

# Opinionpanel

Researching students and young people



**We're your future...**  
*Important messages from recent  
graduates to employers*

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## Table of contents

Introduction	3
Summary	4
Economic recession	5
Messages from recent graduates to employers	10
Appendix	17
Methodology	18
Sample profile	19
About us	21

## Introduction

There's been a lot of press coverage concerning the likely fate of this year's graduates as they enter the jobs market, close to the start of the first recession for around two decades.

The Association of Graduate Recruiters' (AGR) recent winter survey offered advice from employers to graduates, namely:

- conduct rigorous research into potential employers and sectors,
- apply early and widen jobs criteria,
- secure temporary paid employment,
- gain graduate-level experience in another sector, if unsuccessful in first-choice sector.

We felt prompted to ask recent graduates if they had any advice for employers – after all, we know that effective communication happens when there is a continuous process of exchange of views and ideas between two or more parties. Recent graduates are clearly perceived as being 'in the firing line' (whether or not that's actually true) and graduate recruiters ought to take time out to understand the perceptions of the group they have spent so much time and money courting for the past decade.

Using our Graduate Omnibus Survey, we asked over 500 recent graduates (who had been out of university for up to three years) about their jobs, the effect the current economic crisis was having on them and what advice they would like to give to the graduate recruitment community. The nature of the questions asked of the panel means that the results are of a more qualitative nature, which provides great understanding of the feelings of the panel but are not necessarily an indication of the 'market size' of these messages.

## Summary

### **Over half of recent graduates feel they have been affected by the recession:**

- Among the most recent graduates, 39% were employed in graduate jobs (by graduate job we mean a job that you need a degree to hold)
- Overall, graduates' greatest worries relate to: the lack of jobs in the market, job security and financial issues (such as the recession's effects on savings, the ability to get loans and having to 'cut back' on non-essential items)
- Recent graduates with a graduate-level job are particularly concerned about their personal financial position
- Recent graduates without a graduate-level job, however, are more concerned about the state of the jobs market

### **Messages that recent graduates want to give to graduate employers:**

- Don't stop recruiting
- Provide (more) internships / work experience opportunities
- Treat graduates fairly in the recruitment process / keep graduates informed
- When looking for candidates, cast your net wider

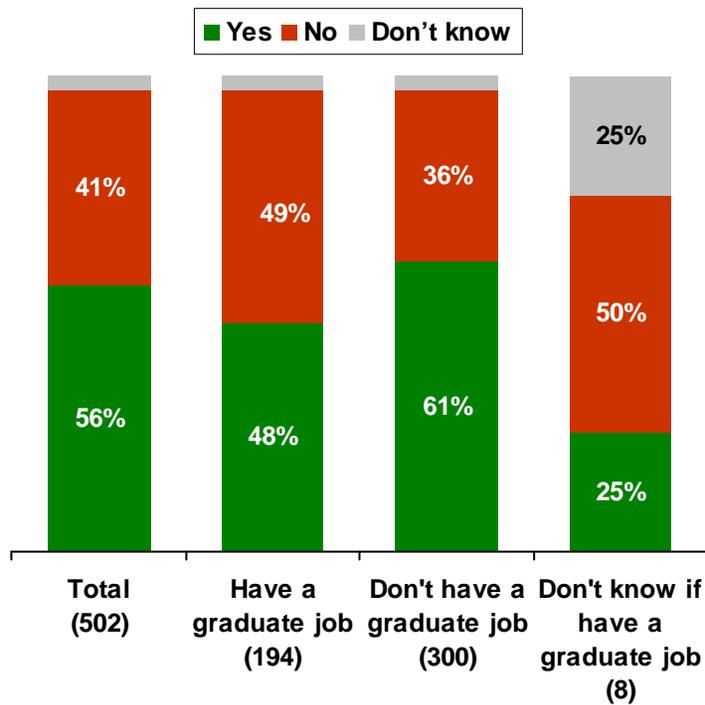
## Economic recession

How is it affecting graduates, if at all?

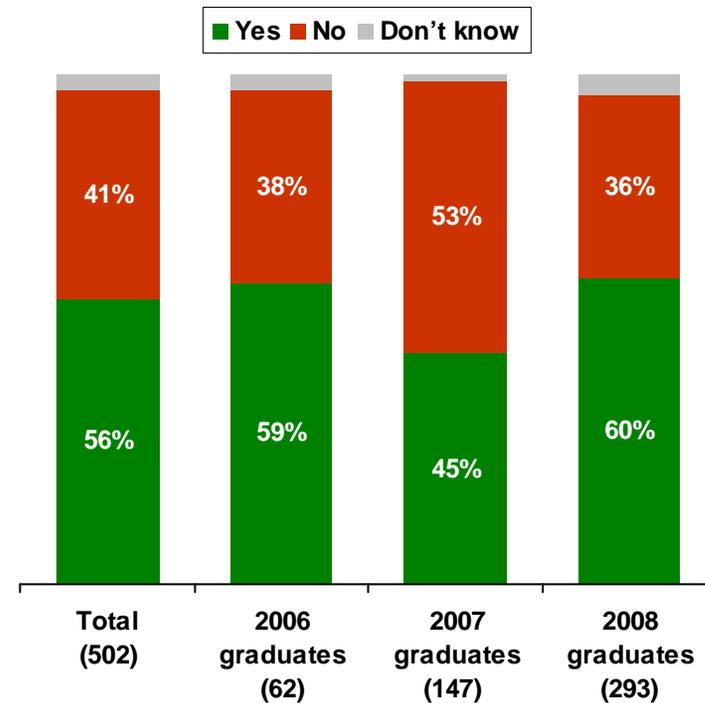
# Have you been affected by the recession?

Those who are not in a graduate-level job are more likely to feel that they have been affected by the recession than those in a graduate-level role.

Have you been affected by the economic recession?



Have you been affected by the economic recession?

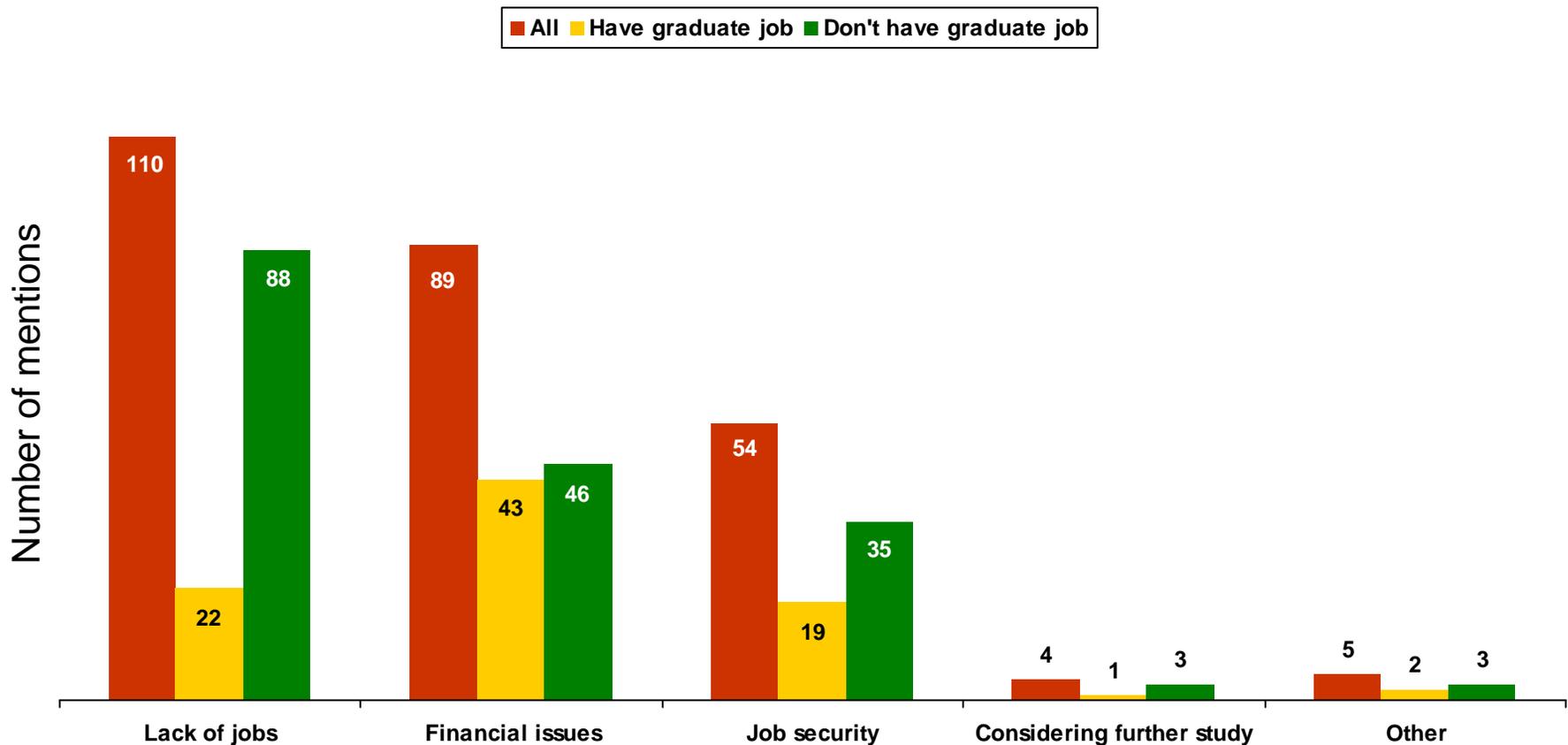


Rec1: Do you feel you have been affected by the economic recession?.

Base: All responding (502)

## How have you been affected by the recession?

Those who are not in graduate-level jobs are more likely to be worried about the jobs market, while those in a graduate-level job are more likely to feel they've been affected by the recession's impact on their personal finances (e.g. access to mortgages and loans)



Rec2: How have you been affected by the economic recession?

Base: Those who explained (264), 2 respondents didn't know if they had a graduate job and have been excluded from this analysis

## How have you been affected? In your own words

Recent graduates have been affected by the recession in terms of downturns in the job market, increase in workloads, the worry of redundancy and impact on their finances.

*"Difficulty finding work.  
Almost got a job at  
Woolworths, which would  
not have ended pleasantly."*

**Male, Psychology,  
University of  
Hertfordshire, 2008  
graduate**

*"I have less  
money and can't  
afford to buy the  
things I want to."*

**Female,  
Pharmacology,  
University of  
Sunderland,  
2006 graduate**

*"In a temporary  
position ...due to  
recession the funding  
isn't there and other  
people within the  
workforce have  
already been made  
redundant."*

**Female, Physical  
geography,  
Scottish  
Agricultural  
College, 2008  
graduate**

*"Job insecurity, no  
bonus, no  
increments. Rising  
costs."* **Male,  
Economics,  
University College  
London, 2007  
graduate**

*"My savings are no  
longer realistically  
gaining in value.  
Housing now should  
be more affordable  
to me, but  
mortgages are less  
available to take  
advantage of that."*  
**Male, Philosophy,  
University of  
Sheffield, 2006  
graduate**



**Rec2:** How have you been affected by the economic recession?

**Base:** Those who explained (264)

Quotes in red are from recent graduates without a graduate-level job, quotes in green are from those who do have a graduate-level job

## Anxieties due to combination of factors

Worries are due to the sum of the recession effects: job security; cost of living; lack of mortgages; etc.

*"I got my job last August. In October the company (which is small, with only 20 members of staff at the time) made 5 people redundant. I was still in my probation period and was concerned that I would lose my position. I have found that retailers are spending less and less on marketing which is affecting the business I work for and the commission I earn. As I'm not a homeowner the reductions in the base rate of interest has affected me negatively as my savings rates have plummeted and I may be just as well off if I left all of my money under my bed in a safe! Positively, I have found that being a consumer is actually ok, in terms of sales & reductions everywhere and eating out has become cheaper."* **Female, History, University of Leeds, 2008 graduate**

**Rec2:** How have you been affected by the economic recession?

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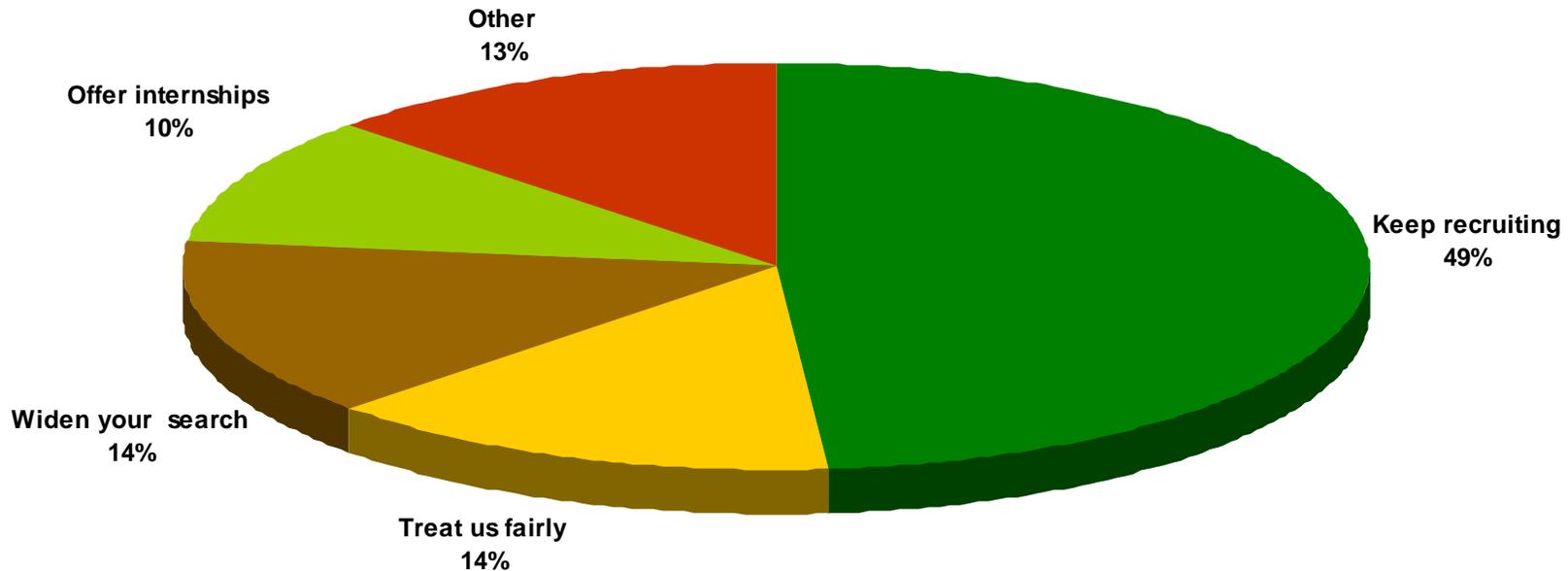
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## Messages from recent graduates to employers

Over 150 panellists left a message.  
We've grouped them into key themes ...

## Themes - summary

Nearly half of the comments left by our graduates concerned them wanting employers to continue with recruiting graduates, even in this climate. They suggest recruiters should broaden their choice of target universities and the minimum degree class requirements they set, in order to gain a more diverse workforce. They advocate the expansion of work experience schemes/internships and wanted to be treated fairly when going through the recruitment process, for example getting a timely response from recruiters.



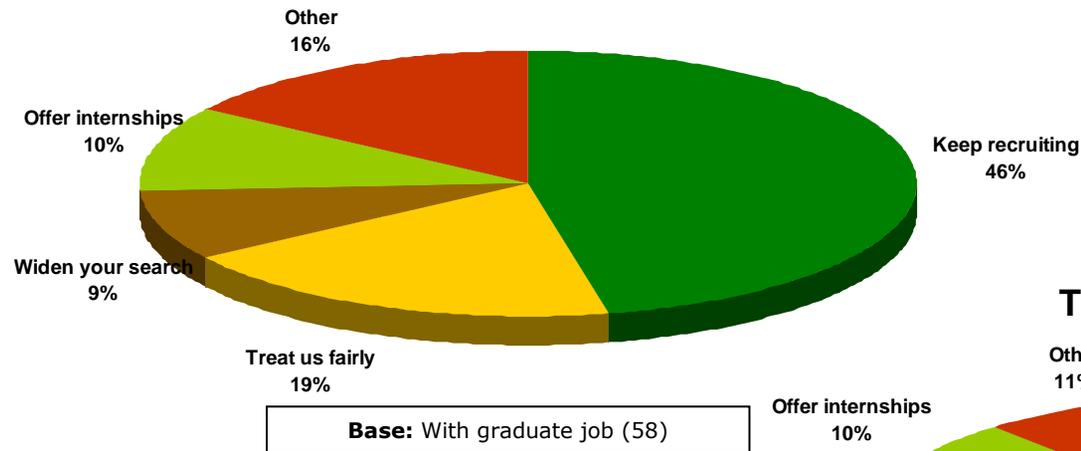
Rec3: What message, if any, would you give to graduate employers right now?

Base: Those who offered advice (156)

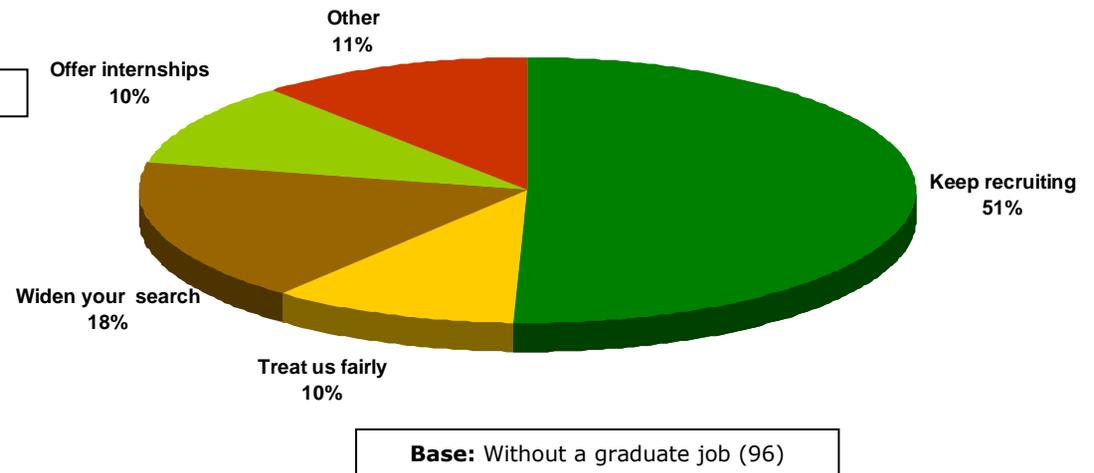
# Key themes

This section is based on the free-text comments made by recent graduates, so should reflect the issues of greatest concern. The key theme (keep recruiting) was mentioned most by both those with, and those without, graduate-level jobs. Those with graduate jobs were, however, more likely to spontaneously mention their desire to be treated fairly. Those without made more comments about widening employers recruitment searches.

Those with graduate job



Those without graduate job

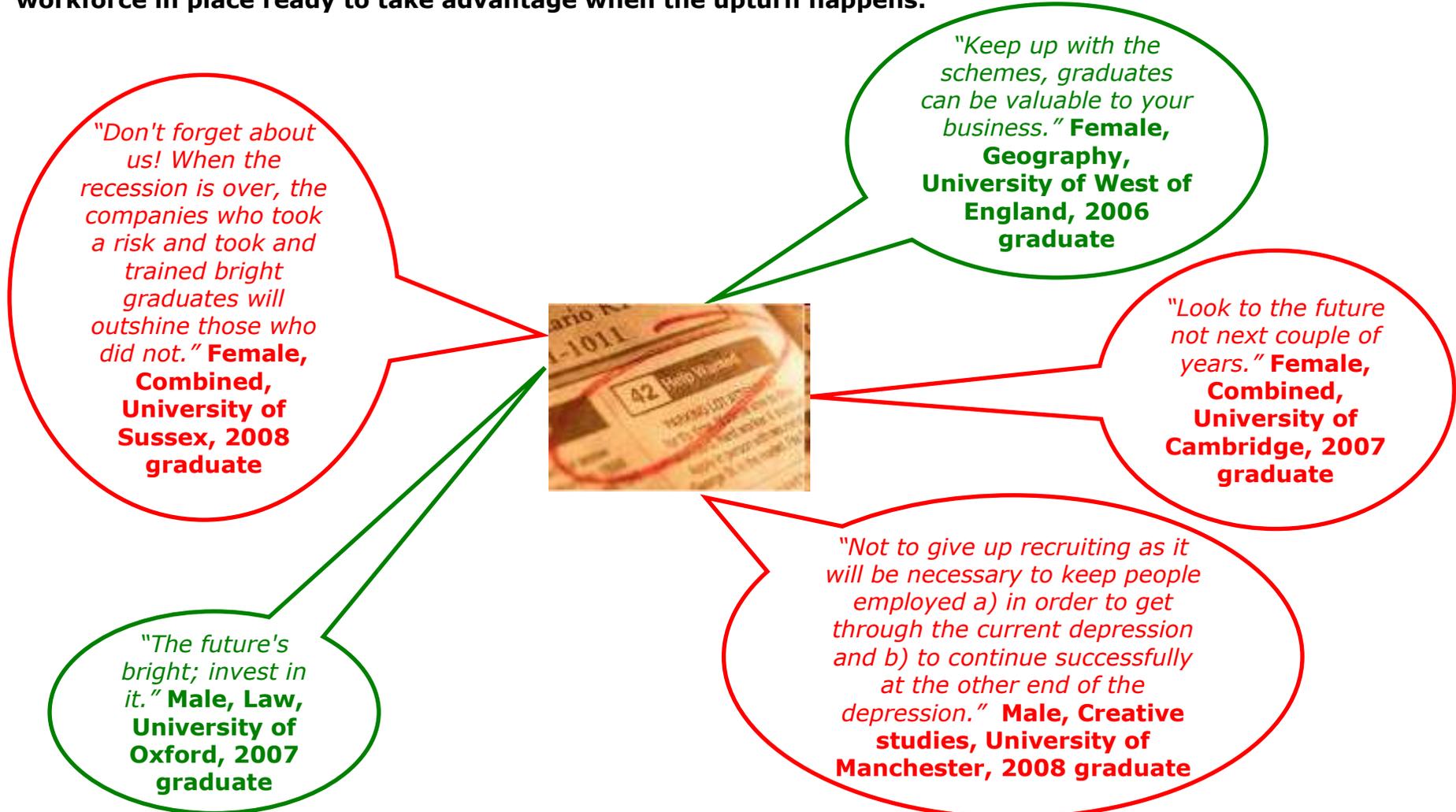


**Rec3:** What message, if any, would you give to graduate employers right now?

**Base:** Those who offered advice (156). 2 respondents didn't know if they had a graduate job and have been excluded from this analysis

## Theme 1: Keep recruiting

**Don't stop recruiting. Look beyond the short-term and plan for going forward with a trained, skilled workforce in place ready to take advantage when the upturn happens.**



**Rec3:** What message, if any, would you give to graduate employers right now?

**Base:** Those who offered advice (156)

Quotes in red are from recent graduates without a graduate-level job, quotes in green are from those who do have a graduate-level job

## Theme 2: Internships and work experience

Offer internships and work experience. This is seen as a win-win: graduates get vital work experience; employers get (cheaper) workers. Our respondents welcome any chance of using their skills and obtaining work experience. They just need more of these opportunities.

*"Offer more work experience / internships!"* **Male, Management studies, University of Southampton, 2006 graduate**

*"We need opportunities to enter the job market and gain the experience. We are being told we are either too qualified or not qualified enough at the moment."* **Female, Anthropology, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2007 graduate**



*"Offer internships etc so that graduates can apply their skills"* **Female, Social studies, University of York, 2007 graduate**

*"Advertise your internships and work experience placements more if you are unable to take in graduates who have not had experience in the field. Also, if there were such thing as a 6-month internship or work experience placement which was only open to graduates this would mean we could apply for the paid graduate schemes afterwards instead of ruling that field out altogether."* **Female, European studies, King's College London, 2008 graduate**

**Rec3:** What message, if any, would you give to graduate employers right now?

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## Theme 3: Treat us fairly

While our respondents may not be aware of the term, Employer Brand, the need to connect with candidates throughout the recruitment process (and beyond) is key. They want to know what is going on in the process and have a road map for their first stage in a career if successful.

*"To consider the student and give them a decision soon enough. There's no joy waiting to see if you got the job. The sooner you know the better."*

**Female, Social Work, University of Derby, 2008 graduate**

*"If they are able to, give graduates a clear idea as to their career path/progression and also an indication as to how long their job is guaranteed for!"*

**Male, Economics, University of Southampton, 2007 graduate**



*"Always give feedback and let grads know whether or not you have refused their application. Being left in the dark is very frustrating."* **Male, Music, University of Hertfordshire, 2007 graduate**

*"Promote your company as a friendly, helpful, useful service. Make sure job adverts are seen in as many places as possible - local and regional papers, for example. If you cannot offer a graduate a job, at least offer them advice and the chance of work experience leading to a reference."* **Female, Media studies, Bournemouth University, 2008 graduate**

**Rec3:** What message, if any, would you give to graduate employers right now?

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## Theme 4: Widen your search

'They would say that wouldn't they?' Fair comment maybe, but they fear that recruiters are too blinkered in their approach. While it could indicate their lack of awareness of the amount of application-shifting needed when recruiting for a graduate scheme and the practical needs that the volume generates, this is nothing new. They may also be seeking 'payback' for what happened to them in the graduate recruitment process they went through. But is the bigger question about comparative value of degrees as a measure of ability to be successful at work?



*"You should visit more universities than just the usual suspects - Oxbridge, Bristol, Bath, York, Manchester etc....there are plenty of very capable students elsewhere too!"* **Male, Geography, University of Wales Swansea, 2008 graduate**

*"There is a huge pool of potential employees. Try to look for less obvious, but key skills that are hard to analyse but make for very effective employees. Many obvious skills can be learnt, but others are much more difficult to spot and master. Things like effective problem analysis, breaking issues down into their constituent parts and good research skills seem to be taking a backseat to more mundane and quantifiable skills such as specific IT knowledge."*

**Male, Philosophy, University of Sheffield, 2006 graduate**

**Rec3:** What message, if any, would you give to graduate employers right now?

**Base:** Those who offered advice (156)

Quotes in red are from recent graduates without a graduate-level job, quotes in green are from those who do have a graduate-level job

# Appendix

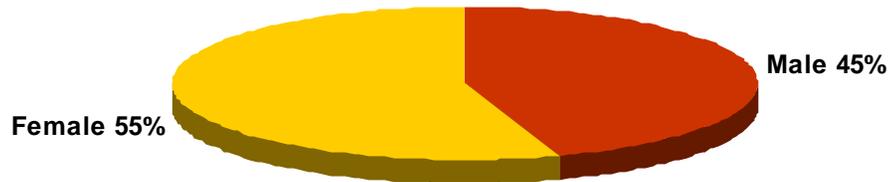
Methodology  
Sample profile  
About Opinionpanel

## Methodology

<b>Sample:</b>	502 recent graduates (graduated in 2006, 2007 or 2008).
<b>Fieldwork dates:</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2009 to 13 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2009.
<b>Fieldwork method:</b>	Online survey, using sample from The Graduate Panel.
<b>Incentives:</b>	Respondents receive a £1 credit in Amazon gift certificates.
<b>Checks:</b>	All panellists had verified ac.uk email address when on The Student Panel.
<b>Compliance:</b>	MRS Code of Conduct compliant. Opinionpanel does not sell, advertise or market to panellists. All research is anonymous and confidential.
<b>Design / Analysis:</b>	Opinionpanel designed the questionnaire; Opinionpanel analysed the data.
<b>Technical:</b>	All scripting, fieldwork, coding, tables and project management by Opinionpanel.

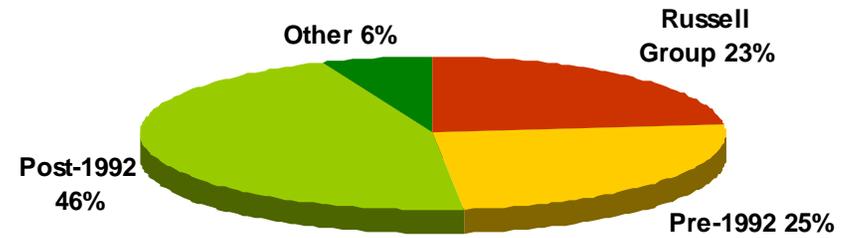
# Sample profile

## Gender



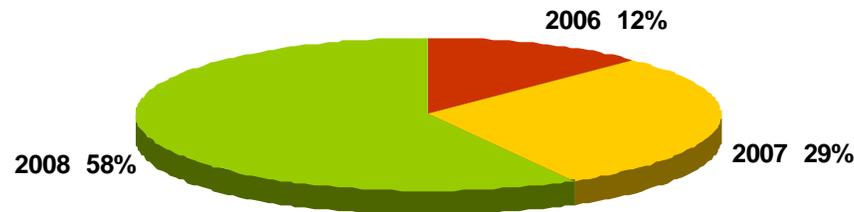
Base: All (502)

## University type



Base: All (502)

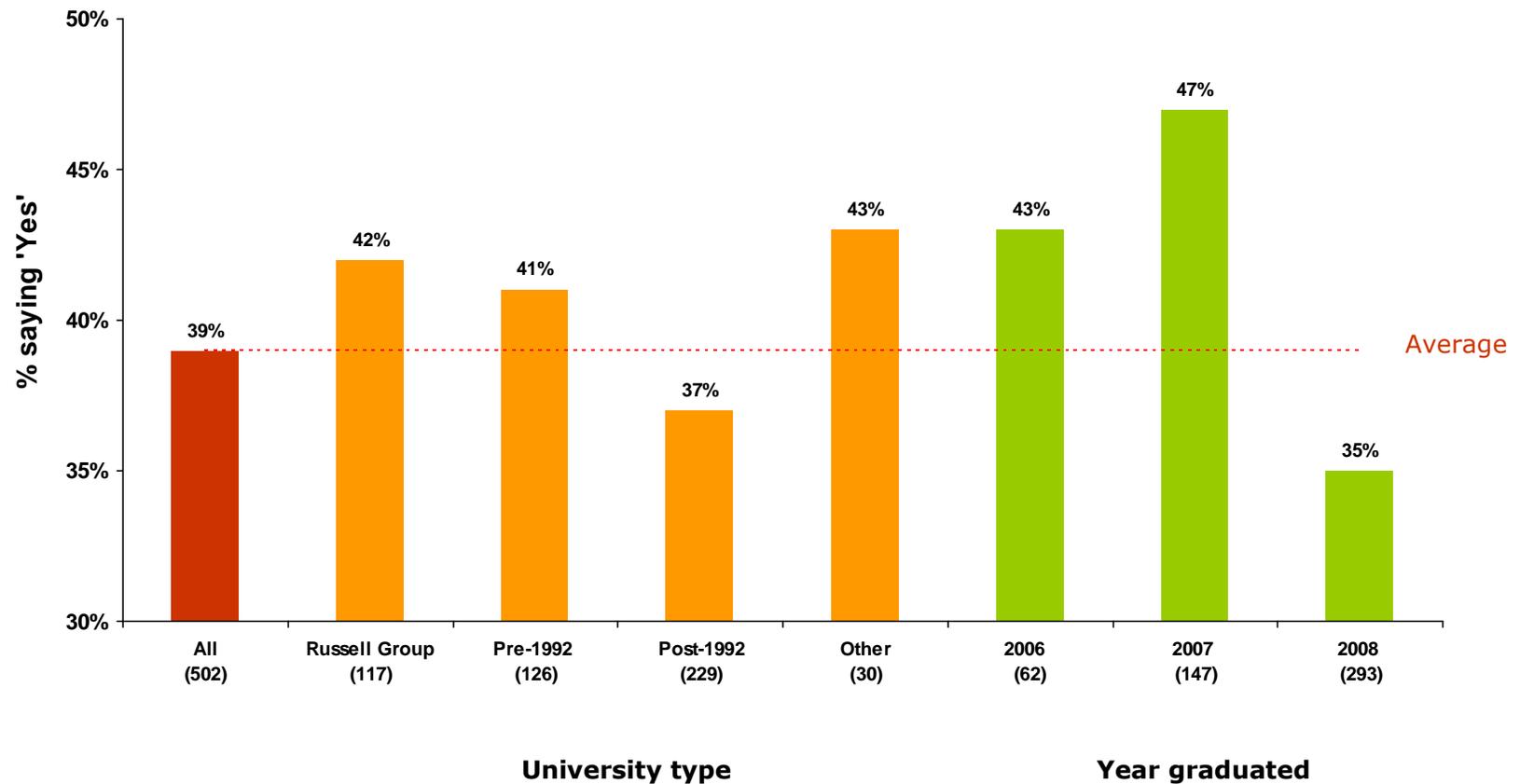
## Year graduated



Base: All (502)

## Do you have a graduate job?

Overall, nearly 40% of the graduates surveyed are working in a role that requires a degree to hold. Those graduating in 2008 are significantly less likely to be in such a role than 2007 graduates.



GR1: Do you have a graduate job? By graduate job we mean a job that you need a degree to hold.

Base: All (502)

## About us

### Opinionpanel

Opinionpanel specialises in researching students before, during and after their time at university.

Founded in 2004, Opinionpanel has become the UK's leading provider of insight into young people, students and graduates through online market research. How? Through our three main panels (we also run private client panels on contract), a great team of researchers, a commitment to high research values and a wide range of customer-focused services.

Opinionpanel offers a full research service, from sample-only to detailed insight. By blending our knowledge of student-, higher education-, and commercial marketing with first rate research skills and our market-leading panels, we bring a fresh and insightful approach to all the sectors we serve.

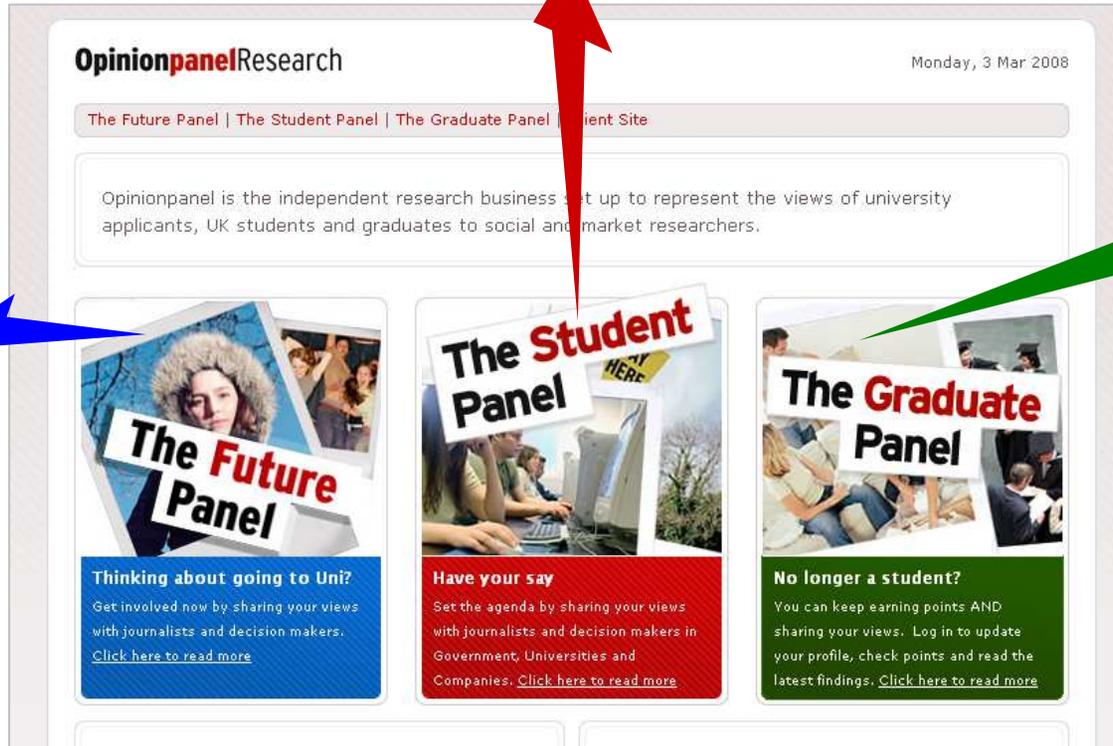
# Opinionpanel's panels

### The Student Panel

- \* Over 60,000 students
- \* UCAS recruited
- \* 100+ profiling characteristics
- \* Every UK institution
- \* ac.uk email verified
- \* £25 Amazon incentive

### The Future Panel

- \* 14,000 pre-applicants (16-17 year olds considering HE and HE applicants)
- \* UCAS recruited – no open access
- \* Panellists sent 'hard copy' vouchers immediately after completing each q'aire



### The Graduate Panel

- \* All former members of The Student Panel (therefore identities assured)
- \* Earned points carry over
- \* Capacity for longitudinal research
- \* 8,000+ recent grads

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