraduates are most likely to feel happy with their choice of career.
- Lastly, those working full time or working in managerial or professional level occupations are happiest with their careers to date, as are those in the same job or in their first job since graduating.

Overall, taking all things into consideration, 82 per cent of respondents believe that the benefits of their studies outweighed the costs with only five per cent disagreeing as they felt the costs were too high. The groups that are most likely to indicate that the benefits outweighed the costs (reflecting their expectations and experiences in the labour market) are:

- women (84 per cent)
- those under 30 years old on completion (84 per cent)
- those with dependants (87 per cent)
- those from the 2001 cohort (87 per cent)
- education postgraduates (95 per cent)
- those who studied part time (85 per cent)
- those currently in full time work (84 per cent)
- those in the same job as they had before embarking on their postgraduate study (100 per cent).

“ I am very happy in my current job. I get on well with others in the company. I manage in my own way and express my own ideas. This was in contrast to my previous work before the postgraduate course where I had felt I was not reaching my potential.

7. Conclusions and Implications

This study was designed both to inform curriculum development at the University and to build a reference model for current and potential postgraduate students relating to the ‘real’ value of postgraduate study — particularly to individuals’ careers. The study meets these aims and the statistics reported throughout the research, together with the key messages presented at the beginning of each chapter, provide valuable insights into the motivations and experiences of Sussex postgraduates prior to, during and after their studies (see Appendix A for information regarding the responses from overseas postgraduates).

7.1 Conclusions

This final chapter concludes that this study paints a positive picture of postgraduates’ expectations of Sussex having been met, in the following ways:

- having looked for a suitable learning environment that fitted with respondents’ lifestyles and finding this at Sussex University
- developing skills that are important to employers (although some employers still need to be convinced of the value of postgraduate study)
- finding relevant and rewarding work quickly, using postgraduate knowledge, building on work experience, working alongside other postgraduates and being able to earn largely what is expected
- feeling that the course was worthwhile, that it was enjoyable and has had a positive impact on their lives and future careers

Some postgraduates do encounter labour market barriers, particularly locally, largely in terms of the limited availability of jobs and strong competition for them. Also, some postgraduates seem less ‘labour market ready’ than others.

7.2 Implications

Drawing together the findings and implications of the key messages reported in earlier chapters, several interrelated themes emerge which have implications for:

- curriculum development and delivery
- student and alumni support and advisory services
- current and potential postgraduate students
- employers.

7.2.1 Diversity

Diversity is a key theme throughout this report, not only in terms of postgraduate profiles, their motivations, experiences and outcomes but also the range of courses offered and the options to study full or part time. Interestingly, differences are repeatedly found between those who followed vocational studies (particularly education) and others, in terms of outcomes and experiences, and satisfaction with most aspects of their time at Sussex and their subsequent careers.

Accepting that the focus, nature and structure of vocational curriculum varies by definition, lessons might be learned from such models for postgraduate study without compromising the academic focus. Employers too might consider that the value of having greater input to curriculum design and development might provide valuable insights and tangible business benefits.

7.2.2 Advice and support

The demand for timely advice and support, prior to, during and after study is strong and should not be underestimated. This is particularly true for those undertaking non-vocational study (with less visible career paths) and those without family or social networks that can provide informal counselling and guidance. Curriculum advice for prospective students could also be critical to widening access to and diversity within postgraduate study. Consistency regarding the advice and support from academics is also needed in order to avoid further disadvantaging less confident or assertive students.

The experience of postgraduate study could be enhanced, and value could be added, to the current curriculum by giving support and advice in order to build self confidence and encourage personal development. Value may also be added by offering opportunities to update study skills via 'return to study' courses prior to, and during, study. Building informal networks could be instrumental in maintaining levels of motivation and a 'physical' postgraduate area at Sussex would be beneficial. There is also a need for careers guidance during study from those who are able

to broker job opportunities, including faculty — particularly for those undertaking non-vocational courses.

The full range and benefits of CDEC services could be marketed and promoted more widely before and after study to encourage access of its services earlier, and a broader understanding of the potential future opportunities for postgraduates and of how to access the labour market. Understanding the role and services of CDEC could avoid the risk of it becoming a 'last-stop shop' particularly for those who are undertaking non-vocational studies. CDEC services have the potential to empower postgraduates' decision making and act as a catalyst for lifelong learning via advice and support regarding forward pro-active planning. However, there is a danger that many postgraduates may under-utilise such opportunities and only seek CDEC services as remedial action as a result of poor decision making, lack of information prior to study, or lack of preparedness for the labour market.

7.2.3 Marketing and the Sussex 'brand'

The Sussex 'brand' and reputation is strong and attracts postgraduates (from home and overseas) with course content, quality of teaching and support from tutors. Postgraduates are demanding and Sussex University provides them with a high quality learning environment. In addition, the University is viewed as receptive to diverse groups which has positive implications for future curriculum development and marketing of courses to widen access and diversity.

There may be value for the future, when 'badging' or marketing the range of courses, in sign-posting their relationship to likely or typical labour market outcomes -- indicating what postgraduates do. Indeed social science or arts and humanities-based courses may benefit from reviewing the information provided to prospective students (home and overseas) to ensure choice of courses is informed by realistic and unambiguous data, relating to course content and potential labour market outcomes.

7.2.4 Soft and hard outcomes

The demand for postgraduate study continues to grow despite the decline in financial support from employers and the increasing costs incurred by those who are self funding. The benefits are seen to outweigh the costs both in terms of time and money and are considered worthwhile and an overall good investment. This investment is also viewed as a passport to career mobility and progression. Accepting that motivation to study at a postgraduate level is generally not driven by a reaction to undergraduate labour market conditions (*eg* to move from the undergraduate to the postgraduate labour market) or salary progression, it is evident

that many postgraduates begin to seek to maximise a return on their investment in postgraduate study as time progresses.

As well as access to higher level or quality work, the financial gains of postgraduate study are likely to appear in the longer term (particularly for those from non-vocational courses) rather than in the short term. These longer term benefits need to be communicated and understood in order to avoid postgraduates forming unrealistic expectations before and during study. Advice may also be beneficial in terms of managing salary expectations as salary progression is likely to be a longer term benefit.

Employers may also need to consider the value of developing both financial and non-financial strategies that will help to engage and retain postgraduates in the longer term. Financial reward plays a part but the productivity of postgraduates, who place learning and development high on their personal agendas, can also be maximised through non-financial reward. Many postgraduates appreciate that learning is a continuous process that does not stop when their postgraduate course does.

7.2.5 Skills and employability

There is a demand for realistic careers advice or counselling in relation to course and labour market outcomes, particularly for those whose choice of study is non-vocational. Postgraduates also need information regarding the segmentation of the postgraduate labour market and how the curriculum fits with employer demand for skills.

Developing and promoting employability skills as an integral part of the curriculum rather than an optional extra might be of value both to students and employers. Employers need to understand the added value of postgraduate study beyond the piece of paper that indicates a qualification in a certain subject.

Postgraduates support the notion of including modules aimed at enhancing employability skills and confidence within the labour market via the curriculum. Understandably the demand is weaker from those who are less 'employment-centric' (typically those studying arts and humanities courses) or those studying in vocational fields. These individuals are typically either not concerned with labour market outcomes before or after their studies or are confident that their needs are already being met. However, they too might benefit from being encouraged to consider the longer term via proactive forward planning.

There may be a need to further develop softer skills across the curriculum as, although such skills are reported as having improved, the greatest shortfall cited remains interpersonal and team working skills. In addition, soft skill development during postgraduate study may need to be promoted to employers. Such

skills align with what employers seek at recruitment, known as emotional intelligence.

7.2.6 Careers and labour market outcomes

Postgraduate study is viewed as a passport both to internal and external labour market opportunities. A commitment to lifelong learning and self managed careers is apparent with:

- personal interest as a key motivator to undertaking and completing postgraduate study;
- a continued encouragement to learn as an outcome of study;
- postgraduates in posts that offer continual skill development;
- intentions to undertake further full time study or particularly to study for additional qualifications while working.

Working during term time has become an integral part of postgraduate study as many want to continue to work and maintain their careers while studying. This has implications for future curriculum design, particularly in relation to options to study part time.

In addition to achieving qualifications, studies are especially valuable in enhancing self esteem and general confidence which are vital when competing in the labour market (viewed as being tight for some). Postgraduates from vocational courses — by definition — use postgraduate study as a career stepping stone but others would benefit from improved sign-posting regarding career options.

As individuals settle into their careers their work life balance priorities change and they develop other career anchors (*ie.* other actual values in making careers choices). As postgraduates' expectations and plans change, career mobility may become more difficult in the longer term. This demonstrates again the value of providing timely postgraduate advice that looks at the longer term, including those following vocational careers.

7.2.7 The future

Most changes which postgraduates expect five to seven years from their postgraduate studies are linked to labour market outcomes. Individuals expect to be more mobile to further their careers. Postgraduates also develop plans that allow for future career breaks in line with taking responsibility for self managed careers, juggling other priorities in order to achieve work life balance. Also, a commitment to lifelong learning is still relevant, although it relates less to formal full time study and more to learning at, and through, work. Employers would be wise to maximise this need by offering career development opportunities and support as part of their recruitment and retention strategies.

Appendix A: The Experiences of Overseas Students

Key messages

- Overseas students tend to have an 'employment-centric' view of skill development — career development and advantage in the labour market are the key drivers to undertaking postgraduate study.
- Overseas students are likely to be part of an employer graduate scheme – and academic qualifications are more of an advantage than work experience in terms of labour market outcomes.
- Lifelong learning via formal accreditation is key to career development for overseas students -- typically funded via scholarships and family support.
- There may be value in promoting the diversity of courses on offer to overseas students -- as many choose to pursue the same discipline (typically studying social sciences at Sussex) rather than use postgraduate study as a route to 'change'.
- The content of information about the University provided for overseas students and the process for accessing may benefit from being reviewed in order to ensure it is fit for purpose and unambiguous.
- Entry to postgraduate study is rare for overseas students who have only studied at degree level previously: most already have a higher degree. Overseas students typically expect to undertake further full time study.
- The Sussex 'brand' and reputation is strong in attracting and delivering to overseas students in terms of course content, quality of teaching and support from tutors.
- Overseas students might benefit from advice and counselling regarding their options as they are likely to be outside the informal networks that many home students value and use before and during study. However, overseas students are generally more confident than home students and more active in their career planning.

There are 92 usable responses from students who are non UK domiciled, 35 of whom were classed as European Union students, and 57 are classed as overseas students. Unfortunately these responses are too few in number in total to conduct analysis at a sub-group level (see chapter 1 and Appendix C) but provide valuable data and therefore the responses have been combined and described for interest in this appendix. While in many respects this group are similar to home students, it is useful to

detail some of the key differences. Throughout this appendix we refer to EU and overseas students together as overseas students.

Background

Overseas students tend to be slightly younger than home students, with only just over a quarter (27 per cent) aged 30 or older when they finished their postgraduate course, compared to over half (51 per cent) of home students. Overseas students are much more likely than home students to describe themselves as members of black and minority ethnic groups, especially Asian or Chinese. They are also less likely than the home respondents to have dependants or to have a disability.

Postgraduate study decisions

Very few overseas students undertook their postgraduate studies on a part time basis: the vast majority (97 per cent) were full time students. A large proportion studied social sciences courses (64 per cent), and worked towards MA qualifications (84 per cent) and only very few studied education. This pattern is mirrored when looking at overseas students' routes to postgraduate study. They typically 'specialise', pursuing their disciplines throughout their studies. Again, the majority had studied social science courses previously, and all had studied full time (this also reflects their relatively younger age). Interestingly, they, like home students, exhibit a commitment to lifelong learning. A larger proportion of overseas students than home students had already studied beyond first degree level, and had a higher degree before embarking on their postgraduate course at Sussex (21 per cent compared with nine per cent of home students). Many are studying for a second Masters degree.

Career intention is the key factor in motivating overseas students to take up postgraduate studies. For this group, enhancing general career prospects and prospects in a particular field or job are very important reasons for studying at postgraduate level, as is the opportunity of gaining formal entry requirements for a specific career or profession. Overseas students are more likely to consider financial reasons and labour market disadvantage as factors in their decisions than home students are.

For overseas students, scholarships and family support are particularly important in funding postgraduate study:

- Just over two-fifths (42 per cent) of respondents had their fees paid by a scholarship.
- Over one-third (34 per cent) received financial support from their family for fees.

Working to help with the costs of study is less common among overseas students (although as a student they have the right to work up to 20 hours per week). This may be a cultural difference or may reflect the fact that those students who choose to study abroad are generally high achievers and therefore avoid working while studying. Taking on debt is also less common. Instead this group rely more heavily on scholarships, family and savings.

Overseas students place relatively greater importance on virtually all of the given factors, when making their choice about their course and about Sussex University, understandably to some extent given the cost, disruption and big commitment to relocate to undertake study. The exceptions are obvious, in that opportunity to study near home, or to study part time are not considered important, nor is receptivity to mature students, which reflects their younger profile. As with home students, the three most important factors are:

- course content
- quality of teaching
- support from tutors.

Sussex University seems to have lived up to its 'brand' and overseas students' expectations, as this group are satisfied with all the measured aspects of their experience, and generally have higher satisfaction scores than home students. Where relatively lower (though still satisfactory) scores are achieved, these reflect the group's priorities and funding strategies. For example, overseas students are not quite as highly satisfied as home students with: opportunities to study near home and study part time or with their work experience and prospect of term time employment.

Outcomes from postgraduate study

The pattern of activities undertaken while studying in order to further careers is similar for both home and overseas students. However, overseas students are more likely to undertake career related activities than home students, indeed 87 per cent reported at least one activity. Also overseas students are marginally more likely to have gathered information, looked at employer websites, applied for postgraduate jobs and visited CDEC while studying.

Overseas students are more positive than home students about the skill development as an outcome of postgraduate study. The skills which are scored 'most improved' by overseas students are somewhat more employer-centric than those chosen by home students:

- analytical thinking
- communication

- planning and organising
- interpersonal skills.

Looking at the relevance of these skills to respondents' current activity, there is little difference between home and overseas students. However, overseas students are more likely to recognise the importance to their current activity of analytical thinking, leadership, business awareness and number skills than home students are.

Overseas students are also much more likely than home students are to see the wider value-added aspects of their postgraduate qualification, particularly in relation to social and employment aspects such as:

- helping with roles outside work
- opening up a new social scene
- providing something to fall back on
- providing access to well paid jobs
- helping to compete in the labour market, and rewarded by employers.

However, overseas students are less likely to feel that their course allowed them to change career, or get them out of a rut. This probably reflects the fact that they have spent less time in the labour market. Overseas students undertake postgraduate study as a stepping stone and part of their career development.

As with home students, the vast majority of overseas students find relevant work by the time they complete their courses or immediately after, either with the same employer or with a new one (57 per cent). However, overseas students may take a little longer to settle into their careers than home students, with one in three (32 per cent) needing a year or more to find relevant work.

Labour market experiences

At the time of the survey, approximately 77 per cent of overseas students are in employment. Almost two-fifths (39 per cent) of these are in their first job since completing their postgraduate studies, a further third (34 per cent) are in their second job, but few had had more than two jobs since graduating. This indicates that overseas students experience less job changeability than home students but their younger age profile must be remembered, suggesting less time spent in the labour market.

Most overseas students (89 per cent) are working full time. A similar proportion of overseas students to home students are working at managerial or professional level, but a greater proportion than home students are working below associate

professional and technical level. Interestingly, the most common jobs for home students (*eg* teaching and research professionals, health and social welfare associate) are much less prevalent among overseas students, where working as public service professionals, or other business and public service associates are relatively more common.

Looking at the characteristics of jobs held by overseas students after their studies, typically their jobs are more likely than home students to:

- be part of an employer graduate scheme
- involve further professional level study
- require a postgraduate qualification for entry
- be undertaken by individuals with postgraduate qualifications.

Work experience is not as important in securing work for overseas students as it is for home students.

In terms of the labour market barriers they have encountered, overseas students are more likely to note that the job market is highly competitive, and that there are too few jobs nationally. A higher proportion also report that they had to persuade employers of the value of their postgraduate qualification. However, we

Table A.1: Agreement with statements about current job (per cent)

	Home	Overseas
Qualification essential to get job	42	56
My colleagues value my qualification	69	82
Other postgraduates in workplace	83	84
Manager encourages use of postgraduate skills	57	71
Qualification useful to get job	69	81
Previous work experience was important in getting job	83	68
Recruited to a general graduate scheme	7	31
Job fits closely with postgraduate subject	56	59
Job uses postgraduate knowledge	74	75
Job involves managing other people	59	61
Job involves study for another professional qualification	28	49
My job offers continual skill development	79	83
Job offers possibility of promotion	73	66
Job is prestigious	60	84
The previous job holder was a postgraduate	58	55
Type of job is usually held by postgraduates	53	63
Career plans are on track	75	76
This job is part of my career plan	77	84

Source: IES Survey, 2003

Table A.2: Experience of labour market barriers (per cent)

	Home	Overseas
Very competitive labour market	68	81
Too few appropriate jobs nationally	45	53
Too few appropriate jobs locally	60	61
Lack of geographical mobility holds career back	31	26
Difficult balancing home/work life	64	53
Family commitments restrict my career choices	39	26
Re-entering labour market after study was daunting	25	16
Experienced racial discrimination	3	9
Had to persuade employers of the value of qualification	23	39
Experienced sex discrimination	8	10
Employers have little understanding of pg skills and knowledge	35	36
Experienced discrimination due to sexual orientation	1	1
Needed PG qualification to move on	46	49
Experienced age discrimination	17	13
Salary expectations have not been met	36	37
Experienced discrimination because of disability	1	1
Lack of self confidence holds back career	29	18

Source: IES Survey, 2003

cannot be certain whether respondents are reporting on the UK job market, and therefore experiencing relative disadvantage compared with home postgraduates, or talking about the job market in their own countries. Relatively fewer overseas graduates are restricted in their careers by work-life balance issues, which reflects both the fact that few respondents have dependants and that on average overseas students are younger than home students. They are also less likely to be held back by a lack of self confidence.

Expected changes

Looking ahead, a similar proportion of overseas students and home students expect to make changes in the near future (*ie* by Autumn 2004), with about one in six not expecting to make any short term changes. However the expected pattern of changes differed between home and overseas postgraduates, with overseas students more likely to:

- expect promotion (36 per cent of overseas students compared with 26 per cent of home students)
- expect to change employer (32 compared with 21 per cent)
- (as would be expected) move abroad (20 compared with four per cent).

Home students however are relatively more likely than overseas students to change aspects relating to work-life balance, such as:

- change their working hours
- do more of their job from home.

Looking further into their careers (*ie* up to Autumn 2006), home students' expectations for promotion and changing employers match that of overseas students. However, home students are still much more likely to expect to change their working patterns than overseas students. Although the differences in the age profiles must be remembered, it is interesting to note, the two groups' study intentions differ in the medium term (though remain largely the same in the short term). Three years on:

- more overseas students expect to undertake further full time study than home students (30 per cent compared with 13 per cent)
- relatively more home students anticipate studying for additional qualifications while working than overseas students (27 and 23 per cent respectively).

This suggests that the career development routes between home and overseas postgraduates are different and further full time study rather than work experience continues to provide overseas students with stepping stones to career progression.

Confidence in and satisfaction with choices

Overseas students tend to be marginally more confident in their choices about postgraduate study than home students, and marginally more satisfied with their postgraduate experience and labour market experience. Almost all felt that:

- Sussex University was the right choice for their postgraduate studies (92 per cent)
- they chose the right course (91 per cent)
- their postgraduate study at Sussex was satisfactory (93 per cent).

Interestingly, this group is also more likely to be satisfied with their current job than home students (83 compared with 75 per cent), and to consider that the benefits to postgraduate outweigh the costs (88 compared to 82 per cent). It must be remembered this group has less of a 'personal' financial investment in their studies than the home students in depending heavily on scholarships and family for funding.

Although largely satisfied with the information provided to them prior to study, there is a small group of overseas respondents that are unsure about or dissatisfied with the accuracy of information

on their course and about Sussex. This may suggest a need to review the content of information provided for overseas students and the process for accessing it to ensure it is fit for purpose and unambiguous.

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Appendix C: Further details on methodology and response

This study involved:

- a postal survey of a sample of 1,800 postgraduates who had followed taught postgraduate courses at Sussex University between 1999 and 2002
- telephone interviews with a subset of 15 survey respondents to complement the survey data.

Postal survey

Questionnaire

A postal survey was designed to track the destinations of a range of postgraduates. The design of the questionnaire was influenced and informed by the literature and other graduate surveys conducted by IES. A key element of the design was to provide quantitative data on career and labour market experiences.

The eight page questionnaire (see Appendix D) was piloted prior to launch and mainly consisted of closed structured questions with standard formats for ease of completion. Areas covered in the questionnaire included:

- postgraduates' background
- details of postgraduate study (including funding)
- earlier education (*ie* route into postgraduate study)
- factors influencing decisions to study at postgraduate level and at Sussex University
- activities prior to and immediately after postgraduate study and current activity
- experiences of the labour market as a postgraduate
- future plans
- perceived value of postgraduate study and qualification.

Survey sample

A sampling frame was designed to draw postgraduate students from four cohorts - those who graduated from their postgraduate course at Sussex University:

- in 1999 — up to four years after graduation
- in 2000 — up to three years after graduation
- in 2001 — up to two years after graduation
- in 2002 — up to one year after graduation.

Pre-1999 cohorts were not sampled as contact details become less reliable over time.

To be included in the sample were: postgraduates from taught courses (including PGCE and other professional qualifications) who had studied either full or part time and had been UK domiciled, had been EU domiciled or from overseas at the time of applying for their course. The sample was drawn from the University's Alumni database. The achieved sample was 1,801 (Table C.1)

Response

The questionnaire was mailed in October 2003 by CDEC to the selected sample of approximately 1,800 Sussex postgraduates who completed taught courses between 1999 and 2002.

After two reminders, the survey was closed in January 2004 and a total of 471 completed questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 26 per cent. However, closer examination of the responses from the four cohorts (1999-2002) revealed the vast majority of respondents completed their courses in 1999 (42 per cent) and 2001 (35 per cent). Further analysis revealed that the sample targeted for 2000 and 2002 cohorts were not reliable and therefore responses for these two cohorts were subsequently excluded from any further analysis.

The main body of the report focuses on the choices, experiences

Table C.1: Achieved sample drawn from Sussex University Alumni database

Year of graduation	UK	Overseas	All
1999	427	289	716
2000	6	27	33
2001	425	384	809
2002	195	48	243
<i>All</i>	<i>1,053</i>	<i>748</i>	<i>1,801</i>

Source: Sussex University Alumni Database 2003

and outcomes of home students who graduated either in 1999, or 2001 (to allow for robust analysis). This gives a total sample size of 242 (131 from 1999; and 111 from 2001). The response rates for these two cohorts are 31 and 26 per cent respectively.

In addition 92 responses were received from postgraduates from outside of the UK. These were compared with those of home students and these findings are presented for interest in Appendix A.

Analysis

The data gathered from the questionnaire survey was compiled into an SPSS dataset. Differences and similarities in the experiences of the two key cohorts were explored and reported. Those differences found to be statistically significant *ie* beyond mere chance, are indicated.

Telephone interviews

A key element of the study concerned gathering qualitative data via telephone interviews to compliment the survey data. The interviews provide a rich picture of the career routes of Sussex University postgraduate alumni. A representative sub-sample was selected from the survey respondents and those who were willing to participate further were invited to take part in a short (45 minutes) telephone interview. A total of 15 semi-structured interviews took place in early 2004. The interview discussions explored:

- expectations for the postgraduate course and studying at Sussex University
- expectations for the use of the postgraduate qualification and actions taken to improve employability
- hard and soft outcomes from the postgraduate 'experience'
- aspects that helped and/or hindered their careers
- and whether postgraduate study was 'worth it'.

The information gathered from the interviews was transcribed into a proforma and a content analysis was used to draw out underlying themes.

Appendix D: Survey Questionnaire

Confidential to the Institute for Employment Studies

Please answer the following questions as fully as you are able by ticking the boxes or writing in the spaces provided. Please return the completed questionnaire in the reply-paid envelope provided. If you have any queries, please contact:
Sarah Perryman at IES: telephone 01273 873642, email sarah.perryman@employment-studies.co.uk, or
Bridget Millmore at CDEC (formerly CDU): telephone 01273 678429 email b.m.millmore@sussex.ac.uk.
Thank you for your co-operation.

Note: If you have completed more than one postgraduate course at Sussex, please answer in respect of the most recent course.

A. Your postgraduate course at Sussex University

We are interested in your journey through education, your postgraduate course at Sussex, your time at Sussex, and what you have done since.

- In which year did you complete your postgraduate course? (Please tick one box)
 1999 1 2000 2 2001 3 2002 4
- What was the postgraduate course you did at Sussex? (Please write in the name of the course and qualification obtained)
 (eg PGCE, MA English Lit)
- Which of the following best describes how your postgraduate study was structured? (Please tick one box)
 Full-time 1 Part-time 2
- Before your postgraduate course at Sussex, had anyone else in your family studied a higher education course?
 Yes 1 No 2 Don't know 3
 If **Yes**, what relation are they to you (please specify)

B. Your earlier education

We are interested in your education prior to your postgraduate course at Sussex University.

- What was the highest qualification you held before your recent postgraduate course at Sussex? Where did you study? When did you complete it? (Please indicate below)
 Name of course and subject: (eg BA English)
 Name of institution: (eg University of Bath)
 Year completed:
- Which of the following best describes how your previous study was structured? (Please tick one box)
 Full-time 1 Part-time 2 Distance learning 3
- If your highest qualification was a degree or diploma, what class of degree/diploma did you obtain? (Please tick one box)
 First 1 Upper second 3 Lower second 3
 Third/Pass 2 Distinction 2 Did not graduate 2
 Other (please specify) 2

C. Postgraduate study at Sussex University

We are interested in the reasons for your choice of postgraduate course and Sussex University, and whether the experience met your expectations.

8. How important were the following factors in your choice? How satisfied were you with your experiences? (Please rate 'importance' by circling one number on each row on the left scale, and 'satisfaction' by circling one number on each row on the right scale)

	Importance of factors					Satisfaction with experience					
	Unimportant		Essential			Dissatisfied			Satisfied		N/A
Subject/course content	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Overall image of Sussex University	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Quality of teaching	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Quality of research	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Academic support facilities (eg library/IT)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Social life in and around Brighton	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Social life/facilities on campus	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Opportunity to study abroad	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Childcare facilities on campus	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Transport links to campus	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Opportunity to study near home	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Work experience/placement	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Prospects for term-time employment	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Opportunity to study part-time	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Support from tutors/lecturers	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Receptive to mature students	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Receptive to black and minority ethnic students	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Receptive to students with disabilities	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Safety and security on campus	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Family friendliness	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6

9. How important were the following in deciding to undertake your postgraduate course at Sussex? (Please circle one number in each row)

	Not at all important	1	2	3	4	Very important
To gain formal entry requirement for a specific career/profession	1	2	3	4	5	
To enhance my career prospects in a particular field or job	1	2	3	4	5	
To enhance my career prospects in general	1	2	3	4	5	
To follow a personal interest	1	2	3	4	5	
Lack of employment opportunities after graduating	1	2	3	4	5	
To postpone/delay a career choice	1	2	3	4	5	
To change my career direction	1	2	3	4	5	
To overcome my disadvantage in the labour market	1	2	3	4	5	
The financial returns to a postgraduate qualification	1	2	3	4	5	
Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5	

10. During your postgraduate course at Sussex did you do any of the following things to help you get a job or further your future career on completion? (Please tick all that apply)

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Visited the Career Development & Employment Centre (CDEC) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Took a work experience placement | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Looked at employer websites about job/careers | <input type="checkbox"/> | Started gathering information about potential careers/employers/jobs | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Started applying for postgraduate level jobs | <input type="checkbox"/> | Went to career presentations/events on campus or nearby | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Used CDEC website 'remotely' | <input type="checkbox"/> | Talked to family/friends about my career choices/opportunities | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Discussed my future career with my existing employer (if applicable) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify)..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |

D. Your career before and after postgraduate study at Sussex University

We are interested in tracking how your work has changed since you completed your postgraduate course at Sussex.

11. What were you doing prior to starting at Sussex as a postgraduate student? What have you been doing since? (Please circle one number in each row to indicate your main activity)

	*Temp employment	**Fixed-term employment	Longer-term/permanent employment	Self-employed	Studying	Timeout/career break	Other (please specify)	N/A
Before...								
2 yrs before	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1 yr before	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
After...								
1 yr after	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2 yrs after	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
3 yrs after	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
4 yrs after	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

* eg casual, temping, with a contract renewed week-to-week or similarly short-term

** eg a contract with a specified end date, for two years or less

12. If you were/are working, what was/is your job title? (Please write in, eg Social Worker)

Immediately **before** your postgraduate course

Immediately **after** your postgraduate course

In your **current** job

13. At what point did you find postgraduate work/career relevant to your studies? (Please tick one box)

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Before the course | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | During the course | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |
| Immediately after graduating | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | Within six months | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |
| Six to eleven months | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | One year to 18 months | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |
| More than 18 months | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | Stayed with same employer in same role/job | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |
| Stayed with same employer in different role/job | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | Still looking | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 |
| Haven't been looking | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | | |

14. Do you currently work full- or part-time? (Please tick one box)

Full-time ²

Part-time ²

Not applicable ²

If part-time, how many hours per week do you work, on average? hours

15. We are interested in the impact of postgraduate qualifications on earnings. What was/is your annual gross salary or profit before tax (excluding bonuses and other benefits)? (Please enter to the nearest £1000, or enter N/A if not applicable)

Immediately **before** your postgraduate course £

Immediately **after** your postgraduate course £

Currently £.....

16. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your experience of the postgraduate labour market: (Please circle one number on each row to show your disagreement or agreement)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
It is a very competitive labour market	1	2	3	4	5
There are too few jobs nationally which are appropriate for my level of skill/qualification	1	2	3	4	5
There are too few jobs locally which are appropriate for my level of skill/qualification	1	2	3	4	5
My lack of geographical mobility holds me back in my career...	1	2	3	4	5
Balancing work and life is difficult	1	2	3	4	5
My family commitments do not restrict my career choices	1	2	3	4	5
Re-entering the labour market after the postgraduate course was daunting (if applicable).....	1	2	3	4	5
I have experienced racial discrimination.....	1	2	3	4	5
I have had to persuade employers of the value of my postgraduate qualification	1	2	3	4	5
I have experienced sex discrimination	1	2	3	4	5
Employers appear to have little understanding of postgraduate skills and knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
I have experienced discrimination because of my sexual orientation	1	2	3	4	5
At that point in my career I needed a postgraduate qualification to move on in my career	1	2	3	4	5
I have experienced age discrimination.....	1	2	3	4	5
My salary expectations have been met	1	2	3	4	5
I have experienced discrimination because of a disability	1	2	3	4	5
My lack of self-confidence holds me back in my career.....	1	2	3	4	5

17. How many jobs have you had since gaining your postgraduate qualification? (Please write in)

.....Job(s)

I am doing the same job I had before I finished the course

18. If you are currently working either as an employee or self-employed please complete this question. If not, please go to **section E**. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your current job: *(Please tick one box in each row)*

	Yes	No	Don't know/ not applicable
A postgraduate qualification was essential for entry to my job	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
My colleagues do not value my postgraduate qualification	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
There are other postgraduates in this workplace	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
My manager encourages me to use my postgraduate skills	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
A postgraduate qualification was useful for entry to my job	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Previous work experience was important in getting this job	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
I was recruited to a general graduate entry/scheme	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
My job fits closely with my postgraduate subject	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
My job uses my postgraduate knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
My job involves managing other people	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
My job involves study/training that will lead to another professional or recognised qualification	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
My job does not offer continual skill development	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
My job offers the possibility of promotion	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
My job is well respected/regarded (<i>ie</i> prestigious)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
The previous job holder was not a postgraduate	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
This type of job is usually held by postgraduates	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
My career plans are on track	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
This job is not part of my career plan	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2

E. Future plans

19. Which of the following changes do you expect to make within the next year (before Autumn 2004), and in the next three years (before Autumn 2006)? *(Please tick all that apply for each column)*

	Short-term (Autumn 04)	Longer-term (Autumn 06)
Change employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change job role/responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get promoted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change career direction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get a job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Move within the UK	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Move abroad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Begin/do more of my job from home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take a career break	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Undertake further full-time study	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Study for additional qualifications whilst working	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Become self-employed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change working hours/pattern	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other <i>(please specify)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

My postgraduate course at Sussex...

	Yes	No	Don't know/ not applicable
...increased my self-confidence	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...made me more attractive to employers	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...did nothing for my long-term career prospects	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...equipped me with skills and qualities that employers value	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...encouraged me to continue to learn	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...opened up a new social scene for me	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...provided access to well paid jobs	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...was a waste of money	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...provided me with something I can always fall back on	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...means I will be less likely to suffer unemployment	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...will enhance my salary in years to come	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...was fun to do	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...was intellectually stimulating	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...has enriched my personal development	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...has boosted my salary	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...was a waste of time	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...opened the door to a different occupation	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
... helped me get promoted	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
... helped me compete in the labour market	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...meant I didn't have to start a career/job straight away	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
... enabled me to change career direction	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...got me out of a rut	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...is rewarded by employers	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
...was a good investment, all things considered	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2

24. When you started your postgraduate course at Sussex, how much did you **expect** you would be earning by now, excluding bonuses and other benefits. *(Please enter to nearest £1000)*

£

25. Looking back and taking everything into consideration, do you feel that: *(Please circle the most appropriate score for each statement)*

	Definitely not	No, with some reservations	Uncertain	Yes, with some reservations	Yes, definitely
Sussex was the right choice for your postgraduate studies	1	2	3	4	5
You chose the right course	1	2	3	4	5
Your experience of postgraduate study at Sussex was satisfactory	1	2	3	4	5
The course information was accurate	1	2	3	4	5
The information about Sussex University was accurate	1	2	3	4	5
You received appropriate help and support from the Career Development & Employment Centre (CDEC)	1	2	3	4	5
You are satisfied with your current job (if applicable).....	1	2	3	4	5
You are happy with your choice of career	1	2	3	4	5
Your career progression is satisfactory so far	1	2	3	4	5
You are satisfied with your salary progression to date.....	1	2	3	4	5
Overall, the benefits outweigh the costs	1	2	3	4	5

I. About you

We would like to know something about you, in order to understand your choices and views.

26. Are you: Male ² Female ²
27. What was your age last birthday: years
28. What is your ethnic group: *(These are the categories devised for the UK National Census, please tick one box)*
- | | | | | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| White | <input type="checkbox"/> ² | Mixed | <input type="checkbox"/> ² | Asian or Asian British | <input type="checkbox"/> ² |
| Black or Black British | <input type="checkbox"/> ² | Chinese | <input type="checkbox"/> ² | Other <i>(please specify)</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> ² |
-
29. Do you consider yourself to have a disability? Yes ² No ²
30. During the time you were a postgraduate student at Sussex, did you have any dependants that you had care responsibilities for? *(Please tick all that apply)*
- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| No | <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes, child(ren) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Yes, parent(s)/other family member(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes, other <i>(please specify)</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
31. When you began your postgraduate course at Sussex, were you classed as: *(please tick one box)*
- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| A 'home' <i>(ie UK domiciled)</i> student | <input type="checkbox"/> ² | A European Union (EU) student | <input type="checkbox"/> ² |
| A non-EU/overseas student | <input type="checkbox"/> ² | Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> ² |
32. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience at Sussex, and your career since? If you have any comments or information you would like to add, please use the space below or attach a separate sheet.
-
-
-

Following-up: We would like to follow-up a number of respondents to discuss the issues emerging from the study. We would also like to contact you again, to see how you are getting on in your career. If you are willing to help us please print your name and contact details below.

Prize draw: This questionnaire is anonymous but we will need your name and contact details to include you in the prize draw. Be assured that your details will not be passed on to any marketing company or fundraisers.

- | | Yes | No |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| May we contact you again for further research? | <input type="checkbox"/> ² | <input type="checkbox"/> ² |
| Would you like to be entered for the prize draw? | <input type="checkbox"/> ² | <input type="checkbox"/> ² |

Name:

Home address:

Telephone number (home/work/mobile):

Email address:

Sussex Graduate Network

Would you be interested in helping Sussex students? The Sussex Graduate Network is a database of graduates and postgraduates who have offered to help current Sussex students research as particular career. To find out more and join go to www.sussex.ac.uk/cdec/emp_sgn.html

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

Please return this questionnaire to: Employment Research, PO Box 2106, Hove, BN3 5ZB, in the reply paid envelope provided.