Graduate Employability

A
Commissioned National
Research Project Funded by

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Thank You

...to all of the graduates, students, employers and educators who shared their strategies and success stories

Abstract

This report aims to inform the improvement of higher education graduate employability through disseminating the perspectives of students, graduates (alumni), higher education personnel (including educators and career development professionals) and employers. The team of report authors propose that students must do more than study and complete their courses in order to be employable upon graduation. Students, graduates and employers all agreed that work experience, internships and placements are the most significant set of strategies to enhancing graduate employability. Furthermore, participation in a number and range of graduate employability strategies is particularly important for students who are not enrolled in generalist programs like humanities that teach graduate attributes such as critical thinking and communications. The research approach of the project presented in this report was survey methodology. Four survey versions were created and distributed online and via paper resulting in over seven hundred responses. Process and outcome data was rigorously collected, analysed, compared and contrasted. The report provides empirical evidence that higher education providers must support graduate employability using a variety of strategies. Research also revealed that employers are open to hiring graduates of professional programs and generalist programs such as humanities, life sciences, computer science and visual/performing arts. Because of the chosen survey approach, the results point to effective strategies for improving graduate employability, but does not enable detailed how-to information. Therefore, the next phase of the project research, forthcoming in a follow-up report, is to conduct interviews and focus groups with all four stakeholder groups to provide rich process details about employability. This current report includes recommendations from the survey responses to guide the improvement of strategy supports of graduate employability. This report fulfils an identified need to improve the ways in which graduate employability is supported to improve the outcomes for the emerging educated workforce.

Three Phases

1. Online Survey
(www.graduateemployability.com)

2. Assessment Rubric

3. Case Studies
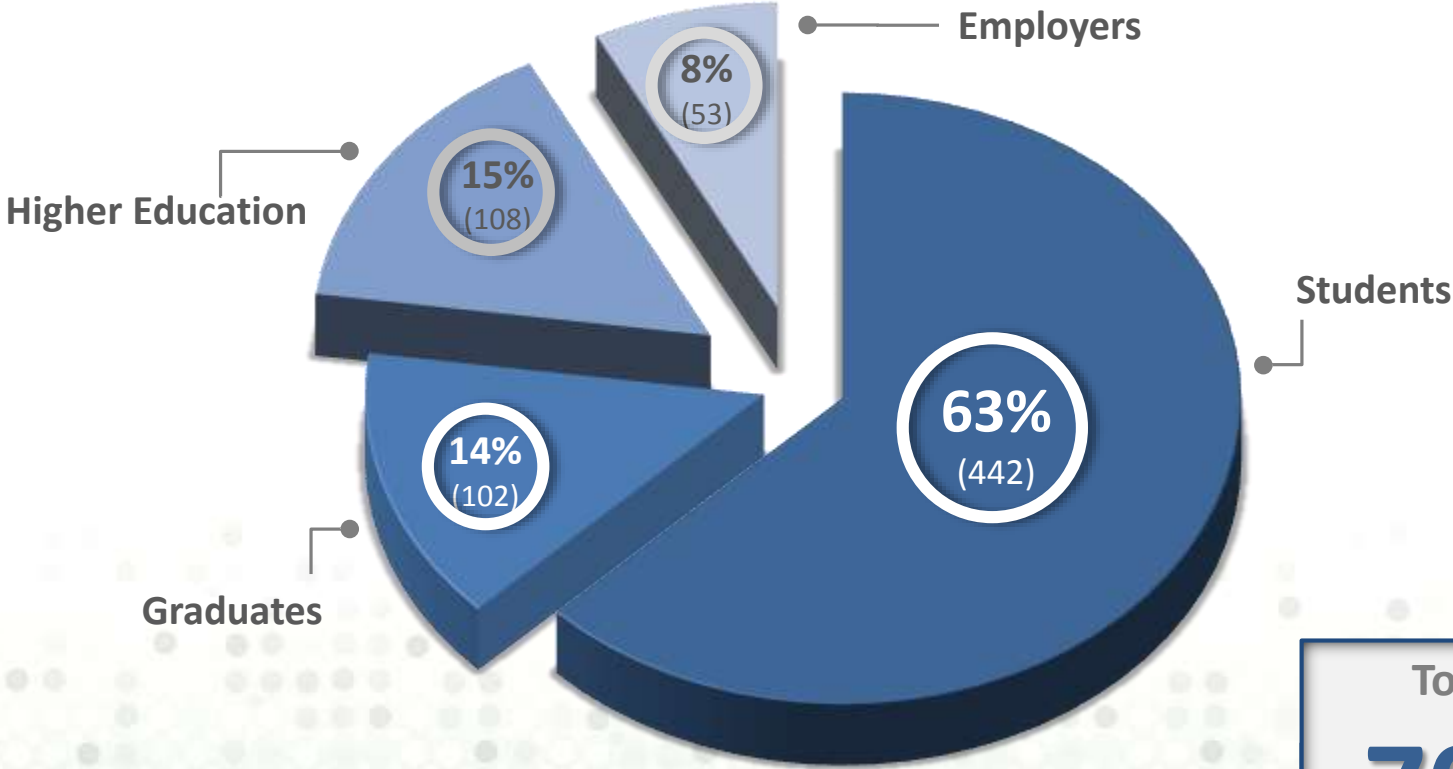
The Surveys

For Students

For Graduates

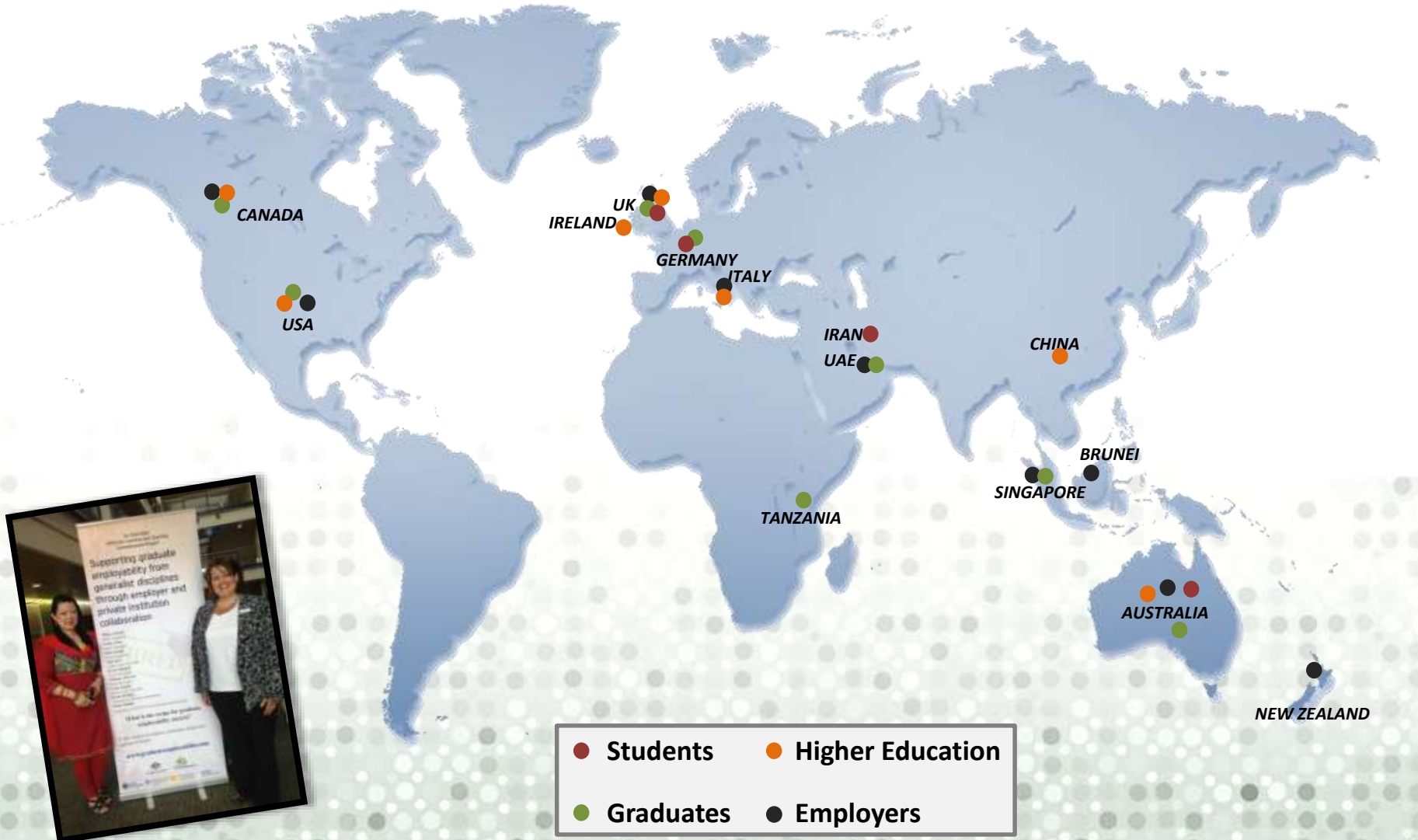For Higher Education
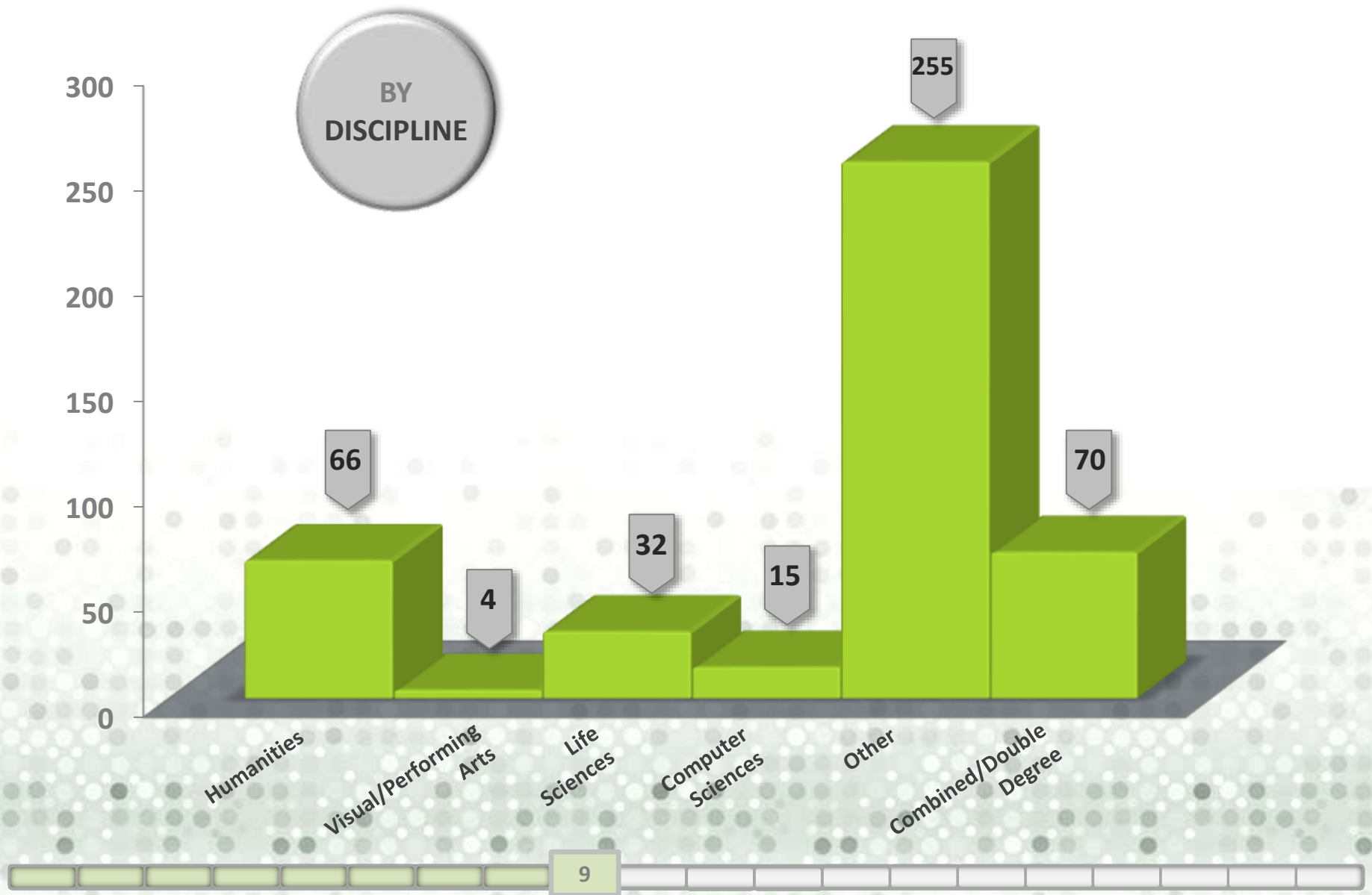

For Employers

Survey Responses (by Respondents)

Employers
8% (53)

Higher Education
15% (108)

Students
63% (442)

Graduates
14% (102)

Total
705

Domestic & International

CANADA

UK
IRELAND
GERMANY
ITALY

IRAN
UAE

CHINA

BRUNEI
SINGAPORE

TANZANIA

USA

AUSTRALIA

NEW ZEALAND

- 🔴 **Students**
- 🟠 **Higher Education**
- 🟢 **Graduates**
- ⚫ **Employers**

Student Demographics

BY DISCIPLINE

Discipline	Value
Humanities	66
Visual/Performing Arts	4
Life Sciences	32
Computer Sciences	15
Other	255
Combined/Double Degree	70

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Employer Perspectives

DISCIPLINES LIKELY TO HIRE FROM

21% Humanities

11% Computer Science

11% Life Science

Twenty-four (45% of) employers ticked one to four of the generalist disciplines

Employers were asked to tick the disciplines from which they have or are likely to employ graduates

ARE THE JOBS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE DISCIPLINE

70% Yes

28% No

2% Don't Know

From which courses are students and graduates finding work?

42%

One hundred and eighty-seven **student** respondents ticked one of the generalist disciplines to describe their course
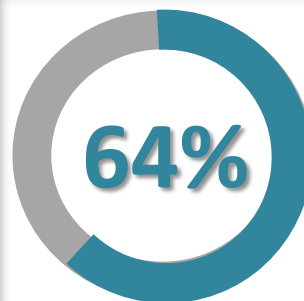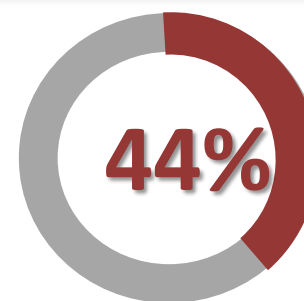
3% of the students enrolled in ¼ generalist disciplines had secured relevant graduate employment while still a student

Whereas **11%** of the students enrolled in the other disciplines had secured employment

27%

Twenty-eighty **graduates** ticked one of the generalist disciplines to describe their course

64%

Of **graduates** from ¼ disciplines secured graduate employment

44%
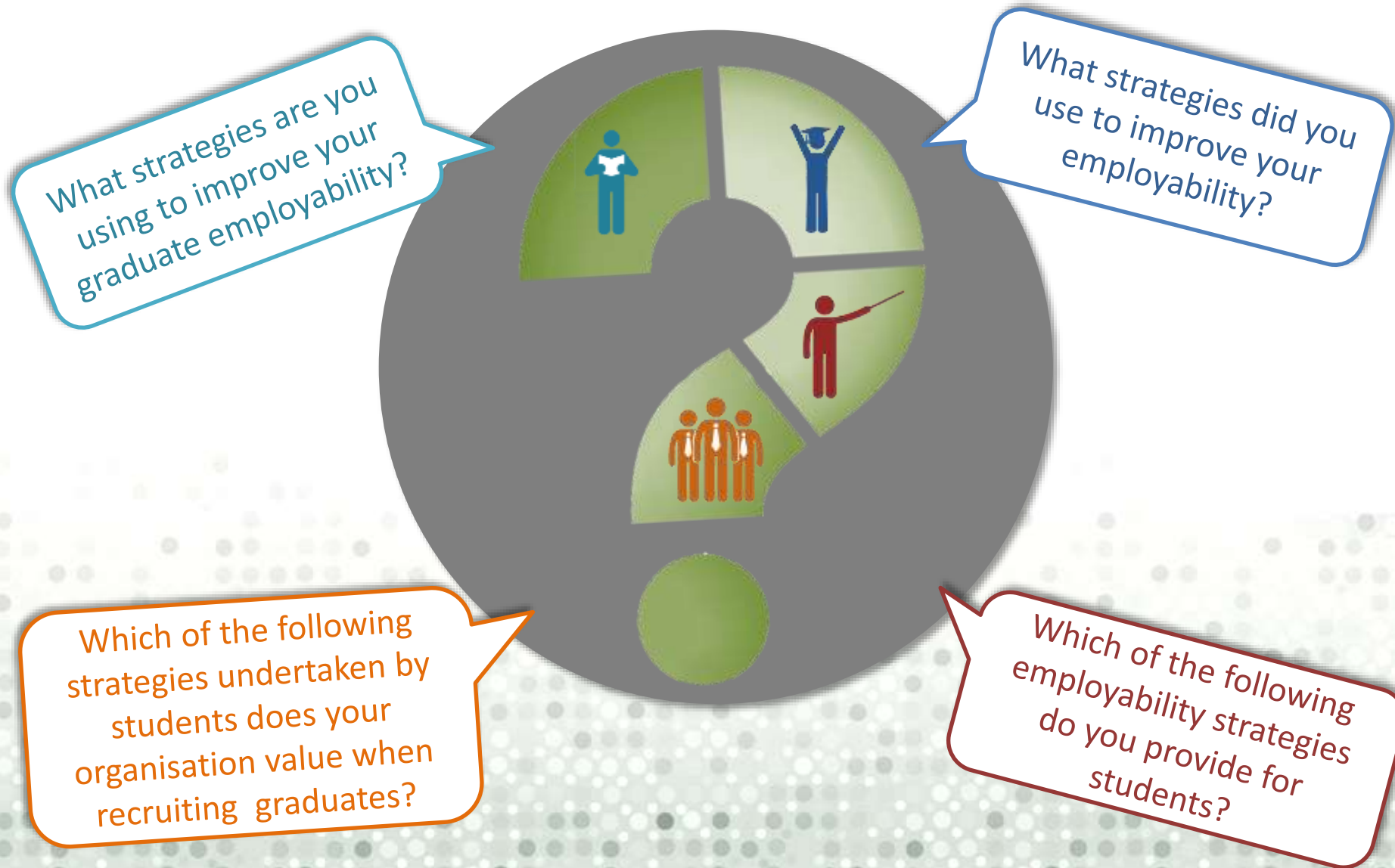
Of **students** from other disciplines had secured employment

Other Disciplines

Disciplines	Students	Graduates	Employers
Accounting	21%	5%	6%
Business		8%	
Construction			4%
Consulting			4%
Education	23%		4%
Law	15%	7%	
Nursing	19%		
Psychology	26%		
Social Sciences		5%	
Sport and Recreation			4%

Survey Questions About Strategies

What strategies are you using to improve your graduate employability?

What strategies did you use to improve your employability?

Which of the following strategies undertaken by students does your organisation value when recruiting graduates?

Which of the following employability strategies do you provide for students?

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Strategies

Strategies	Students	Graduates	Educators	Employers
Capstone/Final semester project				
Careers advice & employment skill development	59%		64%	
Extra-curricular activities			65%	60%
International exchanges				
Mentoring				
Networking		52%	51%	
Part-time employment	53%	53%		
Portfolios, profiles & records of achievement				
Professional association memberships/engagement			54%	
Social media/networks				
Volunteering		50%		53%
Work experience/ internships/ placements	74%	74%		87%

Top Strategies

Work experience/ internships / placements

Careers advice and employment skill development

Extra-curricular activities

Networking

Part-time employment

Volunteering

Professional association memberships / engagement

Which employability strategies DID/DID NOT work?

Strategy	Use by those who are EMPLOYED	Use by those who are NOT EMPLOYED	Statistical Significance
Career Advice		✖	U = 14896, p = 100
Professional Associations	✖		U = 16144, p = 0.019
International Exchange		✖	U = 16824, p = 0.039

What Distinguishes a Top-Performing Graduate?

Notably, graduate employability is not restricted to securing employment. It also encompasses longevity, success and lifelong learning during one's career. Employer were therefore asked to comment on what distinguishes a tope-performing graduate from an average employee. Seven themes emerged.

Skills — Both work-specific (hard) and transferable (soft)

Real-world experience — Engagement with industry and employers throughout university has developed realistic notions and expectations of the workforce

Well-rounded — In addition to study, successful graduates had pursued sports and/or hobbies as well as community engagement

Value alignment — Employees are a good fit with the organisation, sharing values such as customer service orientation

Social support — Employees are resilient and are able to handle work-related stress when they have healthy family relationships and friendships

Initiative — Motivation and enthusiasm are important in that employees are then able to self-initiate tasks and find intrinsic rewards in work

Goal-oriented to learn — Employees make the most of opportunities to develop and do not have unrealistic expectations of immediate high-level positions

Recommendations

International exchanges must be improved so that they are authentic learning experiences that allow students to engage with employers and employment in other cultures

Further resources are necessary to support universities' provision of work experience, internships and placements

Partnerships and collaboration between universities and employers must be strengthened so that career advice and employment skill development is industry-relevant and involves workplace and professional association mentors

Recommendations (cont'd)

A diverse range of degree options should be continued including career-specific pathways such as education and accounting, and generalist degrees such as humanities, life sciences, computer sciences and visual/performing arts
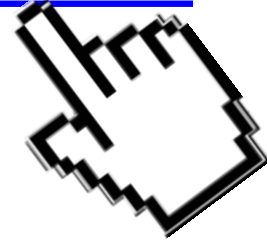
The employability focus of universities should be on *work* while learning and the focus of employers should be on *learning* while at work

Campaigns must be developed to raise the awareness of students and graduates as to: the importance of extracurricular activity; the understanding that non-career-related part-time work does not enhance their employability and; the relevance of career-related volunteering as an effective means of bridging education into employment

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