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Basis of release: Unrestricted, for immediate release

Poor job market could lead to unprecedented levels of postgraduate study applications

New research by specialist student research agency Opinionpanel has revealed that half the full-time undergraduate students due to graduate this summer are seriously considering postgraduate study.

Postgraduate possibilities

Twenty four percent have applied for postgraduate study to date, but a further 26% say they are very or quite likely to apply in the future (Figure 1). Postgraduate study is particularly popular amongst those studying at Russell Group and other old universities where almost a third of final year students have already applied for postgraduate study.

Figure 1: How likely are you to apply for postgraduate study starting after you complete your undergraduate study?

	Final-year students	Final-year – Russell Group (R.G.)	Final-year– Non-R.G. old universities	Final-year – New universities
Total	244	49	59	113
Already applied	24%	29%	34%	17%
Very likely	12%	12%	13%	13%
Quite likely	14%	18%	8%	13%

Based on the net intention (those who are overall more likely to go into postgraduate study minus the number who are overall less likely), finalists are seven percent more likely to choose postgraduate study as a result of the recession. For students not yet in their penultimate or final year, however, the current economic climate seems to be putting students off, with a net of five percent being *less* likely to complete a postgraduate course, perhaps because of the daunting prospect of more debt or additional study.

Figure 2: Are you more or less likely to go into postgraduate study as a result of the recession?

Impact of recession	Total	Final-year students	Penultimate-year students	All other students
Total	1,002	238	320	444
Much more likely	6%	8%	8%	3%
Somewhat more likely	12%	17%	13%	8%
Neutral - the recession won't make a difference	60%	55%	59%	64%
Somewhat less likely	12%	11%	11%	12%
Much less likely	5%	6%	4%	4%
NET IMPACT	+1%	+7%	+6%	-5%

Students surveyed said that they were more likely to go on to do postgraduate study because the lack of graduate jobs means that there is more need to stand out from the crowd.

"I didn't get any job offers from the places I applied to, as there were more applicants per job, and those with postgraduate education were more desirable." Final year student, studying Biological Sciences at a Russell Group university.

Students who are now less likely to go on to do postgraduate study mainly cited finances as their major point of concern for starting postgraduate study in the economic downturn.

“Although it is harder to find a job at the moment, it may be even more difficult when I graduate from a postgraduate course and so I will be in even more debt and with little gain to be made.” Final year student, studying Business Studies at a new university.

Class of 2009 forced to rethink their career expectations

The reality of the recession is clearly forcing final-year students to reappraise their plans in a big way. While just over half the students who are not yet in their final or penultimate year of study expect to take a graduate-level job after they complete university, only 34% of the current crop of final-year students expect the same. Conversely, 15% of students in their final year now expect to take a non-graduate-level role (part-time or full-time), compared to just over one percent of students who are not yet in their final or penultimate year of study. Clearly, students are having to seriously downgrade their expectations. See Figure 3.

At the time of the fieldwork, one in five finalists (19%) had actually secured and accepted a graduate-level job.

“[I plan to] keep looking for a graduate job relevant to my degree. Possibly get a part-time job whilst I look for something more permanent.” Final year student, studying Chemistry at a Russell Group university.

Figure 3: What are your plans for after you graduate?

Plans for after graduation	Total	Final-year students	Penultimate -year students	All other students
Total	1,002	238	320	444
Take a graduate-level job (i.e. one where a degree is required)	45%	34%	43%	52%
Do a postgraduate course	27%	28%	26%	26%
Take a year out	9%	11%	10%	8%
Take a non-graduate-level full-time role	4%	10%	5%	1%
Do some volunteering	3%	3%	4%	2%
Take a part-time (non-graduate-level) role	2%	5%	1%	*%

Final-year students at new universities are most likely to say that they plan to take a graduate-level job, as shown in Figure 4 below. This may be because of the more vocational nature of many degree courses offered at these institutions as well as a lower level of interest in postgraduate study. Postgraduate study, on the other hand, is more popular amongst students at old universities.

Figure 4: What are your plans for after you graduate? – Final-year students

Plans for after graduation	Students at old universities (including R.G.)	Students at new universities
Total	108	113
Take a graduate-level job (i.e. one where a degree is required)	25%	42%
Do a postgraduate course	36%	21%
Take a year out	16%	6%
Take a non-graduate-level full-time role	6%	12%
Do some volunteering	4%	3%
Take a part-time (non-graduate-level) role	2%	7%

Phil Crofts, Research Director at Opinionpanel, said *“Our research shows that many final-year students are feeling pressured to go into postgraduate study, either by a perceived need to gain further qualifications to compete in the job market, or as a means of avoiding that competition. The danger is that after spending time and money gaining a postgraduate degree some students will find themselves overqualified. However, on the macro level, there could be a positive outcome with a better educated workforce and a country more able to compete in the global knowledge economy.”*

NOTES

Methodology

This research is based on findings from an online survey of 1,002 full-time undergraduate students. The sample was representative based on quotas set for course year, gender and university type (Russell Group, other Old universities, New universities and Specialist institutions). The fieldwork took place from 6th May 2009 – 7th May 2009 and included students from 133 universities. All respondents were members of The Student Panel, Opinionpanel’s proprietary online panel of 60,000 students.

Citation

To comply with the MRS Code, the following facts need to be included in the story when this research is cited:-

- The fact that Opinionpanel Research conducted the survey
- Fieldwork dates
- The universe effectively represented (full-time undergraduate students at UK higher education institutions)
- The sample size (1,002)

This information can be gathered into a statement similar to the one below:

“Fieldwork for this research was conducted by Opinionpanel Ltd between 6th and 7th of May 2009. The sample consisted of 1,002 interviews with students at 133 higher education (HE) institutions representative of the UK HE population in terms of gender, year group and university type.”

When citing this research please note:-

- ‘Opinionpanel’ is one word
- Please point any hyperlinks to www.opinionpanel.co.uk

Notes to Editors

1. Opinionpanel Research

Opinionpanel is the independent research business set up to represent the views of students and young people to social and market researchers, policy makers and recruiters. Founded in 2004, Opinionpanel owns and manages the UK’s largest specialist panels of students before, during and after their time at university: The Future Panel, The Student Panel, The Graduate Panel and, privately The Learner Panel for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Opinionpanel’s services run from basic sample provision to detailed full-service projects incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods. By blending a knowledge of students, higher education and commercial marketing with access to our market-leading panels and sector knowledge, Opinionpanel brings a fresh and insightful approach to the clients they serve. A commitment to high-quality research is at the heart of Opinionpanel’s business. Opinionpanel is a Market Research Society (MRS) Company Partner.

2. Press enquiries to Phil Crofts, Research Director or Ben Marks, Managing Director, Opinionpanel
3. For full set of data tables see the Research section of our website www.opinionpanel.co.uk

Phil Crofts
Research Director
Opinionpanel Ltd

Opinionpanel Ltd
Highbury Crescent Rooms
70 Ronalds Road
London N5 1XA

t: 020 7288 8789
f: 020 7288 8772
e: info@opinionpanel.co.uk
w: www.opinionpanel.co.uk

OpinionpanelResearch

Highbury Crescent Rooms
70 Ronalds Road
London N5 1XA

T: 020 7288 8789
F: 020 7288 8772
E: Philip@opinionpanel.co.uk
W: www.opinionpanel.co.uk

Ben Marks
Managing Director
Opinionpanel Ltd
Highbury Crescent Rooms
70 Ronalds Road
London N5 1XA

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F: 020 7288 8772
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W: www.opinionpanel.co.uk