UWI
MONA CAMPUS
JAMAICA, WEST INDIES

Office of Strategic Planning & Enterprise Management
OSPEM

FINDINGS FROM THE TRACER SURVEY OF UWI GRADUATES

CLASS OF 2024

Office of Strategic Planning and Enterprise Management (OSPEM)

Planning and Institutional Research Unit

August 2026

Summary: Tracer Survey of UWI Graduates, Class of 2024

Overall Insights

- Many students are first-generation university attendees, highlighting UWI's role in social mobility.
- Postgraduates reported higher employment, earnings, job satisfaction, and skill development than undergraduates.
- Despite some dissatisfaction with pay and advancement, most graduates valued their job's responsibility and societal contribution.

Graduate Outcomes

1. **Employment:**
    - Employment rates increased post-graduation: 84% for First-degree and 95% for Higher-degree graduates by 2026.
    - Undergraduates were more likely to have temporary/contract jobs; postgraduates more often held permanent positions.
    - Postgraduates were concentrated in education; undergraduates in health, finance, and other services.
2. **Earnings:**
    - Higher-degree graduates earned more, with a greater share in higher income bands (JMD$201,000–$700,000+).
    - First-degree graduates were concentrated in lower income bands (JMD$101,000–$300,000).
3. **Job Satisfaction:**
    - Over 60% of both groups were somewhat to very satisfied with their jobs.
    - Satisfaction was highest for job location, independence, responsibility, and contribution to society; lowest for salary, benefits, and advancement opportunities.

Introduction

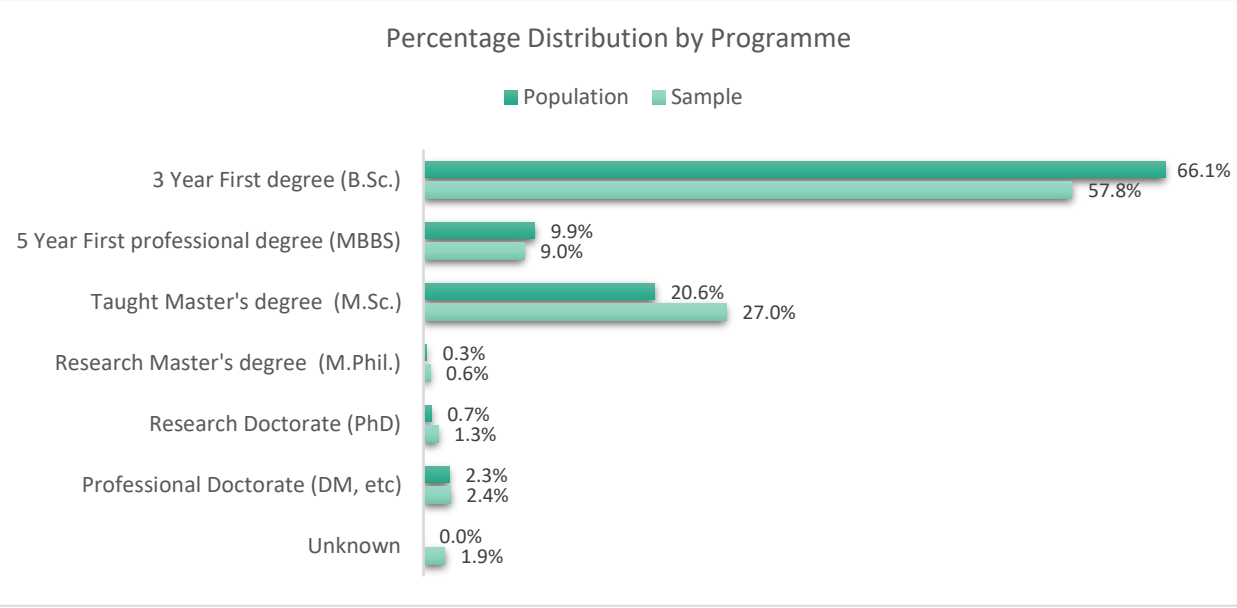
Every other year, the Office of Strategic Planning and Enterprise Management (OSPEM) conducts a Tracer Survey of UWI Graduates. This exercise is in partial fulfillment of an objective of the University Strategic Plan which identifies seven attributes of the ideal UWI graduate.[1] The survey targets First- and Higher-degree graduates who are asked about their programme of study, employment opportunities, job satisfaction, work experience, further education, and UWI's influence on knowledge and intellectual abilities. The survey was conducted June 1 to July 29, 2026, and was administered using the online survey platform, Qualtrics.[XM]

The information gathered will be useful for gauging institutional effectiveness in terms of teaching, learning and student development. Evidence of these activities is needed for quality assurance and accreditation reviews. In addition, stakeholders such as students, parents, employers, government agencies and others are interested in knowing *the returns* to a university education.

About the Target Population

For the Class of 2024, there were 3,475 graduates,[2] 76% of whom were First degree and 24% of whom were Higher degree. Of the total graduates, 467 or 13% responded. Among the respondents, 67% were undergraduates, 31% were postgraduates, while another 2% did not disclose their level of study. The population and sample distributions were fairly proportional with some under-representation in the three-year degree programmes and over-representation in the Taught Master's programmes (Graph 1).

Graph 1

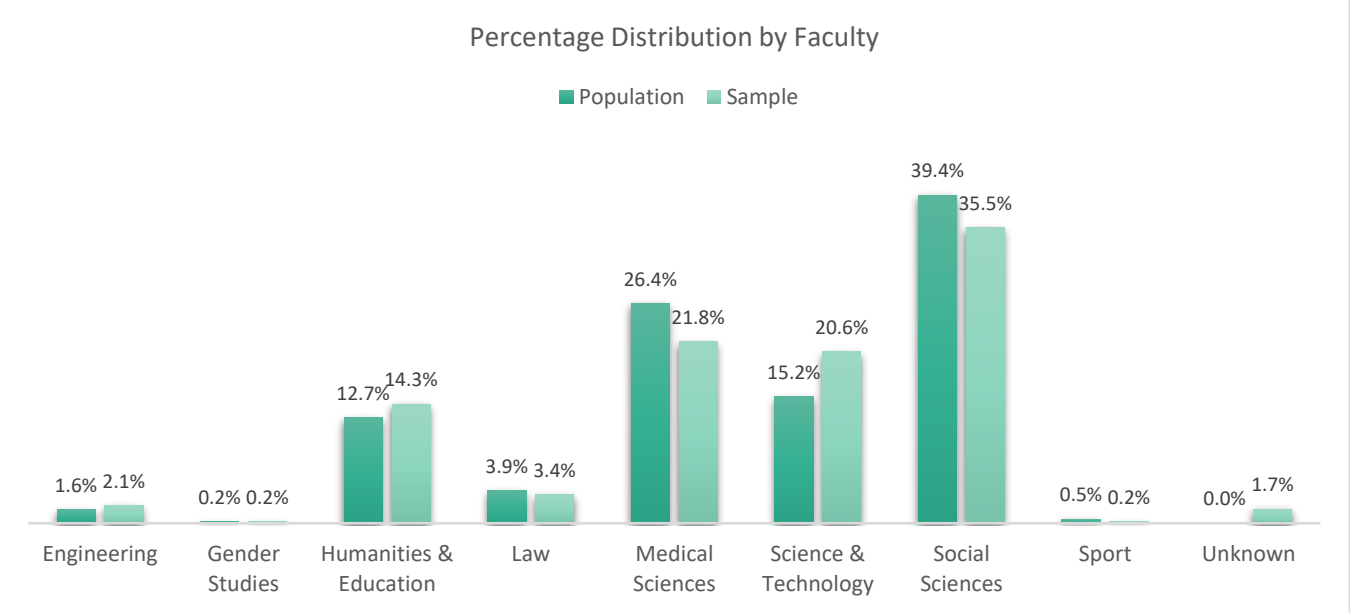


[1] https://uwi.edu/uop/strategic-plan-7-attributes-ideal-uwi-graduate

[2] This figure excludes certificate and diploma graduates.

By faculty, there was over-representation in Science and Technology and under-representation in Medical Sciences and Social Sciences (Graph 2). Further statistical tests were conducted comparing early and late respondents by demographic variables and questions related to employment status, salary, work experience, and internship opportunities. The results support the generalizability of findings to the population of graduates in 2024 with the exception of comparisons by sex and age group.[3]

Graph 2



Profile of Respondents[4]

Among those who responded to the survey (n=467), 67% were First-degree while 31% were Higher-degree graduates. Eighty-four percent (84%) of undergraduates were under the age of 30 while 78% of postgraduates were between the ages of 25 to 44. Just over two-thirds of respondents (71%) were female and 88% of all respondents were Jamaican.

While the majority of respondents (36%) graduated from the Social Sciences, a higher percentage of undergraduates (53%) than postgraduates (27%) studied in the Sciences (Engineering, Medical Sciences, and Science and Technology). By contrast, a higher percentage of postgraduates (34%) than undergraduates (6%) graduated from Humanities and Education.

When asked about parental education, 75% of postgraduates reported that neither parent graduated from university while the comparative figure was 71% for undergraduates. This information suggests that The UWI

[3] See Lindner, J. R., Murphy, T. H., & Briers, G. E. (2001). Handling nonresponse in social science research. *Journal of Agricultural Education 42*(4), 43-53.
[4] See accompanying Tabulations report for data not shown in this paper.

serves a predominantly First-generation student population who are the first in their family to access a university education.

In terms of financing their education, undergraduates were more likely to secure funds from their *parents and relatives* (63%) and the *Students' Loan Bureau* (33%) while postgraduates were more likely to rely on *earnings from employment* (64%), *parents and relatives* (24%) and *bank loans* (20%).

Mobility and Migration of Respondents

Approximately 5% of respondents at the time of the survey indicated that their country of residence was different from their country of origin. Of the 23 respondents, 16 were Jamaican nationals and 7 were non-Jamaican nationals. The countries of residence among Jamaicans were the United States (n=3), the United Kingdom (n=3), Canada (n=3), Trinidad and Tobago (n=2), The Bahamas (n=1), Barbados (n=1), Cayman Islands (n=1), China (n=1), and Japan (n=1). Although it has been speculated that UWI graduates migrate in droves to other countries, it is difficult to obtain data to support this perception.

What is known about Jamaican emigrants to the United States and Canada, is that the majority are admitted under family-related reasons compared to economic ones.[5] In 2024, the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) reported that 23,690 Jamaicans migrated to other countries. Of these migrants, 72% went to the United States, 16% to Canada, and 12% to the United Kingdom (PIOJ, 2025, p. 20:11). Available data also showed that 54% of Jamaicans admitted to Canada in 2024 were in the 20-44 age group and that 425 or 11% of Jamaicans admitted were either professionals, senior officials or technicians (PIOJ, 2025, pp. 20:12-20:13). Based on the Jamaican respondents to the Tracer survey who resided overseas (n=16), 75% reported employment. For the 12 employed, 5 were attached to the *Education* sector, 2 worked in *Professional, Scientific, and Technical Activities*, 2 were employed in *Information and Communication*, and 1 each worked in *Financial and Insurance Activities*; *Wholesale and Retail Trade*; and *Human Health and Social Work Activities*. There is some evidence here to support the perception of the continued exodus of teachers and other professionals as a means of upward mobility or economic gain.

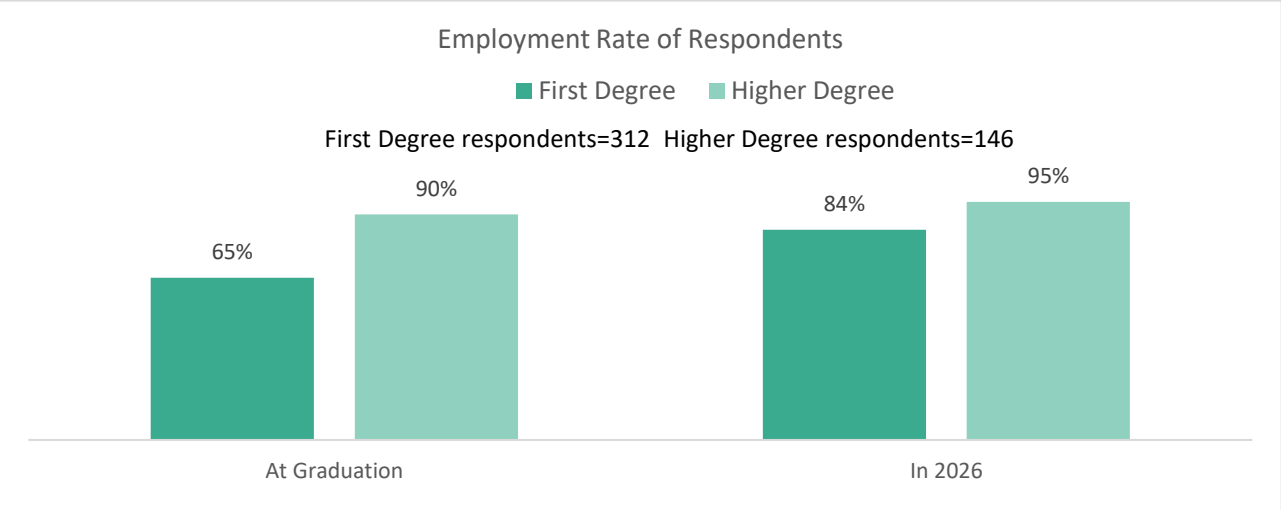
[5] Planning Institute of Jamaica. (2025). *Economic and social survey of Jamaica 2024*.
Thomas-Hope, E. (2018). *Migration in Jamaica: A country profile*. International Organization for Migration.

Graduate Outcomes

Employment

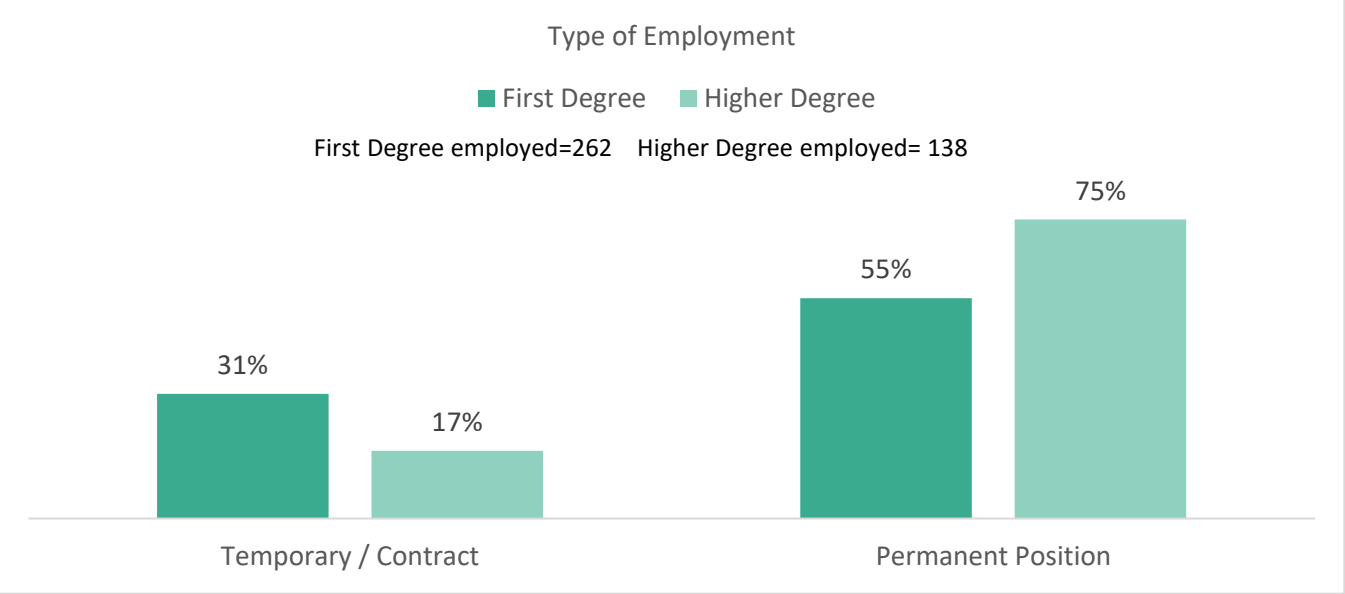
Most graduates who responded to the survey were employed at, or shortly after, graduation. One and a half years later, in 2026, employment increased more among First-degree than Higher-degree graduates (Graph 3).

Graph 3



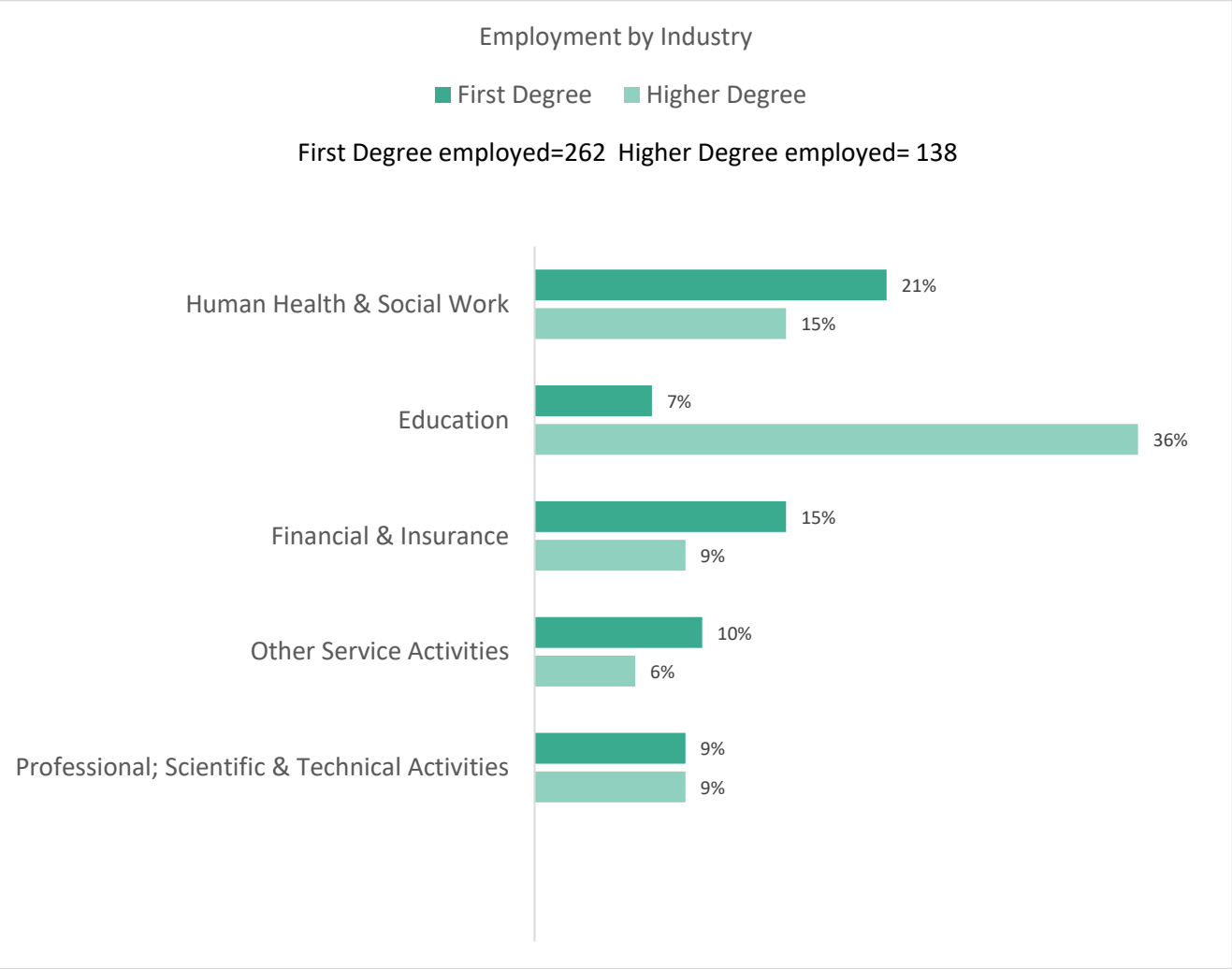
Undergraduates were more likely to report temporary or contract work than postgraduates while postgraduates were more likely to report permanent employment than undergraduates (Graph 4).

Graph 4



Although respondents were employed in key industries, postgraduates were concentrated in the *Education* sector (36%) while undergraduates were spread mainly among *Human Health and Social Work* (21%); *Financial and Insurance* (15%); and *Other Service Activities* (10%) (Graph 5). Undergraduates were also more likely to be employed in the private sector than postgraduates.

Graph 5



Earnings can be influenced by many factors such as age, experience, education, occupation, and geographic location. What is clear from responses to the survey is that more education is associated with higher earnings.[6] Whereas First-degree graduates are concentrated in the second to third income bands (JMD$101,000 to

[6] Jose Manuel Romero, Clemente Avila Parra, Alexandra Gordina. 2024. "Jamaica Jobs Diagnostic." World Bank, Washington, DC. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO.

$300,000), Higher-degree graduates are concentrated in the third to fifth income bands (JMD$201,000 to $500,000) and are more likely to earn monthly salaries in excess of $700,000 than are undergraduates.

Table 1

Gross Monthly Salary in $JMD

	First Degree		Higher Degree	
	N	%	N	%
JMD$100,000 or less	23	9	2	1
$101,000 to $200,000	77	**29**	7	5
$201,000 to $300,000	74	**28**	33	**24**
$301,000 to $400,000	23	9	30	**22**
$401,000 to $500,000	8	3	24	**17**
$501,000 to $600,000	12	5	9	7
$601,000 to $700,000	11	4	4	3
$701,000 or more	8	3	22	**16**
Unreported	26	10	7	5
Total	262	100	138	100

Job Satisfaction

When it came to job satisfaction, more than 60% of graduates reported being *somewhat* to *very satisfied* with their employment. The percentages were 64% among Higher-degree and 63% among First-degree respondents.

Table 2

Level of Satisfaction with Current Job

	First Degree		Higher Degree	
	N	%	N	%
Very dissatisfied	26	10	9	7
Somewhat dissatisfied	50	19	37	27
Somewhat satisfied	129	**49**	50	**36**
Very satisfied	37	**14**	38	**28**
No answer	20	8	4	3
Total	262	100	138	100

When asked to rate various aspects of their job (Table 3), respondents gave higher ratings to *contribution to society*; *job location*; *degree of independence*; and *level of responsibility* than *opportunities for advancement*; *salary*; and *benefits*. A World Bank report[7] indicated that *median* wages for public sector employees were about twice that in the private sector (p. 66) and also that *mean* wages for public sector employees were 47% of private earnings.[8] Despite the opportunity for higher wages in both the public and private sectors, many UWI graduates, perhaps due to the cost of living, view their salary as a source of dissatisfaction. Against this background, the Jamaican government completed a compensation review for the public sector,[9] and recently implemented a staged flexi-work programme for public sector workers.[10] It is not known how these changes will affect ratings of job satisfaction.

Table 3

Satisfaction of Respondents with Aspects of Their Job

Somewhat satisfied to very satisfied with aspects of their job	% Distribution	
	First Degree	Higher Degree
Salary	48	53
Benefits	44	64
Job Security	58	74
Job Location	73	80
Opportunities for Advancement	43	51
Intellectual Challenge	65	71
Level of Responsibility	71	74
Degree of Independence	77	73
Workplace Culture	54	57
Work-Life Balance	52	63
Opportunities for Professional Development	55	72
Contribution to Society	74	88

Rating scale: *very dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, somewhat satisfied, very satisfied*.

[7] Jose Manuel Romero, Clemente Avila Parra, Alexandra Gordina. 2024. "Jamaica Jobs Diagnostic." World Bank, Washington, DC. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/292d2157-b90e-4fee-9f9e-96d16aafda0a

[8] Jamaica: 2021 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; Staff Statement; and Statement by the Executive Director for Jamaica; IMF Country Report No. 22/43; January 25, 2022 [p. 13]

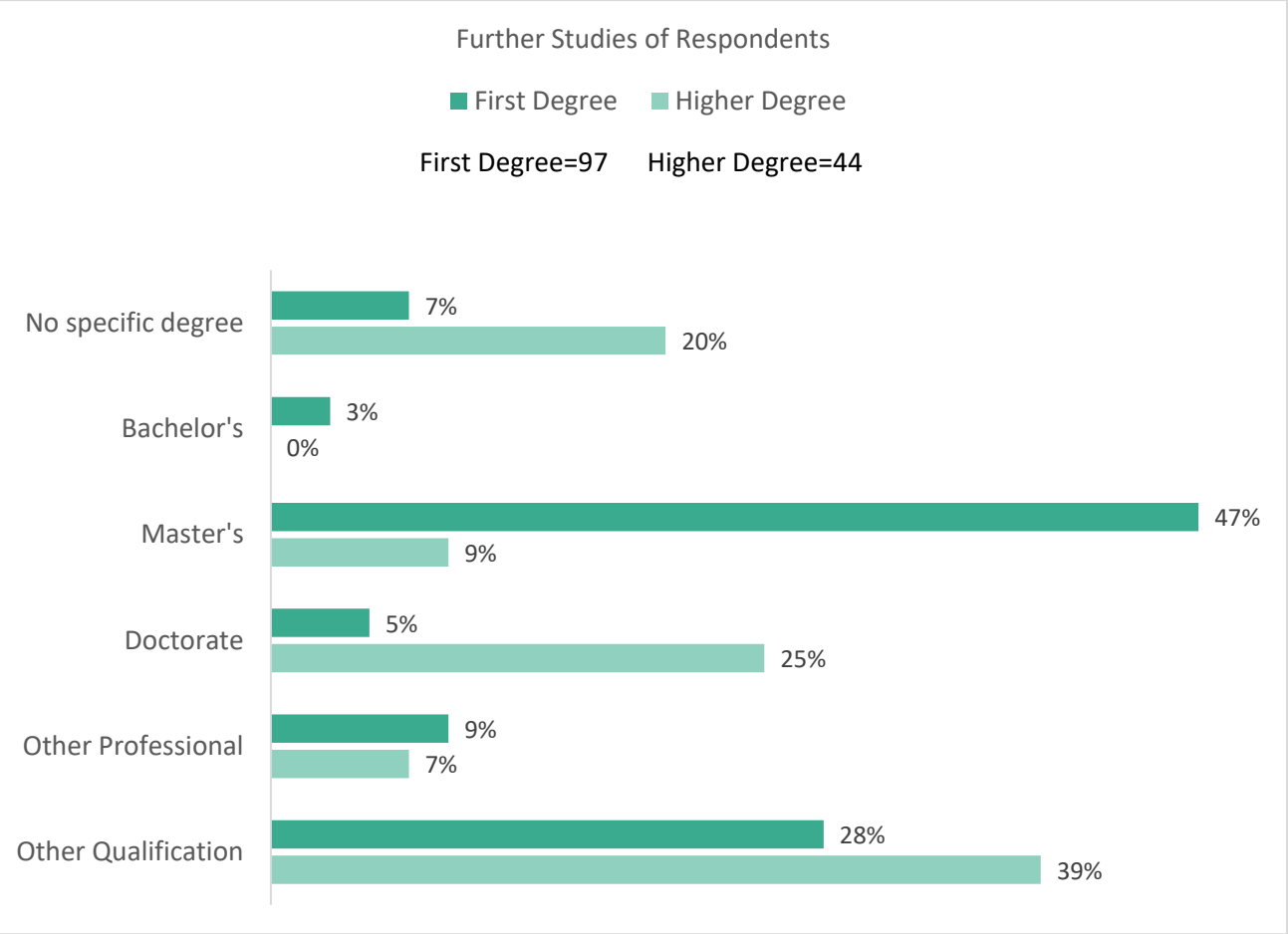
[9] https://www.mof.gov.jm/about-us/compensation-review/

[10] https://jis.gov.jm/government-launches-public-sector-flexible-work-arrangement/

Further Studies

Since graduating in 2024, approximately 30% (n=141) of respondents have pursued further studies as a means of personal and professional development. The majority of undergraduates pursued programmes leading to a master's degree (47%), while 39% of postgraduates pursued *other qualifications* (short courses) for certification, credit, or non-credit.

Graph 6



UWI's Influence on Knowledge and Intellectual Abilities

One of the objectives of The UWI Strategic Plan is to gauge the development of attributes among students. In an effort to measure UWI's contribution to the attainment of these qualities, graduates were asked to rate the development of these characteristics, retrospectively, thinking back to the beginning and end of their academic programme. The results support UWI's contribution to these qualities and skills. As seen in Table 4, there is an increase in scores among undergraduates and postgraduates at the end of their programme. More than half of respondents reported that the following traits were *mostly to fully developed* at the end of their programme: *critical and creative thinking skills; effective communication and interpersonal skills*; *information technology skills*; *socially, culturally and environmentally responsible*; and *strong ethical values*. By contrast, areas in need of improvement were *innovative and entrepreneurial skills* and, among undergraduates, *globally aware and well-grounded in their regional identity*.

Table 4

Development of Attributes among Respondents

Attributes	% Reporting *Mostly/Fully* Developed			
	Start of Programme		End of Programme	
	First Degree	Higher Degree	First Degree	Higher Degree
Critical and creative thinking skills	40	52	59	68
Effective communication and interpersonal skills	38	53	53	68
Information technology skills	41	44	52	59
Innovative and entrepreneurial skills	18	33	33	48
Globally aware and well-grounded in regional identity	29	43	49	53
Socially, culturally and environmentally responsible	39	49	50	59
Strong ethical values	50	58	58	64

Rating scale: not at all developed; somewhat developed; mostly developed; fully developed.

Summary and Conclusion

For nearly two decades, the Office of Strategic Planning and Enterprise Management (OSPEM) has been surveying graduates since the Class of 2007. Higher-degree graduates were surveyed in the Class of 2014 and in subsequent cohorts. By comparing undergraduates to postgraduates, the returns to a university education become amplified. As illustrated in this report, postgraduates report higher employment rates and earnings, greater job satisfaction, and higher development of esteemed attributes as identified in The UWI Strategic Plan.

Nonetheless, there are notable differences among undergraduates and postgraduates. Undergraduates are more likely to fund their education with the help of their *parents and relatives* and the *Students' Loan Bureau*, while postgraduates rely on *savings from employment*; *parents and relatives*; and *bank loans*.

Another important difference among undergraduates and postgraduates is their absorption into the labour market. While undergraduates are more likely to hold positions that are temporary or contractual in nature, this is something that changes over time as they pursue further studies and gain valuable work experience.

It is also noteworthy that survey respondents, despite being unhappy with their *salary* and *benefits* and *opportunities for promotion*, were satisfied with aspects of their job related to *level of responsibility*, *degree of independence*, and *contribution to society*. These facets of their job may have contributed to over 60% of respondents reporting satisfaction with their current employment.

As the University strives to improve teaching, learning and student development, the academy needs to be aware of the fact that many of our students are First-generation ones. While students appear to develop skills during their programme of study, there is still room for improvement, especially among undergraduates. Curriculum renewal may be one way to further develop attributes of the ideal UWI graduate.