

Briefing Paper No.13: Scholarship recipient destination outcomes and attitudes towards postgraduate study



Postgraduate Experience Project

Understanding Today to Create Tomorrow

The Postgraduate Experience Project (PEP) was one of 20 projects funded through HEFCE’s £25m Phase 1 Postgraduate Support Scheme which was designed to test ways of supporting progression into taught postgraduate education in England. A description of PEP can be found in Briefing Paper 1. Briefing Paper 13 reports the destination outcomes and attitudes towards the value of postgraduate study of PEP’s scholarship recipients (see Briefing Paper 2 for an overview).

Introduction

PEP’s full-time scholarship recipients who started and completed their STEM masters course in the academic year 2014/15, were asked to complete a short survey in February 2016 which included questions about their current employment status, whether their employer saw their postgraduate qualification as a factor in obtaining employment, and their attitude towards the value of postgraduate study. The number of surveys completed was 118 (60% of the possible sample).

Employment status

Of the respondents, 50.0% stated that they were in *full-time in paid employment*, 18.6% in *part-time employment*, 10.2% were *unemployed*, 9.3% cited *‘other’ status*, 7.6% were *starting a PhD*, 1.7% were *looking after the home/family*, 1.7% were *due to start work* and 0.7% were *undertaking an internship*. Of those who were engaged in full and part-time employment, 63.1% were *working in the subject area of their master’s degree*, but for 36.9% this was not the case.

Qualification requirement for employment

Of the respondents who were working or undertaking a PhD, 9.7% stated that a *masters qualification was a requirement* (mainly for those undertaking a PhD), 55.9% felt that *while it was not a formal requirement it had given them an advantage*, 25.8% stated that the *qualification was not required* and 8.6% stated that *it did not help at all*. Of the 55.9% who felt that it had given them an advantage, 66.1% were in full-time employment, 22.0% in part-time and 22.1% were undertaking a PhD. Of those who stated that it was a requirement or it had given them an advantage (65.6%), when asked if they knew which part of their postgraduate qualification had been the most important to their employer, 42.6% cited the *level of qualification*, 36.1% the *subject studied* and 9.8% stated *no one thing had been important*.

Location of employment

The location of the respondents’ place of work was 38.1% *near my previous institution and place of residence*, 38.1% *near just my place of residence*, 17.9% *elsewhere in the UK*, 3.6% *near my previous institution* and 2.4% *overseas*.

Motivations for undertaking their employment

Respondents were asked about their motivations for undertaking their current employment. The top 3 most cited motivations from the 9 options available are listed in Table 1. Fitting into their career plan, the location, gaining experience and paying off debts were key factors.

Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3
It fitted into my career plan	It was an opportunity to progress in the organisation	It was the right location
Accepted it in order to pay off debts	It fitted into my career plan	The job was well paid
To gain and broaden my experience to get the job I wanted	It was the right location	Accepted it in order to pay off debts

Table 1 Motivations for undertaking my current employment

The top four primary sources used in obtaining their employment were a *recruitment agency/website* (25.8%), the *employer’s own website* (18.3%), they had *already worked there* (including an internship/placement) (17.2%) then *personal contacts* (12.9%). *University career services* only accounted for 4.3% and *other university sources (e.g. lecturer, university website)* with 8.6%. For the 17.2% who stated that they had already worked at the company, 62.5% had been employment with the company in some capacity all year round and 37.5% had been on an internship or placement of some kind with them.

Contractual status

When asked to describe the contractual status on which they were employed, 66.7% stated they had a *permanent or open-ended contract*, 13.1% were on a *fixed contract lasting 12 months or longer*, 10.7% were on a *fixed contract lasting less than 12 months* and 6% were *self-employed*. When the responses were examined by mode of employment, there was little difference between those who were full or part-time on a *permanent/open ended contract* with 69.5% and 68.2% respectively. The picture was similar for those on a *fixed term 12 month contract or less* with 11.9% for full-time and 9.1% for part-time. However, there was a notable difference for those on a *contract of 12 months or more* with 13.6% for full-time and 4.5% part-time. When examined by contractual status and whether the respondent was working in the field of their postgraduate qualification, there were some differences. These are highlighted in Table 2.

Working in the field	Not working in the field
Permanent or open ended 62.3%	Permanent or open ended 74.2%
Fixed term 12 months or longer 17%	Fixed less than 12 months 12.9%
Fixed less than 12 months 9.4%	Fixed term 12 months or longer 6.5%

Table 2 Contractual status and field

Of those respondents who had moved elsewhere for work, 80% had a *permanent/open ended contract*, 13.3% were on a *fixed term 12 month contract or more* and 6.7% were *self-employed*. No one who had *moved elsewhere* had done so for a *12 month contract or less*.

Gross salary

When asked their approximate gross salary, 83.3% of respondents had a gross salary between below £9,999 and £29,999. The majority of those earning under £9,999 were on a part-time contract. Of those working part-time, 68.2% were on a gross salary below £9,999, 18.2% between £10,000 and £19,000 and 9.1% between £20,000 and £24,999. Table 3 highlights the gross salary level, mode of employment and whether working in the field of their qualification. There appears to be little difference in the salary groups' £10,000-29,000 for full-time workers, and little difference for part-time respondents in any of the salary groups.

Gross salary	Fulltime working in the field	Full-time not working in the field	Part-time working in the field	Part-time not working in the field
£0-9,999	2.4%	11.8%	69.2%	66.7%
£10,000-19,000	28.6%	29.4%	23.1%	11.1%
£20,000-24,999	19.0%	11.8%	7.7%	11.1%
£25,000-29,000	28.6%	29.4%	-	-
£30,000-34,999	9.5%	-	-	-
£35,000 +	9.5%	11.8%	-	-
Rather not say	2.4%	5.8%	-	11.1%

Table 2 Gross salary, mode of employment and working in the field of their qualification

Of the respondents who were in full-time work before starting their postgraduate studies, 48.6% stated that their new qualification had increased their salary, 34.3% stated their salary had stayed the same and 17.1% stated that they were now on a lower salary. Of the respondents who had obtained a salary increase, 64.7% were working in their qualification field and 35.3% who were not.

Hours of work

When those in full-time work were asked about the hours they were undertaking per week, 58.3% were working 37 hours and 41.7% working in excess of 37 hours. Of those working 37 hours a week, 54.8% were working in the field of their qualification and 47.1% were not. For those working in excess of 37 hours a week, 42.9% were working in the field of their qualification and 35.3% were not. This suggests that those working in the field of their qualification generally work longer hours.

Value and course benefits

Of the respondents, 85.5% felt that their postgraduate course was value for money. Of those who stated that it had not been value for money (14.5%), 82.3% were working, 11.7% undertaking a PhD and 6% were not working. Comments by those respondents who felt it had been value for money included:

'It gave me a chance to explore the field and gives me a qualification that I can use to gain employment'.

'It has certainly improved my knowledge, research abilities, skills and confidence'.

For those who felt it had not been value for money, comments included:

'I have yet to notice what my Master's degree gives me over my undergraduate degree that could help me in the job market'.

'As there is no maintenance funding this degree ended up completely bankrupting me, who knows how I would have survived without the scholarship'.

'I do not believe the full course fees represent value for money, especially as there is such little contact time'.

When asked whether the course provided the knowledge, skills and experience they had expected to obtain, 84.6% felt that it had. Of the 15.4% who felt that it hadn't, 72.2% were working and 27.8% were not. All respondents undertaking a PhD felt that it had. When asked whether postgraduate study had been worthwhile, 94% stated that it had been. Of those who felt it had not, all were working. Comments by those respondents who felt it had been worthwhile included:

'The networking was amazing'.

'I feel it has further developed me as an individual as well as academically'.

For those who felt it had not been worthwhile, comments included:

'I am in two minds about this. The sheer pressure of working and studying both with near full time hours is incredibly difficult and caused quite a lot of depression. However, I now have a distinction in a master's degree and also gained the Deans Award so the struggle is kind of worth it'.

'For the jobs I want... I don't think so as it wasn't specific enough. I will still be going in as a trainee, the same level as if I just had a BSc'.

Issues for consideration

This paper has highlighted that amongst the PEP scholarship graduates; there are differences in contractual status, mode of and field of employment and salary level. Further research could be undertaken to determine whether the findings reflect those of the general postgraduate population as well as further longitudinal research into the benefits of postgraduate study on salary attainment.

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