

milkround



# **Milkround Student and Graduate Career Confidence Survey Report 2015**



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## Introduction

Now in its fourth consecutive year, *The Milkround Student & Graduate Career Confidence Survey* measures how confident university students and graduates feel about their career prospects in an ever-evolving graduate job market. We also sought to find out which factors are influencing confidence levels most strongly, and how trends have shifted compared to previous years' studies.

With these findings, we're able to gain a better understanding of the most concerning topics among our users, and pre-emptively provide advice and information for candidates on Milkround.com that will assist them in their quest to find the perfect graduate role.

## Summary

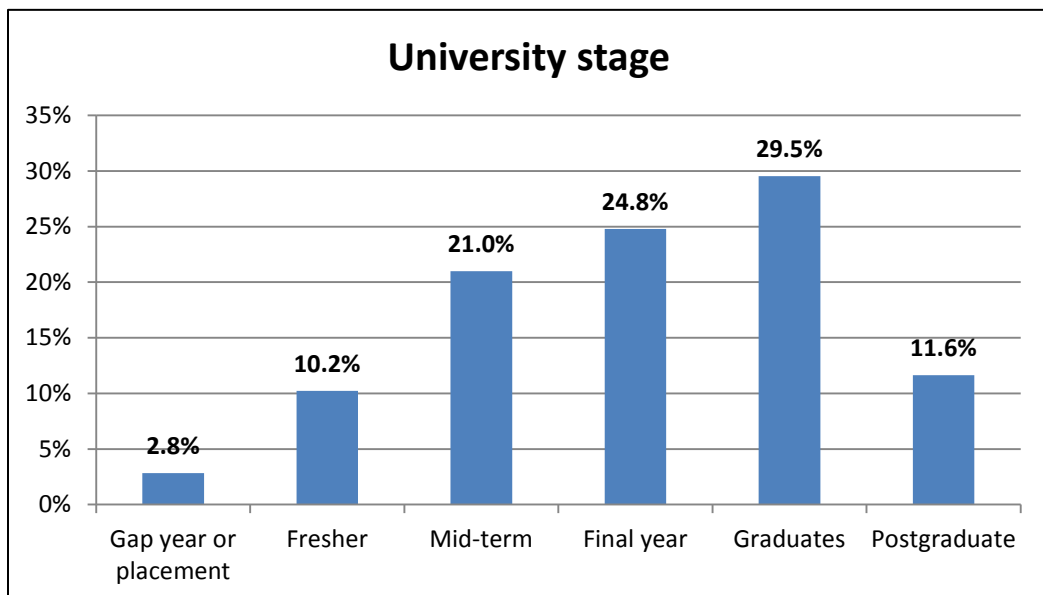
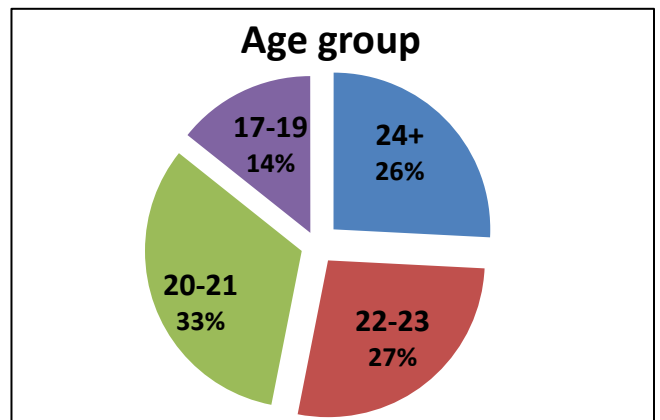
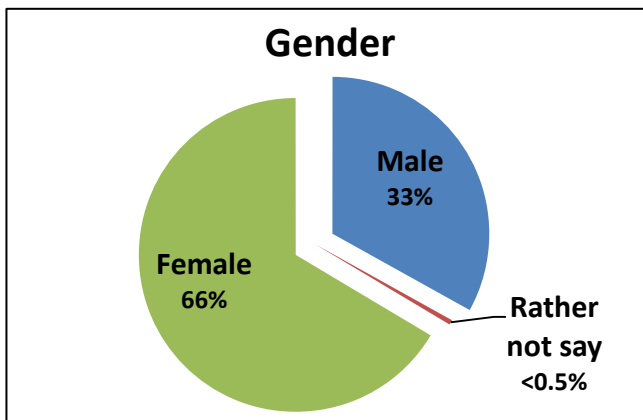
- **66%** of students and graduates said that **"too much competition"** was their biggest concern about their job prospects
- **More than a quarter** (25.8%) of students were "pessimistic" about their chances of getting a graduate job after university
- Despite the above point, students' **"optimism" towards finding a job after university has risen for a second consecutive year**
- Compared to 2014, students and graduates are **less concerned about there being "not enough jobs"**, but have grown **more concerned about "low pay" (+4.2%)** and **"employers expectations [being] too high" (+9.3%)**
- **31.6%** of graduates were still **"looking for a job"**
- **61.2%** of student and graduates felt that **"work experience or an internship"** would make them feel more confident about their career prospects
- **53.3%** of students and graduates said **"work-life & flexibility"** is most important to them in their future role
- **29%** of students and graduates said that **media coverage had lowered their overall confidence in finding a job after university**

## Methodology

Our 2015 fieldwork was carried out from 18<sup>th</sup> February to 19<sup>th</sup> March. We invited users to participate via a blend of email invitations as well as hosting the survey on our very own Milkround Advice website ([advice.milkround.com](http://advice.milkround.com)).

## Respondents

Our 2015 Career Confidence Survey attracted a record **5,688** respondents across all university stages, from first-year Freshers all the way to now-employed Graduates.

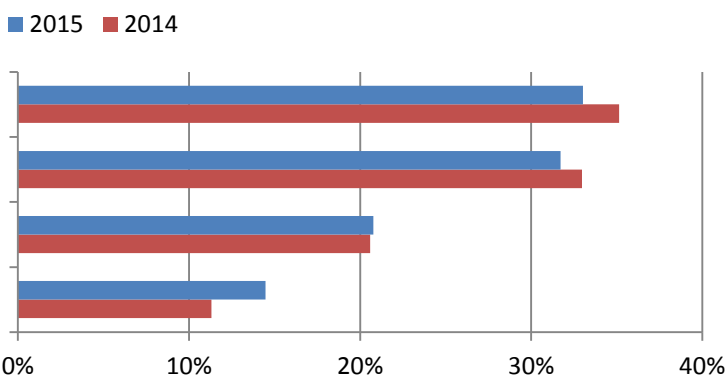


## Choices

We asked our respondents if they felt they had a good understanding of the various options available to them *before* making their final decision to enrol in university.

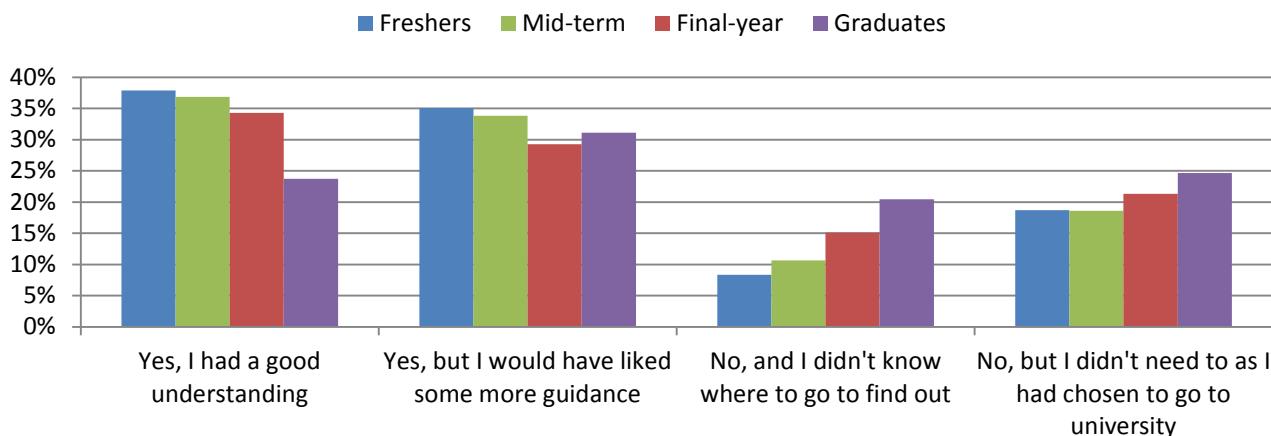
Overall across all course stages, most feel that they *did* have a good understanding of their options: “**yes, I had a good understanding**” and “**yes, but I would have liked some more guidance**” took a combined **64.8 per cent** of votes – 3.3 per cent less than in 2014.

### Before you made the decision to go to university did you feel you had a good understanding of the alternative options available to you?



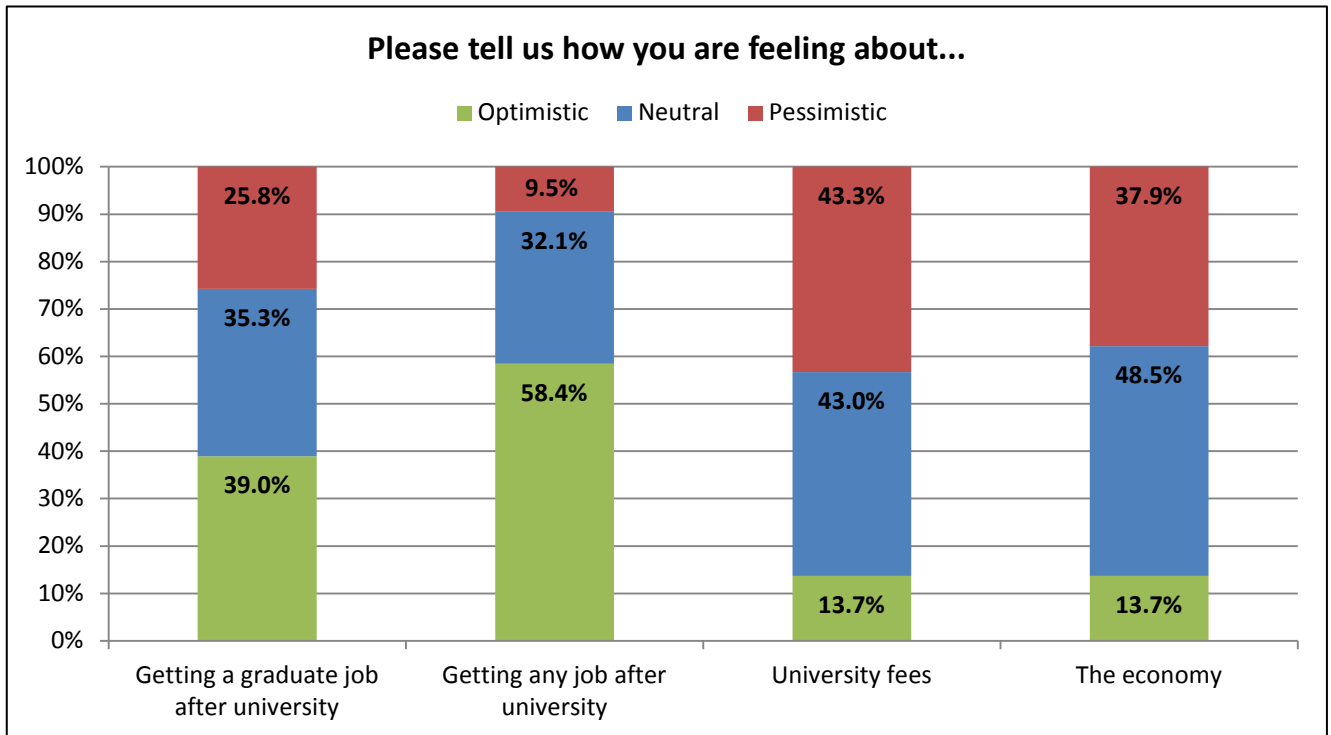
Broken down by university stage, we see **20.5 per cent** of Graduates answered “**No, and I didn't know where to go to find out**” compared with only 8.4 per cent of Freshers, suggesting that current students, still fresh from school or college, feel better informed about non-university options than their more senior counterparts.

### Before you made the decision to go to university did you feel you had a good understanding of the alternative options available to you?



## Student confidence

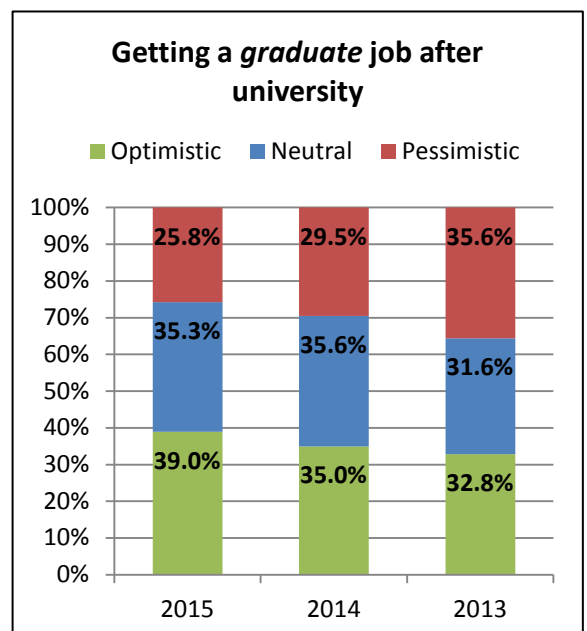
We asked students to rate how they feel about several graduate-related topics. Users are able to select a feeling of “optimistic”, “neutral” or “pessimistic”. This question-set has been a staple of our Career Confidence Surveys for several years.



When we looked at how students felt about “**getting a graduate job after university**”, we recorded an almost identical proportion of “**neutral**” students – 35.3 per cent – as last year.

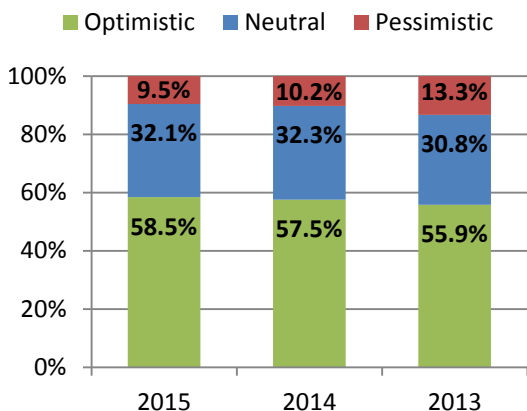
Despite that, **39 per cent** said they were optimistic about finding a graduate job – **4 per cent higher** than in 2014, and 6.2 per cent higher than 2013.

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## Student confidence (cont.)

### Getting *any* job after university



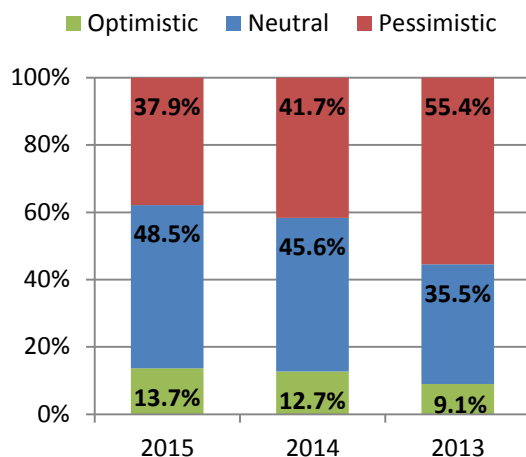
Here we asked respondents how they feel about getting *any* job after university (not a graduate-specific role, as on the previous page). Now at 58.5 per cent, **optimism increased** for a second consecutive year.

Students are clearly far more optimistic about their chances of finding a role which isn't aimed specifically at university graduates.

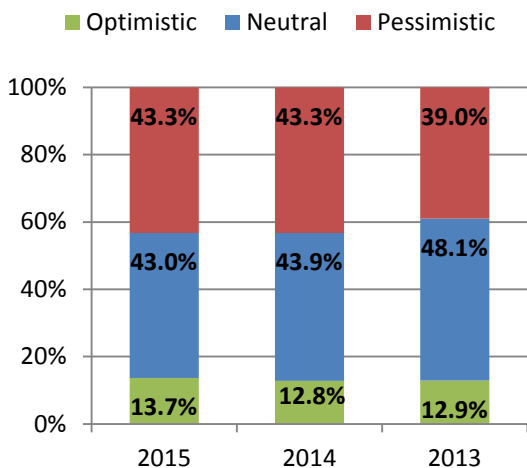
Results were clear when it came to the economy: students are **slightly more optimistic** than they have been in the previous two years.

The large proportion of pessimism in 2013 (55.4 per cent) **has shifted substantially into neutrality** this year, which now sits at 48.5 per cent – suggesting a mostly indifferent feeling towards the topic for almost half of respondents.

### The economy



### University fees



We recorded exactly the same level of pessimism towards university fees as last year, but **4.3 per cent more** than in 2013.

However, **optimism was also higher than in 2013**, by 0.8 per cent, revealing how feelings have generally shifted from a neutral standpoint in the past two years to a more definitive stance on the subject.

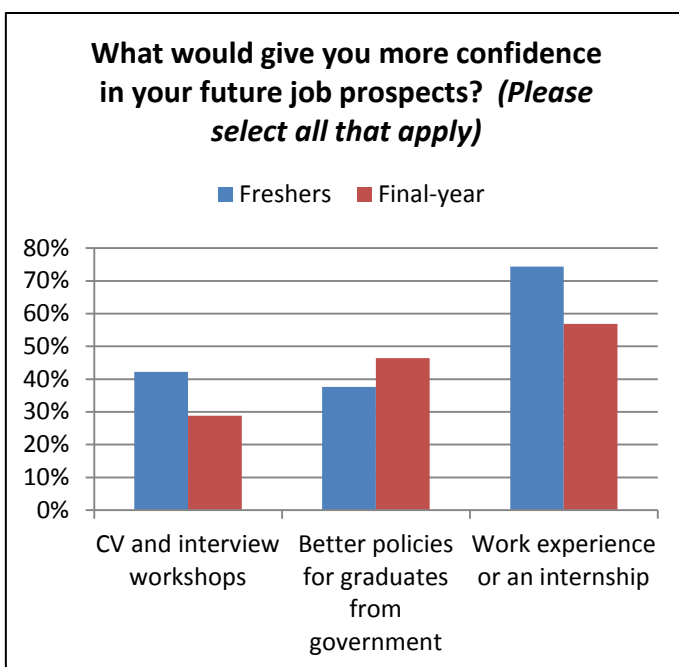
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## Gaining confidence

After gathering responses based around confidence levels and concerns over graduate roles, we moved on to finding out what could makes respondents feel *more* confident.

61.2 per cent of all respondents felt that **“work experience or an internship”** would make them feel more confident. Moving down the list, 44.1 per cent would feel confident with **“better policies for graduates from government”**.



Despite recording similar percentages on most choices, Freshers and Graduates differed substantially on three particular choices.

**74.4 per cent** of Freshers said that **“work experience or an internship”** would improve their career confidence, compared with just **56.9 per cent** of Final-year students, who put greater stock into **“better government polices for graduates”**.

Students in their final year have less faith in the confidence-boosting powers of **“CV and interview workshops”**: **just 28.2 per cent made this selection**, versus 42.2 of their younger, first-year peers.

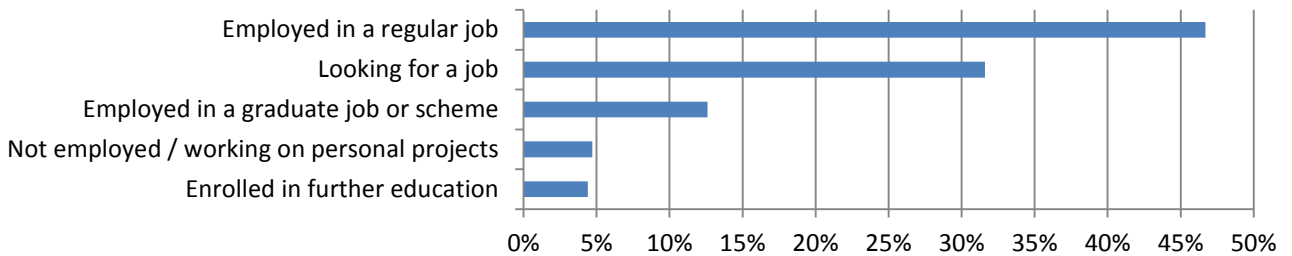


## Graduates – Where are they now?

We created a new path within the survey, specific to Graduate respondents, and posed them a series of questions to gain a better understanding of how their career is progressing post-university. Over **30 per cent** of our 2015 respondents were Graduates. Consequently their information is and will become useful in gaining a better understanding of what future grads can expect to face upon earning their degree.

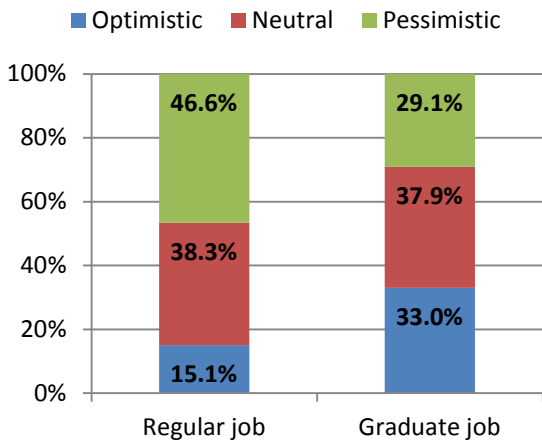
Only 12.6 per cent of respondents said they were “employed in a graduate job or scheme”. Although a very positive 46.7 per cent said they were “employed in a regular job”, 31.6 per cent of graduates were still “looking for a job”.

Now that you've left university, which of these options best describes your current status?

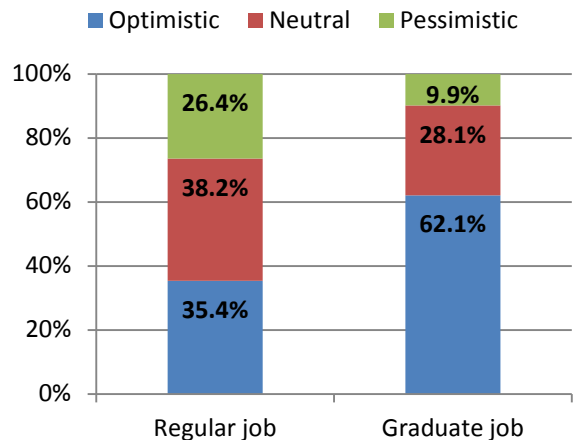


We spotted vastly different levels of optimism in respondents employed in “regular” jobs and those in “graduate” roles and schemes. **33 per cent** of graduate-job respondents felt optimistic about their salary – **more than double** that of regular-jobbers. Similarly when asked about their “current career prospects”, **just 35.5 per cent** of those in regular jobs were optimistic, compared to **62.1 per cent** of graduate-jobbers.

Your current salary



Your current career prospects



## Media coverage

We revisited the subject of media coverage and the effects it has on students and graduates.

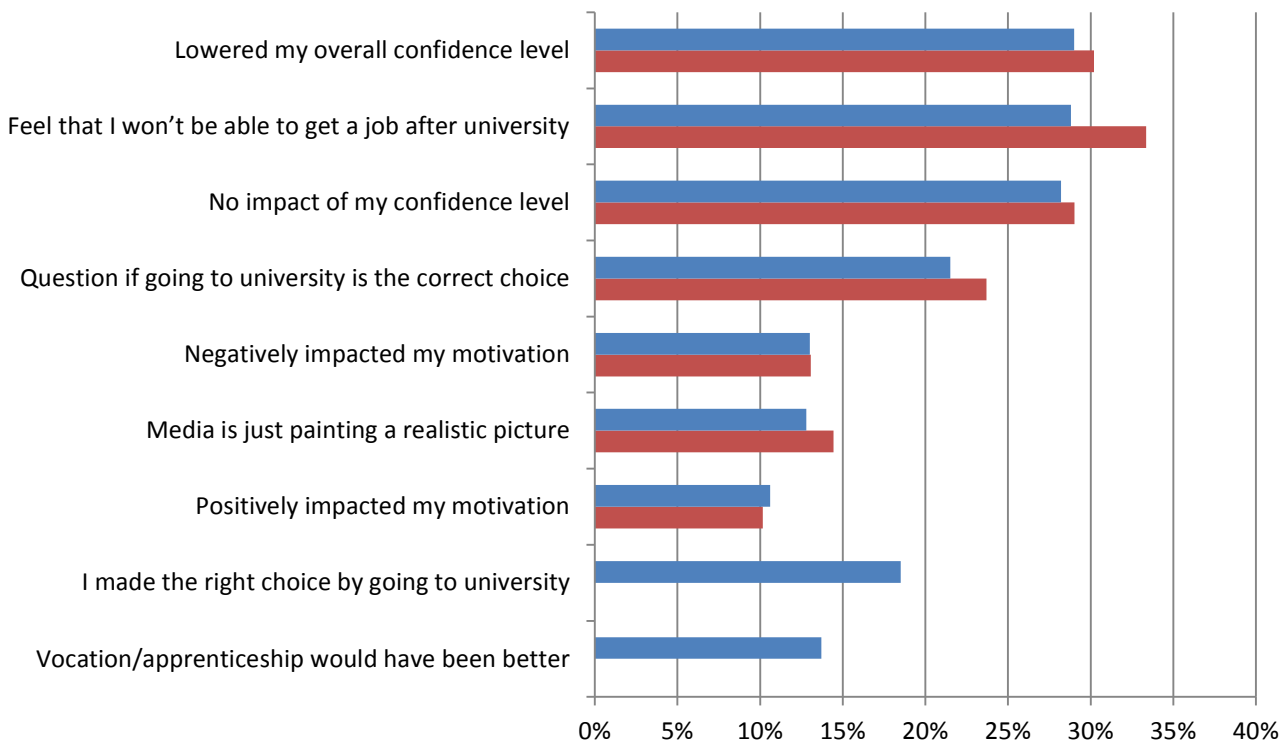
**29 per cent** of students and graduates said that media coverage had **lowered their overall confidence** in finding a job – the highest proportion of votes, but 1.2 per cent **lower** than last year. Inversely, a similar proportion - 28.2 per cent – said that media coverage had **had no impact**.

21.5 per cent **question whether going to university was the right choice**, but **18.5 per cent feel that it was** (a new option on this year’s survey).

Apprenticeships have been a hot topic this year due to upcoming general election, so we added another new option to this year’s survey – “vocation or apprenticeship would have been a better option” – and saw **just 13.7 of respondents selecting this**, suggesting that only a minute proportion of students and graduates feel that ‘school leaver’ options would have been more beneficial than university.

**How has media coverage impacted your confidence level in finding a job after university? (Please select all that apply)**

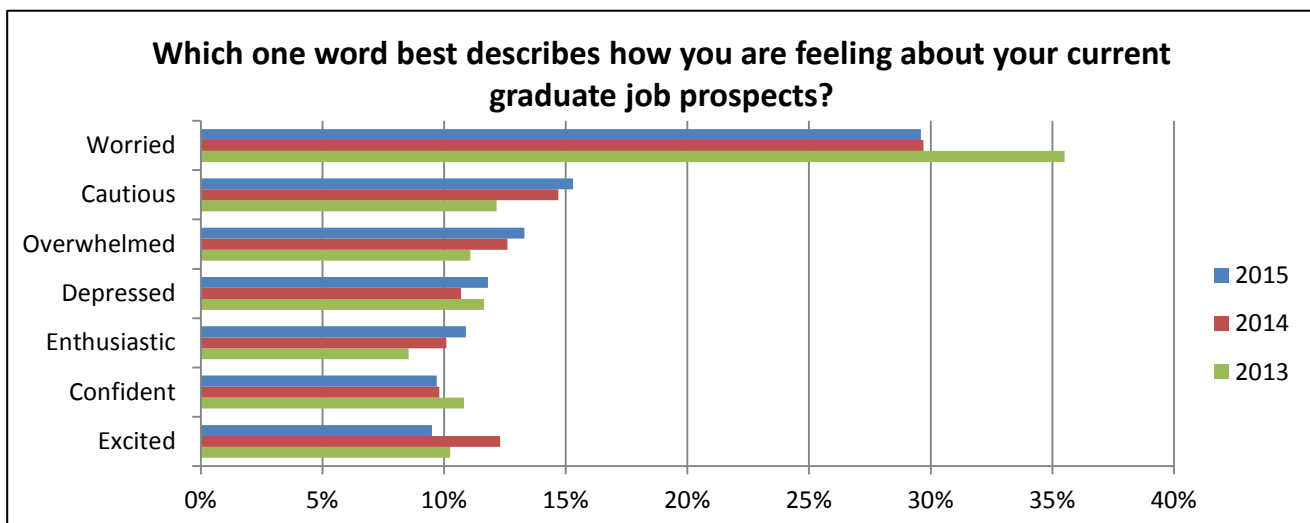
■ 2015 ■ 2014



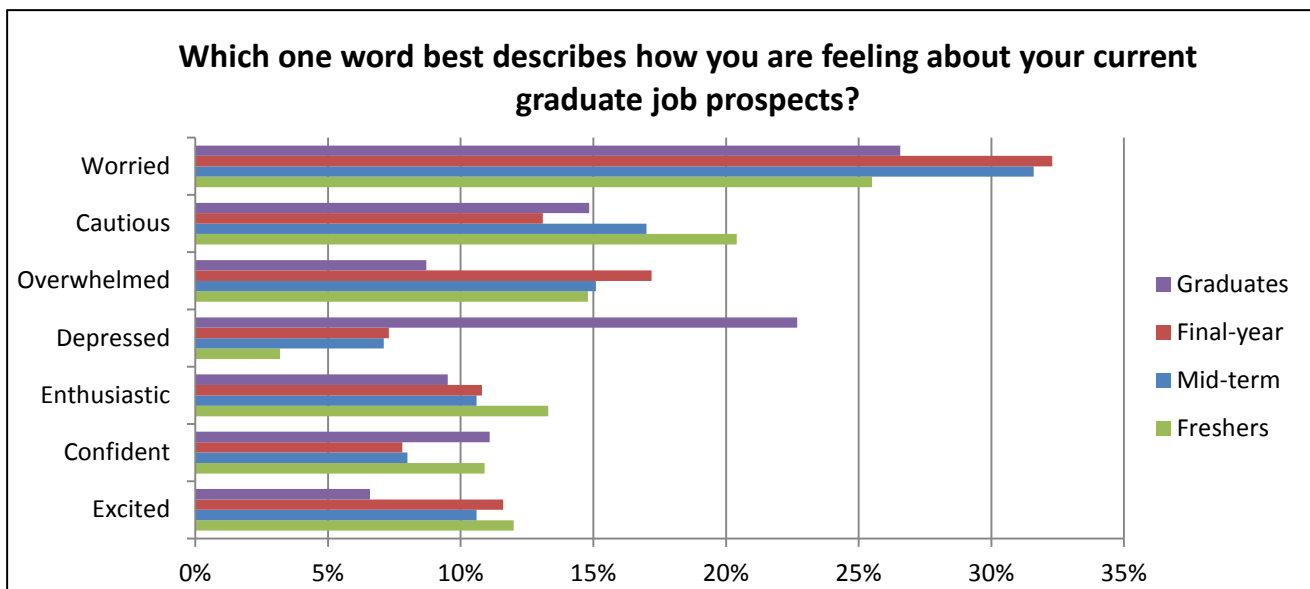
## In a word...

We asked respondents to choose one word to best describe how they're feeling about their job prospects. Like 2014, **"worried"** received the most votes by a considerable margin, at 29.6 per cent. This was, rather positively, **5.9 per cent down on 2013**.

There was a **relatively large annual drop in the proportion of "excited" respondents** – down by almost 3 per cent. **"Enthusiastic"** saw a slight increase – the **only 'positive'-type word to do so**.



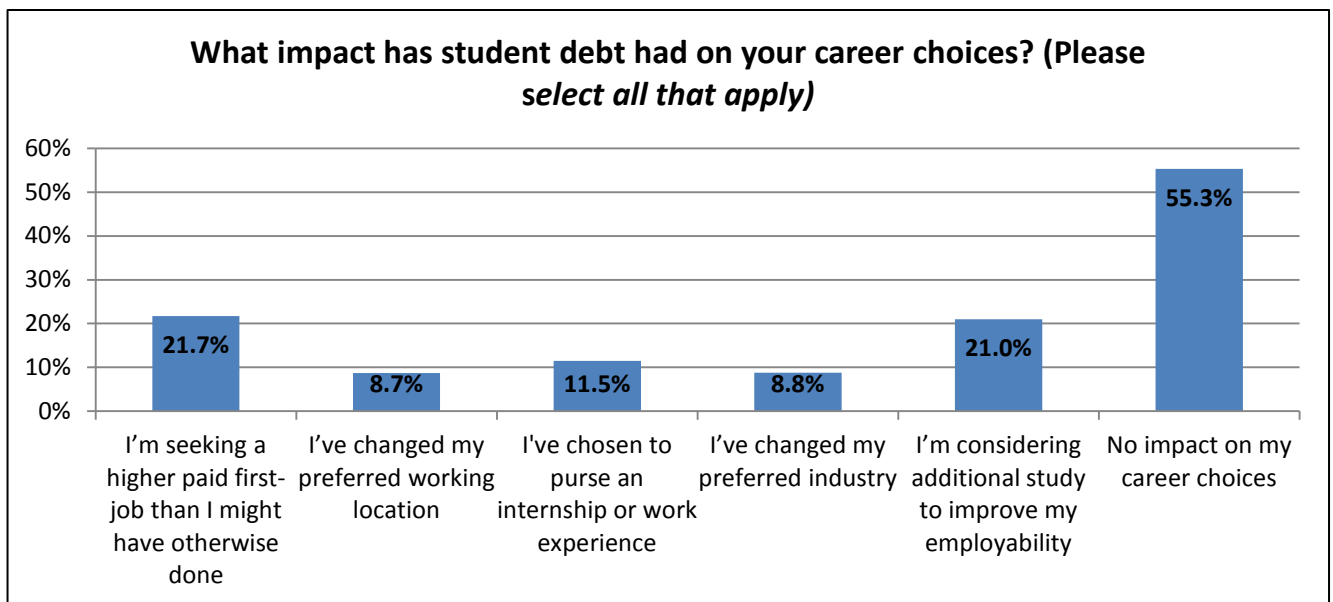
Broken down by university stage, we can see that these **"worried"** responses came from **students closer to graduating**. Freshers ranked highest it two out of the three 'positive' words: **"enthusiastic"** and **"excited"**. Most startling was that **only 3.2 per cent of Freshers felt "depressed"**, compared to almost a quarter (22.7 per cent) of Graduates.



## Student debt

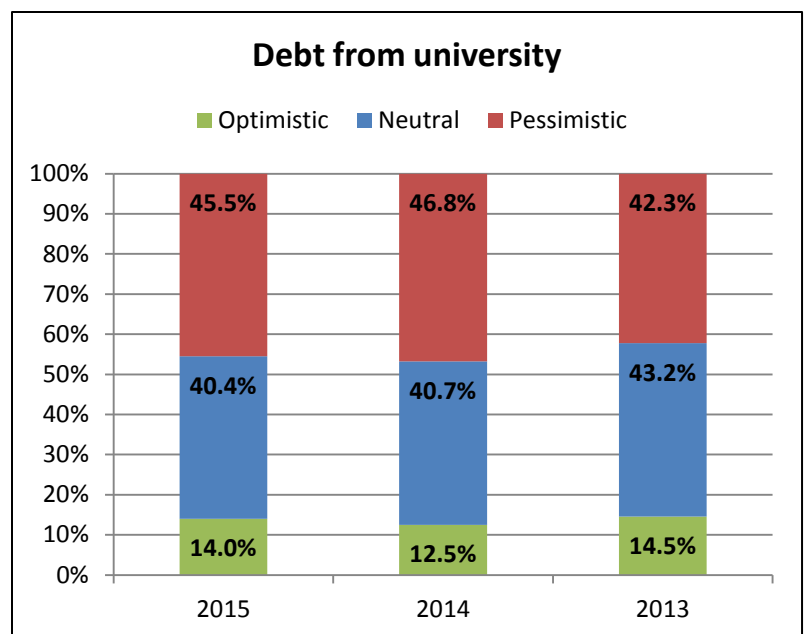
We were interested in finding out what impact, if any, student debt is having on students.

A **55.3 per cent** majority said that student debt has had “**no impact on my career choices**”. 21.7 per cent have changed tact and intend to look for a “**higher paid job**”. Just 8.8 per cent said they would “change [their] preferred industry”.



Optimism towards “**debt from university**” stood at 14 per cent – 1.5 per cent higher than last year, but not quite back to the 2013 high of 14.5 per cent.

**Pessimism reduced by 1.3 per cent** compared to last year, but is greater than it was in 2013.



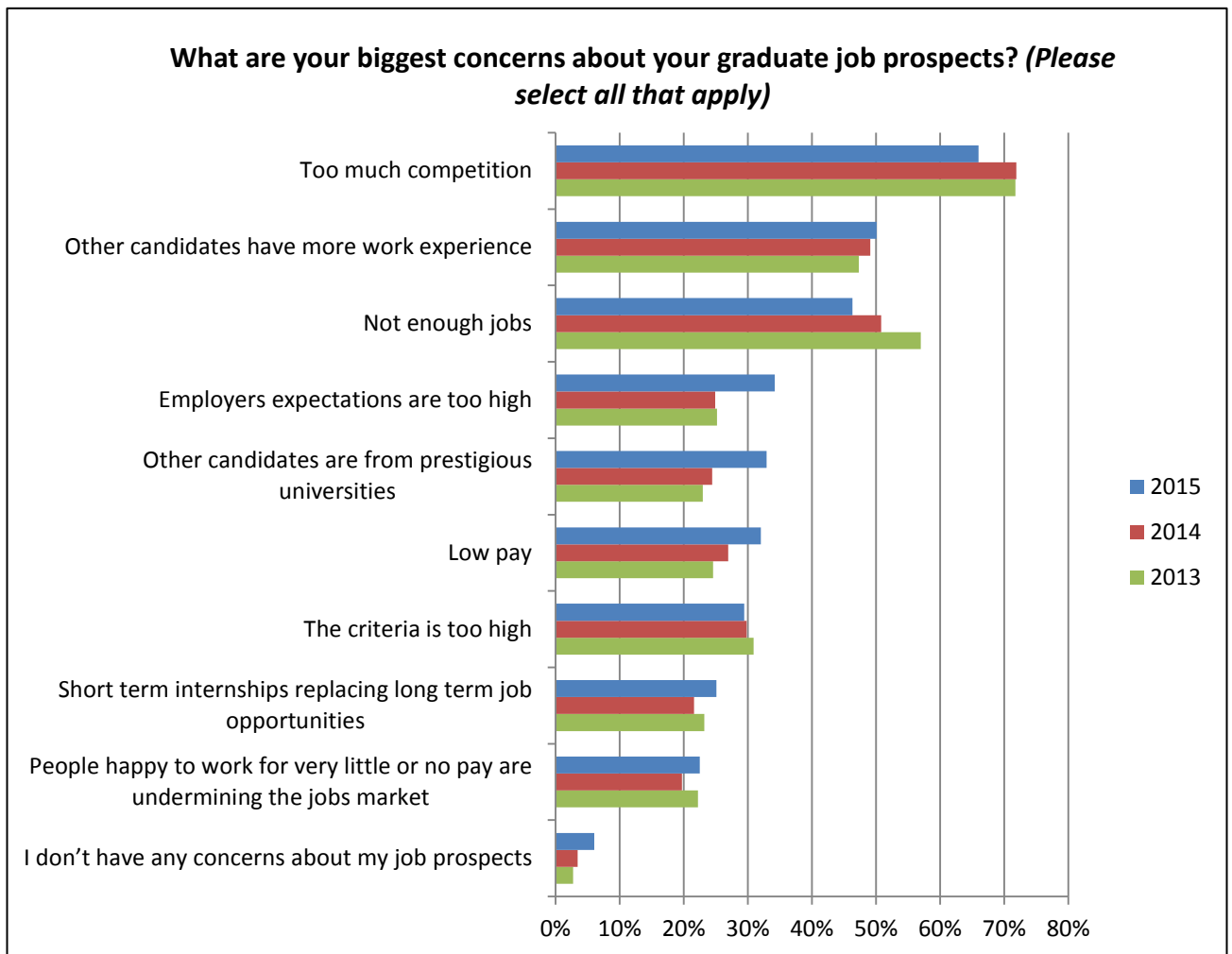
## Concerns

We asked our respondents to tell us what concerns them most about their graduate job prospects. Despite ranking at 5.9 per cent lower than last year, **“too much competition”** took the greatest share of votes, with **66 per cent** of all respondents choosing this answer.

**“Not enough jobs”** has steadily decreased for two consecutive years – now concerning to just 46.3 per cent of respondents, compared with 57 per cent in 2013 – suggesting relatively recent improvements in the economy *are* being felt.

Worries that **“employers expectations are too high”** rose by a substantial 9.3 per cent year-on-year, as did **“other candidates are from prestigious universities”**, by 8.5 per cent.

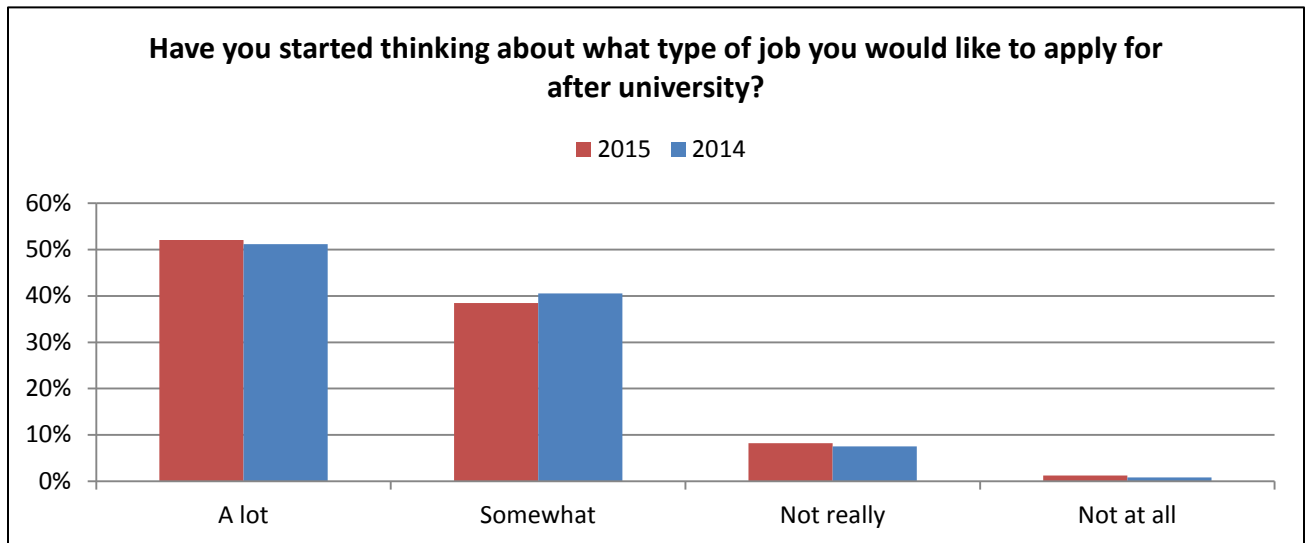
**“Low pay”** and **“people happy to work for little or no money...”** saw annual increases of 5.1 and 2.8 per cent, respectively, indicating increased concern over salaries and pay in general.



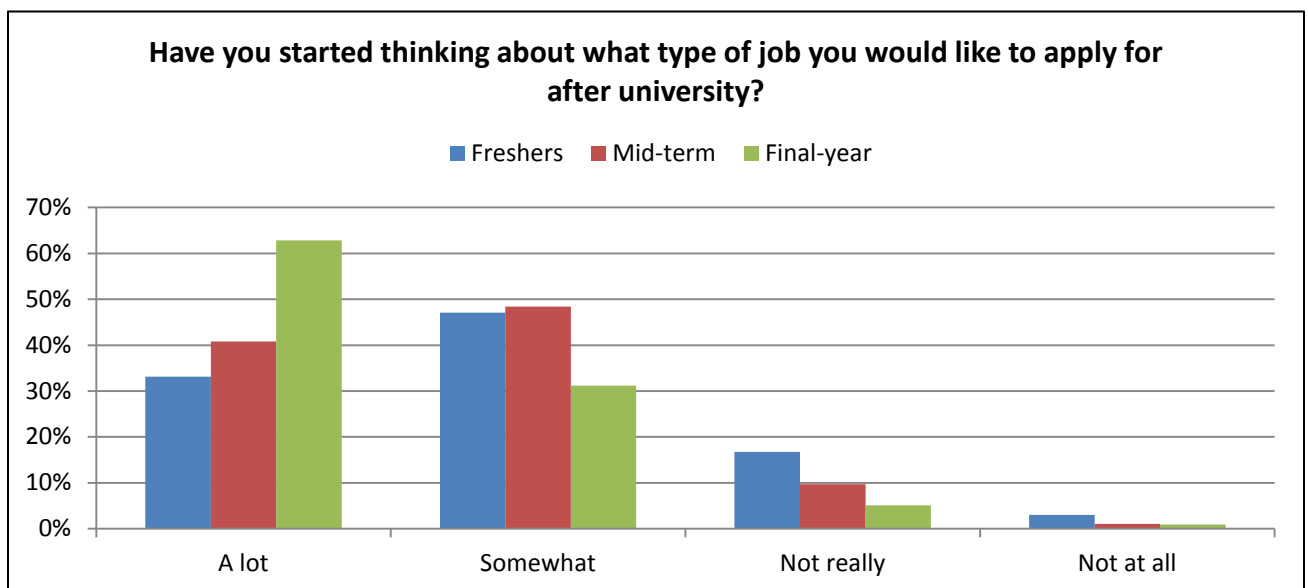
## Career Planning

We asked our respondents to tell us whether or not they have been thinking about the types of job they would like to apply for after university, and how often they have been.

We monitored little change and recorded similar results as in 2014. **“A lot”** and **“somewhat”**, combined, made up **90.6 per cent** of all responses. Unsurprisingly, **“not at all”** took just **1.2 per cent of 2015 votes**. The majority of the overall demographic appear to be taking things seriously.



When we divided the responses into university stage groups, it was clear to see that **students increase the amount of time thinking about jobs the further into their course they get**. 33.2 per cent of Freshers said they were thinking about jobs **“a lot”**, but this gradually increased to **40.8 per cent** for Mid-termers, and ended on a sizable **62.8 per cent** for Final-year students.



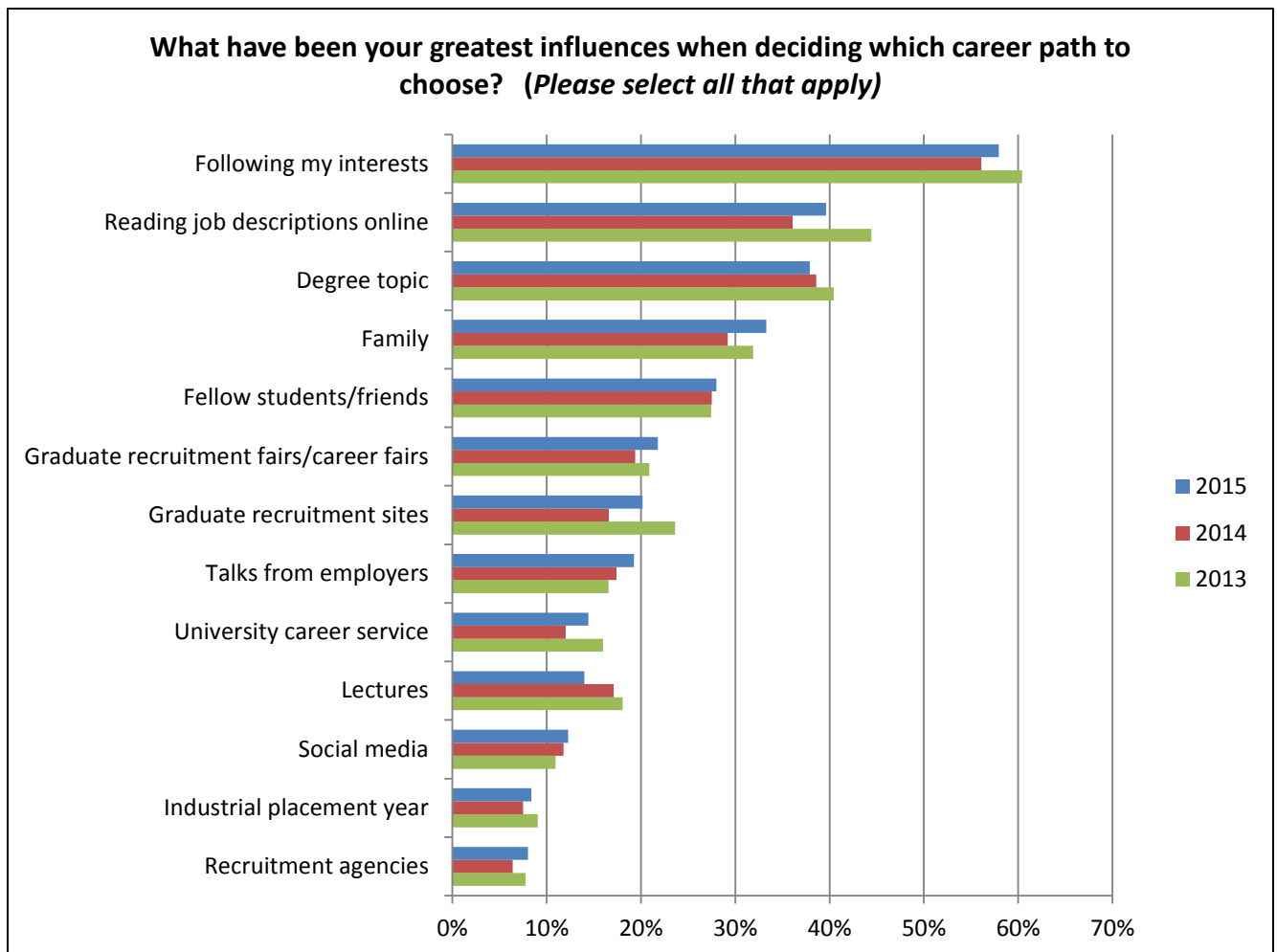
## Influences

We asked our respondents to tell us what has influenced their choice of career path. The results of almost every option matched similar trending patterns recorded in our two previous Career Confidence surveys.

For a second consecutive year **“following my interests”** ranked as the top influencer, with 57.9 per cent of respondents choosing this option.

Suggesting that **technology is playing an ever-increasing role in influencing students**, “Graduate recruitment sites” increased by 3.5 per cent year on year, and **“social media” saw a rise for a second year running**.

Interestingly, **“lectures”** and **“degree topic”** seem to be influencing students less and less: both have trended downward for a second consecutive year.



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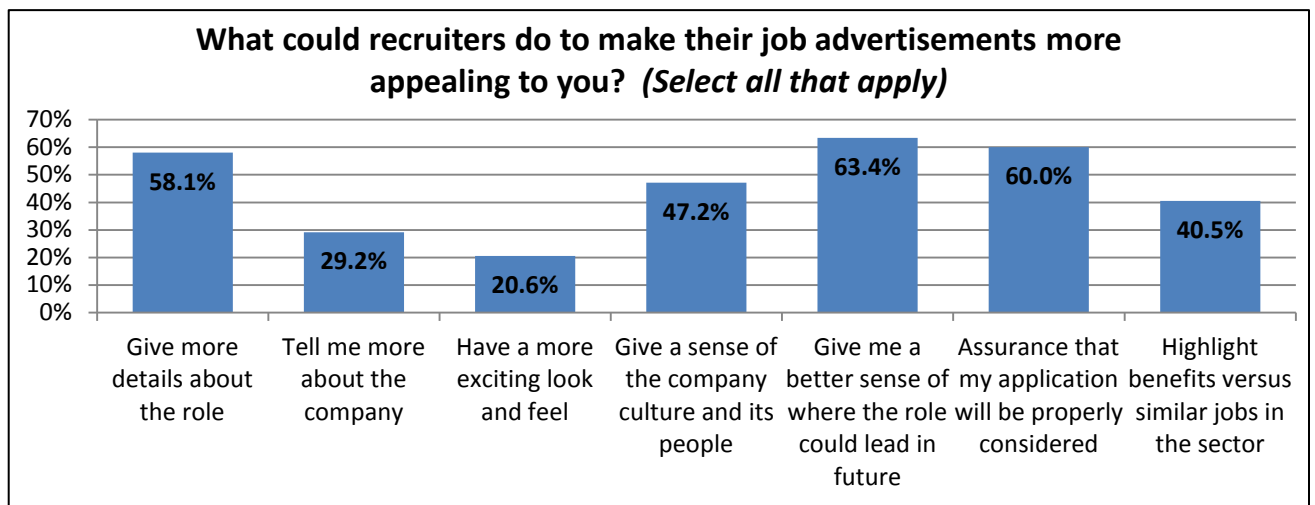
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## Job prospecting

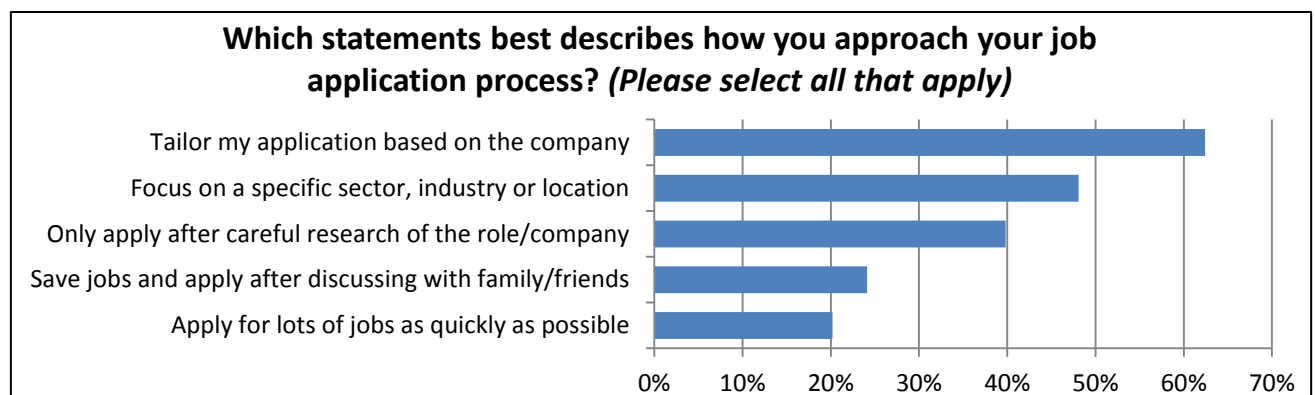
We asked our audience what would make graduate job advertisements more appealing to them, hence making them more likely to push that “apply” button or send in that application form.

The results show that most graduates won’t be wholly satisfied by a job advert having “a more exciting look and feel” – only **20.6 per cent** of respondents said this would make the advertisement more appealing to them.

The majority of selection – 63.4 per cent – revealed that **students want employers to provide them with more information on “where the role could lead in future”**, indicating that grads are not just focused on short-term pledges. 60 per cent would also like “assurance that [their] application will be properly considered”.



We then asked users how they typically approach their job application process. We monitored almost no change among separate university stage groups. **62.4 per cent tailor their application to the specific company they are applying to** – arguably a far better method for ensuring success, as opposed to “I apply for lots of jobs as quickly as possible”, which was selected by just 20.2 per cent of students and graduates.

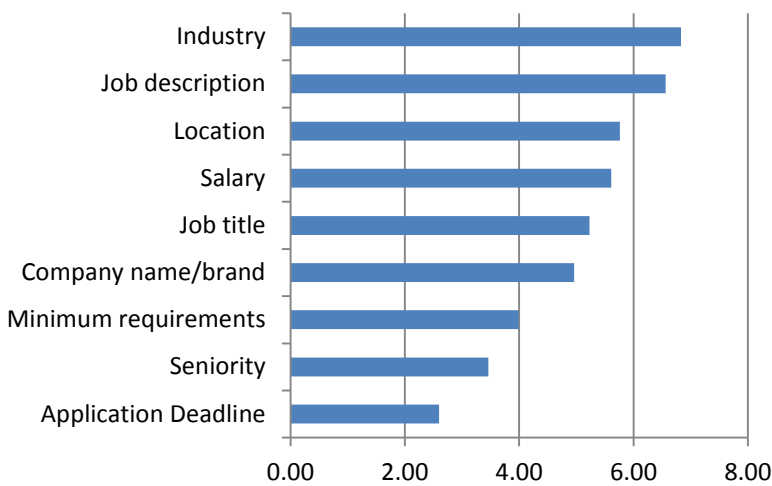




## Job prospecting (cont.)

We sought to find out which criteria graduates give the most consideration to when applying for a job. Students were presented with nine criteria and asked to rank them from 1 to 9. The criteria is then given a reversed, weighted score out of 9, based on where the respondents ranked them most often.

**Please list in order of importance, what is it you look for when searching for a graduate role?**



Perhaps unsurprising given that most students will take the common-sense approach of applying for a role in line with their degree subject, **“industry” ranked as most important**, with a score of 6.8 out of 9.

Students seem to be accepting of their more-than-likely entry-level position upon starting work after university: **“seniority” ranked second-lowest at 3.5 out of 9.**

We then moved on to what graduates believe will be most important to them when they envisage their future role, or what is important to them *right now* based on any work experience.

**“Work-life & flexibility” ranked top**, appearing on 53.3 per cent of our users’ choices.

Regardless of the user’s university stage, “recognition”, “high level of responsibility” and “prestige of company” **consistently ranked in the bottom three.**

Interestingly, **“fun working environment”** was only chosen 34 per cent of the time for Final-year students, compared to 41.5 per cent of First-years (*not shown on chart*).

**Which three factors do you think will be most important to you in your current or future role?**





## Closing statement

We were incredibly happy with our 2015 Career Confidence Survey and the insight we were able to gain from our key demographics. Our database of students and graduates is leaner and more targeted than ever before, and consequently we were able to attract a record number of respondents to ensure a comprehensive study. We were pleased to see that overall optimism towards finding a job after university has steadily increased over the years, but concerns have shifted to other factors.

Our 2015 findings suggest that students are now less concerned about the number of graduate jobs available than they were previously, but are becoming increasingly wary of competition from their fellow graduates. We're already moulding our 2016 survey to capture even more useful data on these shifting concerns.

## Recommendations

- Employers should increasingly leverage the power of **social media** to better influence the student demographic
- When applying for jobs, students want to see **better examples of where the role could lead to in future**, and are less invested in the design of the advertisement. "Level of responsibility" was also shown to be a minimal motivator
- Most respondents have yet to begin their long-term careers, yet "work/life balance and flexibility" is *already* their most sought after career benefit. Employers should make every attempt at **highlighting how their roles can offer this**
- **Don't let the learning end:** "mentoring" was shown as a key confidence booster and "training and development" was the second most important first-job consideration for respondents. Students will **continue to expect** employers to provide both in their graduate programmes
- Don't neglect company recruitment portals. Graduate recruitment sites were shown to be the most popular method of job-prospecting for students and graduates, but "**company websites**" was a not-too-distant second
- The vast majority of students and graduates are tailoring their application to the specific role and company they are applying to. **They'd like this effort reflected** on the employers' side, as "assurances that my application will be *properly* considered" was shown to be the second most appealing criteria of a job advert