UWI
MONA CAMPUS
JAMAICA, WEST INDIES

Findings from the Survey of Employers of UWI Graduates, Class of 2020

Office of Planning and Institutional Research, University of the West Indies, Mona Campus

July 2022

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 10 to July 18, 2022. Employers were contacted based on the Tracer Survey of UWI Graduates, Class of 2020 which was conducted over April 21 to June 10, 2022. Graduates had the option to nominate their immediate supervisor to evaluate their work performance. From a sample of 510 graduates who responded to the Tracer survey, 56 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

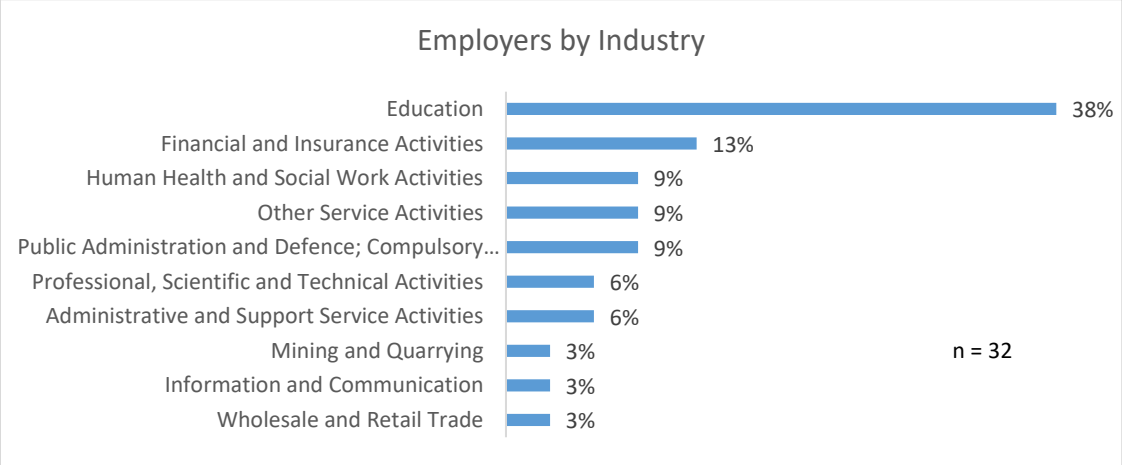
There may be an element of bias in the survey data. Graduates who nominated their employers may represent those who share a cordial relationship with their supervisor or have a substantive post or salary. Employers may also succumb to social desirability when evaluating UWI Graduates. As a result, the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

Nonetheless, the results indicate a fairly high response rate (57%) from employers (n = 56). Of the 32 appraisals submitted, 66% (n = 21) were geared at undergraduates, while 34% (n= 11) were directed at postgraduates.

Profile of Employers

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

Graph 1. Employers by Industry based on the 2016 Jamaica Industrial Classification (JIC)

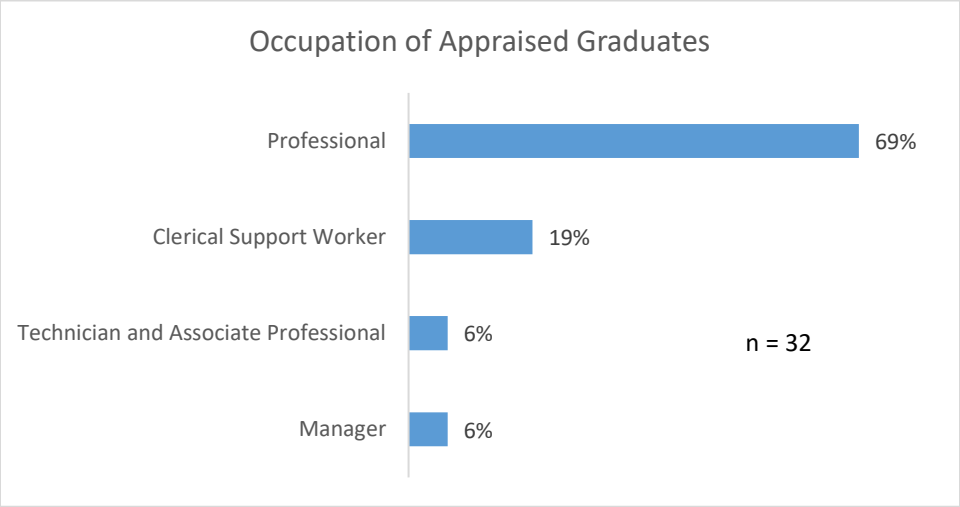


Most employers were in the education sector, followed by the financial sector.

Profile of UWI Graduates

Graduates who were appraised were predominantly in positions commensurate with their academic qualifications. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of appraised graduates were professionals, while 6% were technicians and associate professionals, and 6% managers. A higher proportion of graduates were clerical support workers (19%) compared to 3% in the last survey in 2020 which examined graduates from the Class of 2018.

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



Most graduates (53%) were employed for one to three years, while 16% were employed for less than one year, and 31%, for four or more years (not shown). Graduates were hired many for their educational qualifications than for their work experience (Graph 3).

Graph 3 Greatest Influence in the Decision to Hire UWI Graduate

When asked how well the University of the West Indies prepared the graduate, 53% of employers said *sufficiently,* 34% said *more than adequately*, while 13% said *extremely well* (not shown).

Satisfaction of Employers with UWI Graduates

One of the objectives 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 *adaptability* signifying the only attribute to receive an average score of 83%.

Table 1 Employer Rating of UWI Graduates

	% Reporting *Good* to *Excellent*	
	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
Writing skills	96	82
Presentation skills	90	100
Problem solving skills	86	100
Critical thinking skills	85	92
Interpersonal skills	91	92
Knowledge of information technology	95	100
Cross cultural competence	91	80
Adaptability	86	80
Innovativeness	95	100
Independent thought	86	100
Application of theory to practice	96	90
Professional ethics	96	90
Overall academic preparation	91	100
Total Number of Employers	21	11

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

When asked whether they would continue to hire UWI Graduates, 100% of employers said *yes*. One hundred percent (100%) of employers also said that they would recommend the hiring of UWI Graduates to other employers.

When 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. These suggestions included greater exposure to the following: internships, leadership training, ethical and professional standards, emotional intelligence and soft skills, and practical applications of knowledge. Teaching candidates should also be taught to write proper lesson plans while library courses

need to focus on emerging trends in a post-pandemic library environment as well as training in sign language to improve service delivery.

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 soft skills and emotional intelligence. 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 *innovation/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.