# Findings from the Employer Survey of UWI Graduates Class of 2018

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### Introduction

In keeping with the mission of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPAIR), employers of UWI Graduates were invited to partake in a survey during June 5 to July 5, 2020. Employers were contacted based on the Tracer Survey of UWI Graduates, Class of 2018 which was conducted over April 10 to May 15, 2020. Graduates had the option to nominate their immediate supervisor to evaluate their work performance. From a sample of 586 graduates who responded to the Tracer survey, 74 nominated their employer to participate in the study. The Employer survey asked about the graduates' work experience, training, important skill sets and performance, and the satisfaction of employers with UWI graduates. The survey was conducted online using the survey platform, Qualtrics.

The information gathered will be useful for gauging institutional effectiveness in terms of teaching, learning and student development. As The UWI seeks to be responsive to the needs of industry, employer feedback will assist the University in designing programmes that can equip the graduates with the right aptitudes and skills for success in the labour market.

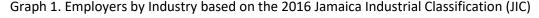
## **About the Target Population**

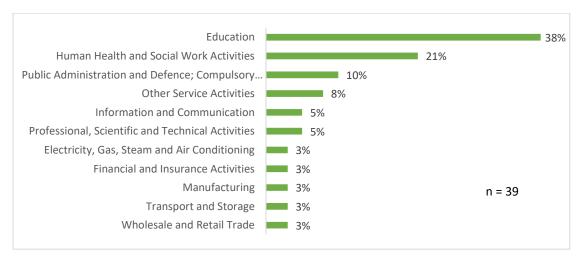
There may be an element of bias in the survey data. Graduates who nominated their employers may represent those who share a cordial relationship with their supervisor or have a substantive post or salary. Employers may also succumb to social desirability when evaluating UWI Graduates. As a result, the findings may not be representative of all employers and all UWI Graduates.

Nonetheless, the results indicate a fairly high response rate (53%) from employers (n = 74). Of the 39 appraisals submitted, 59% (n = 23) were geared at undergraduates, while 41% (n= 16) were directed at postgraduates.

## **Profile of Employers**

Employers represented a range of industry groups, typical of "white collar" work (Graph 1).





Most employers were in the education sector, followed by the health and public sectors. The grouping is consistent with the top three areas of employment among UWI Graduates who responded to the Tracer survey.

# Profile of UWI Graduates

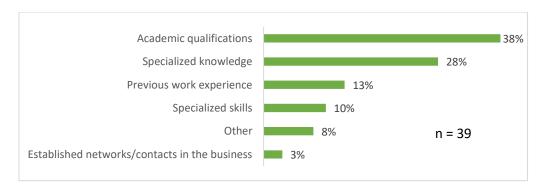
Graduates who were appraised were predominantly in positions commensurate with their academic qualifications. Seventy-four percent (74%) of appraised graduates were professionals, 15% were technicians and associate professionals, while 8% were managers, and 3% clerical support workers.

Graph 2 Occupations of Appraised Graduates based on the Jamaica Standard Occupational Classification (JSOC)



Most graduates (64%) were employed for one to three years, while 18% were employed for less than one year, and 18%, for four or more years. Graduates were hired many for their educational qualifications than for their work experience.

Graph 3 Greatest Influence in the Decision to Hire UWI Graduate



When asked how well the University of the West Indies prepared the graduate, 31% of employers said extremely well, 50% said more than adequately, while 19% said sufficiently.

## Satisfaction of Employers with UWI Graduates

One of the outcomes of the current UWI Strategic Plan is for students to be in possession of esteemed attributes upon graduation. Students had the opportunity to assess the development of these attributes in the Tracer survey of UWI Graduates, while employers were asked to rate the graduates on these attributes in the performance of their work. As seen in Table 1, graduates received high ratings from employers on these attributes with *cross cultural competence* signifying the only attribute to receive a score below 80%.

Table 1 Employer Rating of UWI Graduates

	% Reporting Good to Excellent	
	UG	PG
Writing skills	96	94
Presentation skills	96	88
Problem solving skills	87	94
Critical thinking skills	87	94
Interpersonal skills	91	75
Knowledge of information technology	91	94
Cross cultural competence	78	69
Adaptability	96	81
Innovativeness	92	88
Independent thought	92	100
Application of theory to practice	92	88
Professional ethics	91	88
Overall academic preparation	96	100
Total Number	23	16

Response options: *Poor, Fair, Good, Excellent, Not Applicable*.

When asked whether they would continue to hire UWI Graduates, 100% of employers said *yes*. When asked whether they would recommend the hiring of UWI Graduates to other employers, 96% of those appraising an undergraduate said *yes*, while 100% of those appraising a postgraduate said *yes*.

Given the opportunity to provide important feedback to The UWI on UWI Graduates, employers had a number of suggestions for improving the curricula and student development at the University. Some of these suggestions include greater exposure to internships, project management, leadership training, IT skills, ethical and professional standards, public speaking and entrepreneurial skills, marketing strategies, and the capacity to deal with interpersonal and multicultural challenges.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The Employer Survey of UWI Graduates is an important tool for capturing the perspectives of stakeholders outside the University. This perspective is important for institutional effectiveness with regard to teaching, learning and student development as well as for quality assurance and accreditation reviews.

Over the years, despite the relatively low numbers of employers who are nominated and respond to the surveys, the feedback has been consistent in one area and that is the need to balance theoretical knowledge with practical applications and experiences. The University's response has been the promotion of work study programmes and internships to provide students with practical exposure and experience in the world of work. This, the University will continue in partnership with industry.

It is interesting to note that this year, employers have provided more feedback on areas for improvement such as exposure to leadership and project management. It is hoped that graduates take advantage of professional development opportunities once they leave the halls of academe. But perhaps these qualities could be emphasized more amongst final year students and postgraduate students. It is also expected that as graduates gain more experience in the world of work and take on more responsibilities, they will acquire the competences needed to perform well on the job.

Additionally, while *information technology* and *entrepreneurship* have been the weakest areas of development as reported by students, these areas have been gaining in approval ratings over the years. In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, the University continues to place strong emphasis on *information technology* by transitioning to online education and embracing *innovation* to keep the institution operational and viable to both staff and students of the University.