

Work Matters: Distance Graduates and the Employability Discourse

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Outline

- Employability/Graduate Employment defined
- Employability Discourse
- Contexts from the Literature
- The Research Study
- Conclusions
- Recommendations



Definitions

Employability

One's ability to get a job or get promoted

A set of achievements....that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations...(York 2004 p. 8)

Graduate Employment

Employment where graduates are required to use the and knowledge they have gained in their degree
(Elias and Purcell 2013)



Employability Discourse

- Human Capital Theory/Mainstream Position/Individual
Deering 1997; Schultz 1971; Spence 1973.
- The Critical Account/Alternative Position/Structural
Boden and Nedeva 2010; Brown & Hesketh 2004;
Tomlinson 2010.
- Employment as Processual (Holmes 2013)
External process of negotiation

Other Contexts from the Literature

- We know little about part-time students (Butcher 2015)
- We know little about the impact of part-time study on employability (Bennion et al. 2011; Feinstein et al. 2009, Woodfield 2011)

Research Questions

How do distance graduates experience career progression?

What is the perceived impact of delayed participation in HE on employability?

What role, if any, does social class play on employability?

Case Study
Recent distance graduates (2012-21015)
Institutional records (n=268)
Survey (N=126)
Interviews (n=18)

Case Study

- Illustrative ✓
- Theory generation ✓
- Exhaustive ✗
- Theory testing ✗
- Ref: Yin 2014



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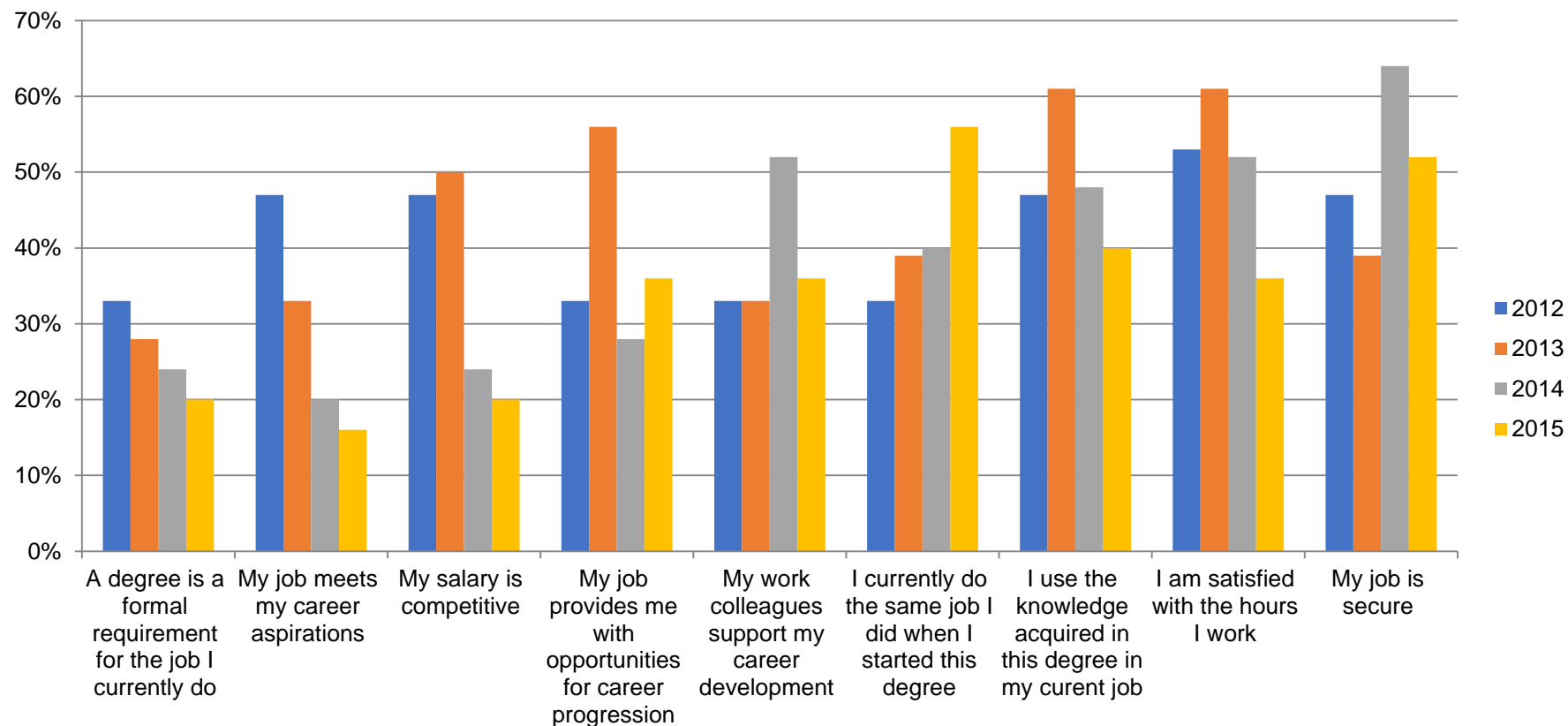
Findings: overview

- 88% in employment (64% at entry)
- 49% graduates in graduate level employment
- 55% classify Professional (24% at entry)
- 47% had changed job since undertaking the degree



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Graduate Level Employment





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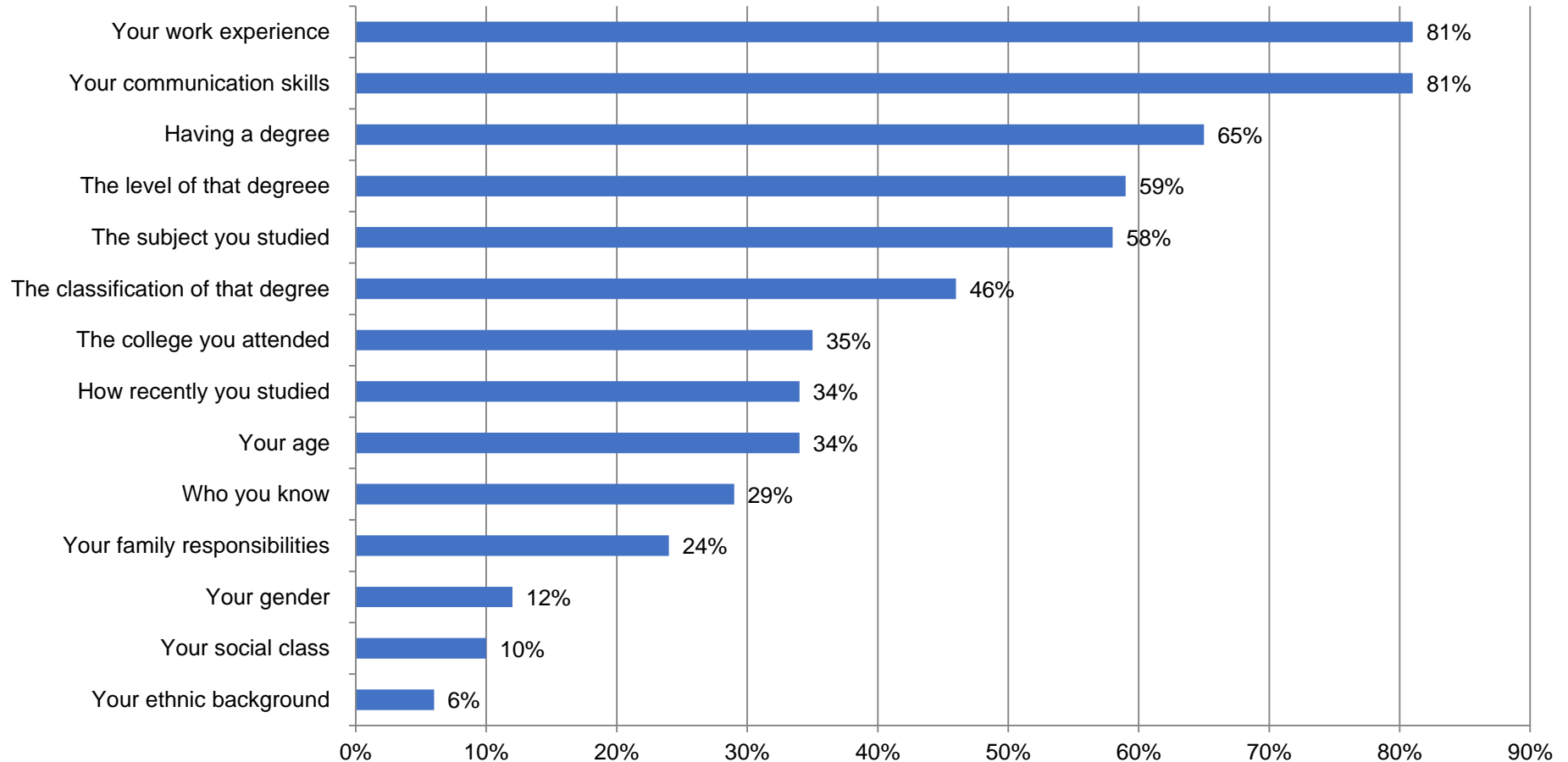
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*'It validated my position
if you know what I
mean, in that I'm now
officially smart...'*

*'I completely changed
profession...the course
was a necessary factor in
this change'*

*'pretty much our whole
department was made
redundant...of 65 people only
10 of us are
left...studying...sure helped
me in an indirect way...'*

Factors important to employability



Interviews

'...I seriously believe.... there is an ageist agenda.'

'It's horrible work. But the reason I got that is I'm a secretary. I'm used to the admin. And she knows that. She sees your past and she pulls it in.'

'What makes you think you can do this? Who do you think you are?'

Employability Discourse

‘Employability is an *external* process of negotiation which ‘takes place over time and in interaction with others’ (Holmes 2013 p. 548).

However,.....



Employability as Internal Process

Employability



Graduate Identity

Belief in one's *capacity to successfully belong* to a particular group

Agents of Social Transformation



'we certainly expect them to go to college and they would know that'

'I wouldn't have been as good an educator if I had come through the normal route'



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Conclusions

Impact of social class: whether, when and how we participate in HE

Importance of credential capital

Graduate employability/identity as a slow, internal process of negotiation

Graduates as Agents of Social Transformation

Recommendations

- Importance of flexible study options.
- Importance of career guidance for part-time flexible learners, even those in employment.
- Importance of raising awareness of structural obstacles in order to free individuals from burden of inadequacy and un-entitlement.



References

See full paper.

Go raibh mile maith
agaibh!



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