As market conditions begin to show signs of improvement, there has arguably never been a better time for recruiters to evaluate the effectiveness of their graduate programmes.

In order to attract and retain graduate talent, employers need to know what graduate employees think of their organisation. Real Prospects is designed to help employers evaluate and improve the strategies they use to recruit, select and develop graduate employees.

Real Prospects is the only national survey to explore the reality of graduate employment. An online questionnaire was designed and piloted during the autumn of 2009 and launched in January 2010.

Graduates between one and five years since graduation were asked a range of questions across six categories of investigation. The report findings broadly cover the following areas:

- Recruitment and induction
- Training and development
- Support, supervision and progression
- Pay and benefits
- Work-life balance and CSR
- Organisational leadership and senior management

The results provide a unique insight into the state of mind of more than 14,500 graduates in employment in the UK.

They also provide recruiters with powerful marketing messages in support of future graduate recruitment campaigns.

Recruiters can participate in Real Prospects in a variety of ways. Partner-level participation includes a customised questionnaire directed at an organisation’s graduate staff. For more information on this and other levels of participation, contact Eden Keane on 0161 277 5266 or E.Keane@prospects.ac.uk

Graduate Prospects is owned by, and gifts its profits to, the registered charity HECSU, an agency of UUK and GuildHE. HECSU supports the work of higher education careers services in the UK and Ireland, commissions and funds high quality research and gives financial support to the organisation AGCAS (Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services).

Graduate Prospects publishes the Prospects series of graduate recruitment and postgraduate study publications and provides online careers and postgraduate course information via the UK’s official graduate recruitment site, Prospects.ac.uk

Real Prospects 2010
© Graduate Prospects 2010

Publisher: Eden Keane
Researcher: Holly Higgins
Design: Funnel Creative
Photography: Simon Pantling
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The Real Prospects report

The Real Prospects report is designed to help employers evaluate and improve the strategies they use to recruit, select and develop graduate employees.

WHAT DID REAL PROSPECTS GRADUATES SAY?

• 57% are considering leaving their employer within the next twelve months.

• Nearly one in five Real Prospects graduates applied to their employer because the job role sounded interesting.

• 20% had previously worked for their employer as a student before they applied for a graduate role.

• 80% feel that they were kept informed of their progress throughout the recruitment process, but only 67% were able to get enough information about the job role before they applied.

• 83% of Real Prospects graduates were satisfied with their employer’s selection process.

• When asked about their employer’s induction process, 81% were satisfied with their introduction to the company as a whole, but only 57% were satisfied with the explanation of the company’s HR procedures.

• 57% of Real Prospects graduates feel that their employer is meeting their training needs.

• 65% are satisfied with the quality of the training they have received while working for their current employer.

• 70% are satisfied with the support and supervision they receive at work.

• 69% feel that their line manager encourages their professional development, but 44% would like more feedback on their performance.

• 90% of Real Prospects graduates think it is important that their current role enables them to progress in their career, but only 62% are satisfied that it will.

• 57% would like to be offered opportunities to work in different departments to broaden their experience.

• 55% of Real Prospects graduates are satisfied with their pay and benefits.

• 64% are satisfied with their work-life balance, but 47% feel that they are expected to work in excess of their contracted hours.
WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE 2010 REAL PROSPECTS SURVEY?

• More than 14,500 graduates responded to the Real Prospects survey.

• All are in permanent employment or employed on fixed-term contracts.

• 46% are working in London, and the East or South East of England, while a further 7% are working in the South West.

• 27% are working in the Midlands or the North of England.

• 9% are working in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, and 12% are working outside the UK.

• 53% are working for large organisations with over 1,000 employees, while 20% are employed by companies with fewer than 50 members of staff.

• 64% are working for privately-owned companies, while 24% are working in the public sector.

• 7% are working in the third sector for a charity or other not-for-profit organisation.

• 92% are aged between 21 and 29, and 50% are aged between 21 and 24.

• 57% of respondents are female.

• 67% consider their cultural and ethnic background to be White British, while a further 10% describe themselves as Asian or Asian British.

• 36% hold a postgraduate qualification.

• 43% are or have been employed on a graduate training scheme.

• Around 60% agree that they need to be educated to degree level in order to do their job.
RECRUITMENT

‘REPUTATION FOR A GOOD WORKING ENVIRONMENT’
WHY DO GRADUATES APPLY?

- Graduates are attracted to roles they describe as ‘challenging’ and ‘stimulating’. They seek variety in their work and are looking for roles that will give them the opportunity to do something rewarding.

- One of their priorities is to gain experience of working in a particular sector or profession. Consequently, graduates are often looking for an employer who can offer them a range of projects, interesting clients, or the opportunity to work collaboratively with more experienced colleagues.

- Graduates are keen to learn new skills, but also want to use the transferable and technical skills they developed at university.

- Their focus is on career development, and as such they are looking for roles that have ‘room for growth and development’ and can offer them real responsibility and autonomy in their work.

- Recent graduates look to their first job to guide their decision-making with regard to their future progression, and are attracted to roles that they feel will help them to clarify their career path.

- Those who join graduate training schemes are often prompted to do so because they want to be able to undertake placements in a variety of departments and find out what they enjoy doing before they commit to a particular role.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS…

“High calibre company, stimulating and challenging work”

“I decided to apply to [the company] because it offered the perfect combination of what I wanted in a job – a fulfilling role with a company vision that I believed in [and] a varied role where I could learn new skills as well as building on the skills I already had”

“Reputation for a good working environment e.g. friendly, collegiate”

“The breadth of work and possibility of real responsibility and client contact secured it for me”

WHY WERE REAL PROSPECTS GRADUATES ATTRACTED TO THEIR CURRENT EMPLOYER (MAIN REASON)?

- 6% It offered a good salary
- 5% It offered job security
- 19% The role sounded interesting
- 4% The company offered to pay for a further/professional qualification
- 7% It offered good training opportunities
THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

33% of Real Prospects graduates said that one of the reasons they applied for their current role is because the organisation was known to be a good employer.

- Graduates are attracted to employers who stress the importance of a healthy work-life balance and who can offer graduates a good network of support.

- Graduates are keen to join organisations which offer a friendly, supportive working environment and are known for treating their employees well.

- 16% said that the main reason they applied to their current employer is because it is acknowledged to be a leading organisation in its sector. They feel that working for a company with a good business reputation will look good on their CV, even if they are there for only a few years.

- Graduates are also attracted by opportunities to learn from professionals who are experts in their field in a company that is renowned for quality or innovation in its work.

- The size of an organisation can be an important factor for many graduates. A large company appeals to those who hope to progress rapidly within the organisation and gain experience working in a variety of roles or on a range of projects.

- However, some graduates dislike the anonymity of a large organisation and are looking for a company with fewer barriers between graduates and senior managers, which will enable them to take on responsibility at an earlier stage.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS…

“My current employment offers me all of the following (which was my ‘tick list’ for the kind of job I was looking for): a challenging environment; intellectual stimulation; high degree of autonomy; strong network of support; opportunities to progress outside the scope of my regular day job”

“I wanted to apply to a firm that was large enough to provide good training opportunities and interesting work, but not so large that I would feel anonymous”

WHY DID REAL PROSPECTS GRADUATES APPLY TO THEIR CURRENT EMPLOYER (SECONDARY REASONS)?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Located where they wanted to work</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good training opportunities</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good opportunities for career progression</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good salary</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job role sounded interesting</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known to be a good employer</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading organisation in its sector</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to study for a further/professional qualification</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Respondents were able to select more than one category
THE SELECTION PROCESS

20% of Real Prospects graduates had previously worked for their employer as a student before they applied for a graduate role.

- Of those who had worked for their employers before, 42% were employed as a work experience student, 23% completed an industrial placement as part of their degree course, and 35% did casual work.

- 46% reported that the company itself suggested that they rejoin the organisation once they completed their studies.

- 46% of graduates who had previously undertaken work experience with their employer rejoined the company because they liked the people they worked with.

- 51% returned to the same company because they enjoyed the work they had undertaken as a student.

- 35% explained that one the reasons they had returned was because they liked the company's ethos.

- 20% reapplied to work for the same company again because they had heard good things about the company's graduate scheme while working there as a student.

WHAT FIRST PROMPTED GRADUATES TO APPLY TO THEIR EMPLOYER?*

| Recruitment advertisement on a website | 35% |
| Friend or family member suggested it | 25% |
| Listed in a directory of employers | 12% |
| Recruitment agency suggested it | 11% |
| Recruitment advertisement in a magazine/newspaper | 10% |
| Company presentation/presence at a recruitment fair | 9% |
| University tutor or careers adviser suggested it | 8% |
| Marketing information around university campus | 6% |

* Respondents were able to select more than one category
How do Real Prospects graduates think employers could improve the way they communicate with applicants during the application and selection process?

BEFORE THEY APPLY

• Graduates like employers to give plenty of detail about the selection criteria they are going to use as it helps them to assess their chances of success, and makes preparing CVs and filling in application forms less time-consuming.

• Graduates find it useful when recruiters publicise details of the selection process on their website as it enables them to find out key dates for interviews and assessment centres in advance.

DURING THE SELECTION PROCESS

• Graduates are impressed by employers who notify candidates of their progress in a timely manner as it suggests that the company values them as an applicant. They object to chasing recruiters to find out what stage of the process they are at.

• Graduates like recruiters to be prompt in responding to queries.

• Graduates prefer to have one point of contact throughout the process. It feels more personal and gives applicants someone they can rely on for support and guidance.

AT THE END OF THE SELECTION PROCESS

• It is important to keep in touch with graduates who have been offered a job as they can feel slightly abandoned if the company ceases to contact them. Graduates can also find it quite stressful if they are not able to find out what they will be doing, where they will be located, and when they will be starting.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS…

“Brilliant. Good use of text message, email and phone calls to keep in touch. Great recruitment team”

“Sometimes slightly muddy – like being invited for an informal chat and being asked to answer a technical questionnaire”

“Clear – person specification was detailed [which helped] when creating a supporting statement”

“Very amateur. Lack of correspondence and feedback made me wary of the company”

“Was a really nice touch that I dealt with one HR contact throughout the process… it felt less mechanical and there was a genuine sense that everyone I met wanted me to be successful in my application”

COMMUNICATION DURING THE APPLICATION PROCESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was able to get enough information about the company before I applied.</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was kept fully informed of my progress throughout the recruitment process.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to get enough information about the job role before I applied.</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Graduates expect a company's recruitment process to give them an idea as to what the employer is like, as well as what it is looking for in its employees. Employers should bear in mind that graduates use the selection process to assess both the job and the company, and that candidates with more than one job offer will reflect on this experience when making their final decision.

**What do Real Prospects graduates think recruiters can do to ensure applicants have a positive experience during the selection process?**

**BE REASONABLE**

- Graduates understand that some employers get thousands of applications for every post, but they are exasperated by employers who seem to have an unnecessarily long selection process. They are opposed to assessment centres and online tests when the competencies being assessed are not relevant to the job role.

- The selection process should be challenging, but not overly complex. Graduates are more likely to be impressed by a company whose process is ‘rigorous, but not overly onerous’.

**BE SUPPORTIVE**

- Graduates want to feel that the company is encouraging applicants to perform at their best. They are unlikely to be impressed by a company whose process intimidates them, or recruiters who do not try to make nervous candidates feel more comfortable.

- Company representatives need to be friendly and enthusiastic about both the applicant and the job. Graduates see these representatives as potential colleagues so they need to make sure they are making a good impression on the candidates they meet.

**BE INFORMATIVE**

- Graduates want the process to give them a good understanding of what the company is about, and how it operates.

- They expect the organisation to provide them with an explanation of the job they have applied for, and are disappointed if they are not given some indication as to what the day-to-day life of an employee in that role is actually like.

- Interviews and assessment centres are a two-way process, and graduates are impressed by employers who make an effort to sell themselves to candidates.
THE APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

BE CLEAR

• Employers should be clear about both the process and the selection criteria from the very beginning. Graduates want to know what the selection process will involve before they begin their application.

• Be clear about the length of the process, and make applicants aware of key dates at the start.

BE FAIR

• Graduates welcome the opportunity to prepare for interviews, assessment centres and presentations in advance. Applicants are unimpressed by employers who they feel are seeking to catch them out, while recruiters who provide applicants with advice and guidance in advance are seen as fair and supportive.

• Applicants want to have confidence in the selection process, and to believe that the company is picking the best candidates. They need to feel sure that all candidates have been given a chance to show what they can do.

• Graduates also want to feel confident about their decision to join the company, and to be sure that the company is even-handed in its treatment of employees. Employers who are open about the criteria they are using to judge candidates are considered to be ‘transparent’ and ‘professional’.

BE HONEST

• Graduates are impressed by employers who make an effort to engage with what applicants want from the job, but are unconvinced by companies who oversell themselves. They prefer employers to be honest about what the company can offer graduates in terms of training, development and progression.

• If employers do not manage the expectations of applicants during the selection process they risk employing graduates who will quickly become disillusioned with both the company and the job.

BE ORGANISED

• The selection process is the only opportunity applicants have to see how the company operates, and graduates use their experience to assess whether or not this is the kind of employer they would like to work for. They are impressed by recruiters who are organised and efficient, and sceptical about those who seem uninterested and unprofessional.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS…

“The whole process was very well organised and they told me the sort of information I wanted to hear about, which others didn’t do so well. The selection event was great fun, which made me think ‘this is a company I could work for’. I was completely put off other employers by their selection events so I feel this was quite important”

“It was very challenging, but actually quite enjoyable. The assessment centre was really fun and was based on a typical day as a senior manager in [the organisation]. The only problem was that they were terrible at telling you if you had actually got the job”

“The assessment centre was really good, went the extra mile to make you feel welcome and gave you the opportunity to talk to others, which was useful”

“The process was extremely thorough and gave a good indication of what the job would really be like”

“My employer dealt with my application process extremely poorly – it felt as though they did not know what they were doing”
THE INDUCTION PROCESS

72% of Real Prospects graduates were satisfied with the explanation of their job role.

Real Prospects graduates find the best induction programmes are those which help graduates to settle into their role as quickly as possible without ‘throwing them in at the deep end’. New starters expect inductions to welcome them into the organisation, prepare them for the job they have been hired to do, and provide them with all the information they will need to know during their first few months.

- New starters welcome the opportunity to refresh their skills in the first few weeks, particularly if they are employed in a technical role.

- Graduates advocate identifying and addressing any initial training needs as soon as possible, and think new starters should be introduced to the organisation’s processes, systems and software as soon as they join the company.

- Graduates are unimpressed by line managers who leave new starters to figure out their job with little or no guidance, particularly if the role was not properly explained during the selection process. This is a common complaint, and one which could easily be addressed with a proper induction programme.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS…

“A week of technical training could be provided to go alongside the company induction to help give graduates a better understanding of business operations before they enter the working environment”

“Have a set induction and training programme in place for all graduates for at least 2-4 weeks when they first start in the role. I do not agree with the idea of dropping someone into a role they have never done before and leaving them to fend for themselves”

HOW MANY GRADUATES WERE SATISFIED WITH THEIR COMPANY’S INDUCTION PROGRAMME?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the company as a whole</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the colleagues they needed to know</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of their job role</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the senior management team</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of the company’s HR/personnel procedures</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
79% of Real Prospects graduates were satisfied with their introduction to the colleagues they needed to know.

• Getting to know their colleagues is essential if new starters are to settle into the organisation quickly. Graduates like to be formally introduced to the people they will need to know, and find it useful to have face-to-face meetings with colleagues and senior managers during their first few weeks.

• It is important to ensure that graduates feel properly supported when they first start. Providing new starters with a ready-made network of support (line manager, mentor, buddy) is reassuring as it means that they immediately have someone to turn to if they have any problems.

• Graduates find it useful to have an induction which introduces new starters to both the wider business sector and the organisational structure of the company itself.

• New starters feel more comfortable if they know where to look or who to contact for help. The best induction programmes provide graduates with the information they need, and then equip them with the tools to follow up any future queries themselves.

• Try not to overwhelm new starters with too much information in the first fortnight. Spread the induction process out to give graduates a chance to digest the information and follow it up in their own time.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS…

“I feel that my employer was particularly good at the induction process in terms of making me feel comfortable with the new environment and new people”

“From the word go, the employer should assign graduates to [shadow the work] of a more senior person in a similar role. This will get the graduate up and running with the technical skills required for the work as well as the bureaucracies involved”

“I think that as a new employee very little time is spent explaining the job role or even going through typical communication processes. It did feel as though I was “thrown in the deep end” being forced to “sink or swim” and this for me made my first few months while I learnt my role very frustrating”
MY ENGINEERING JUDGEMENT WILL BE VALUED’
What kind of training do graduates want?

57% of Real Prospects graduates feel that their employer is meeting their training needs.

When it comes to training and development, graduates have two main priorities: to meet the demands of their current job role, and to develop as a professional.

• New starters like to focus on job-related training, but more experienced graduates need to combine this with training which will contribute to their continuing professional development.

• Graduates expressed concern that their personal development needs can be overlooked when managers are more concerned with training them for the here and now. They acknowledge that the needs of the business will come first, but think some employers could do more to help graduates prepare for the future.

• Graduates welcome the opportunity to study for a professional qualification, and are impressed by employers who offer to support this as it shows that they are committed to investing in their employees’ professional development.

• Graduates are unhappy when it appears that training budgets vary across teams or departments. They strongly feel that all employees should be entitled to access the same training opportunities as their peers, and consider anything else to be extremely unfair.

• Graduates are keen to develop their skills, with 87% saying that they would like to be trained in the technical skills relevant to their job role. However, they also want to build up their professional knowledge of the industry, something that graduates feel employers often overlook.

WHAT KINDS OF TRAINING DO GRADUATES WANT?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical skills</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People management</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
65% of graduates are satisfied with the quality of the training they have received while working for their current employer.

- Graduates expect the training they receive to be challenging and relevant. They find it frustrating to participate in sessions which are pitched at the wrong level, or which appear to them to be merely a ‘box-ticking’ exercise.

- Irrespective of whether they are sourced internally or externally, the people delivering the training should be experts on the topic. Graduates want trainers to be able to answer their questions and give them advice as well as deliver the content.

- Aside from training, graduates welcome opportunities to develop their skills in other ways by attending conferences, participating in seminars, becoming members of professional associations, and networking at workshops and other industry events.

- Graduates report that in some cases the training on offer is excellent, but difficult to access. They suggest that employers could do more to publicise the training opportunities that are available and think that graduates would find it useful if this information was made available to employees as well as line managers, possibly by having a dedicated training portal on the intranet or by organising training seminars.

- If graduates find something they learned during a training course particularly interesting they like to be able to follow it up in their own time. They find it useful when the trainer provides participants with plenty of supplementary material suggesting where to go look for more information, additional resources or further reading.

Are graduates satisfied with opportunities to access different kinds of training?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical skills</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People management</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“The training needs to be more demanding – I found it too basic at times”

“They should assess background knowledge before putting people on courses that may be below their level”

“My line manager and top manager are always suggesting training and the HR manager in Head Office also sends regular emails”

“Offer more regular training sessions that build on previous ones – rather than one off sessions each on a separate subject”
PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS
50% of Real Prospects graduates are studying for or have completed a professional qualification.

We asked graduates how they think studying for a professional qualification will help them in their career.

IN THEIR CURRENT ROLE

• Graduates think that studying for a professional qualification gives them a better understanding of their own role. It gives them an opportunity to think more critically about their work and to reflect on the theory which underpins both their own working practices and their employer’s business processes.

• Studying for a professional qualification widens their knowledge and helps them to identify examples of best practice in other organisations. This also gives them a better understanding of the way the industry operates as a whole, and an appreciation of the way their own company fits into the sector.

• Graduates are keen to study for professional qualifications because it gives them the opportunity to develop their technical and professional skills.

• In many professions graduates feel that employees with professional qualifications are taken more seriously when they make suggestions, both by clients and by other colleagues.

• Graduates who have studied for a professional qualification feel that it has given them more confidence in their own ability, which makes them more likely to volunteer their professional opinion and to suggest new ideas.

• They also think that graduates who have a professional qualification are better prepared to deal with situations or problems they might not have experienced before because they are likely to have been forewarned of similar difficulties during their course, and are able to use their theoretical training to resolve the problem.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS…

“If a company invests in an individual it [makes them] feel important and helps other aspects of the job like motivation, commitment and loyalty”

“It has given me the confidence to be more proactive”

“Helps keep me up to date with current issues within the industry”

“Has helped to focus my career choice… and helped me to gauge how well I’m progressing in my knowledge and understanding. It gives me a milestone to aim for”

“It has improved my knowledge and skills, and also given me confidence as I am able to understand and tackle my role more effectively and efficiently”

“Proof of expertise and experience, shows I have considered the job seriously and am willing to work hard to progress”
CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

• Graduates reason that studying while working demonstrates that they are disciplined, committed to their professional development, and determined to achieve their goals. It also shows employers that they are able to prioritise their workload and manage their time effectively.

• Graduates feel that studying for professional qualification shows that they are committed to learning, and are both interested in, and intellectually capable of, stretching themselves academically.

• Working towards a professional qualification gives graduates a ready-made programme for their continuing professional development. The qualification gives graduates something to work towards, while the structure and syllabus of the course helps line managers to assess their strengths and weaknesses, and identify their training needs.

• Graduates often worry that they are losing the skills they gained at university because they are not using them in their current job. Studying for a professional qualification gives them an opportunity to exercise these skills, and allows them to build on their existing knowledge rather than letting it languish.

• Graduates are keen to build up a body in contacts within the industry, and studying for a professional qualification provides them with an excellent opportunity to network with people in other companies or sectors.

CAREER PROGRESSION

• Graduates feel that studying for a professional qualification demonstrates that they are committed to their chosen profession.

• Once they have completed the qualification, graduates expect to be offered the opportunity to take on extra responsibility, and to be allowed to work independently without supervision.

• Graduates think that the possession of a professional qualification is proof of their ability to work within their chosen profession. The successful completion of an independently accredited course demonstrates that they have the skills and experience to succeed in their role.

• Graduates also believe that the possession of a professional qualification gives them more options with regards to their career progression. For example, they could negotiate a pay increase with their current employer, or move to a more senior role in a different company.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS…

“It will enable me to display the skills and knowledge I have picked up during my time in the industry in a format that all [employers] acknowledge”

“I think it confirms to people that you know what you are talking about”

“Without the qualification I would not have so many [career] options”

“I think it has demonstrated to my employers that I have the discipline and determination to obtain a qualification whilst progressing my career”

“It has helped tremendously by giving me the knowledge I need to do my job well and [has] also brought about opportunities for networking with colleagues while on the courses”

“Gaining chartership will increase my self confidence and demonstrate my commitment to continuing self improvement in terms of technical knowledge and industry understanding”
‘STRONG EMPHASIS ON FEEDBACK IS A HUGE DEVELOPMENT ASSET’
44% of Real Prospects graduates would like more feedback about their performance.

- Graduates value feedback and find constructive criticism particularly useful because it helps them to identify their weaknesses and work out where they need to improve. They can then draw on this feedback when setting development objectives and agreeing their training needs.

- Graduates appreciate it when colleagues and managers acknowledge the positive contributions they have made, especially when they have done something particularly well. Similarly, graduates are happier with line managers who offer them encouragement as well as advice.

- Graduates who have not received much feedback feel overlooked and undervalued. However, it is important to get the balance of positive and negative feedback right, as graduates point out that it can be demoralising if they are only ever told how they need to improve.

- Graduates welcome regular performance reviews, but 34% of Real Prospects graduates think their employer’s performance review system is ineffective. They want structured feedback on a regular basis and urge employers to allocate time for graduates to have weekly or monthly one-to-one meetings with their line managers.

- Line managers play an important role in coordinating the overall review of an employee’s performance, but graduates also find it useful to get feedback from other colleagues they have worked with.

**DO REAL PROSPECTS GRADUATES FEEL SUPPORTED AT WORK?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel I am a valued employee</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My line manager encourages my professional development</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have confidence in the senior management team</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need more feedback on my performance</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need more supervision than I currently get</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
70% of Real Prospects graduates are satisfied with the support and supervision they receive at work.

**SOURCES OF SUPPORT**

Graduates find it reassuring to know they have access to a network of support as they know that there will always be someone they can turn to for help and advice.

- The best line managers are accessible and approachable. Graduates find it frustrating if their line manager is never around as it makes it difficult to build a relationship with them. They also think it is important to be able to meet with their line manager privately, something which open-plan offices can make difficult.

- Graduates who have a mentor consider them to be an invaluable resource. Mentors are usually senior members of staff who oversee the professional development of their protégé. Graduates find it useful to be able to draw on their mentor’s experience when learning about the industry and planning how to move forward in their profession.

- Some employers have adopted a ‘buddy’ system, whereby graduates are paired up with a colleague who provides them with a more informal source of support. Graduates find that the buddy system is especially useful during the induction period, as buddies often contact new starters before they arrive to introduce themselves and answer any questions the graduate might have.

**TYPES OF SUPPORT**

In general graduates look to their employer to provide them with three kinds of support: support in their job role; career guidance; and development support.

- Graduates like to know that they have someone to turn to when they are experiencing problems or need advice. It is important to make sure that graduates continue to be supported in their role as they gain experience and begin to take on more responsibility.

- Graduates find it useful to discuss their career development with line managers and mentors, and are keen to plan their career progression in partnership with these sources.

- Graduates rely on managers to help them to identify and meet their training needs. They welcome company initiatives like development plans which provide a template for these discussions and facilitate the development of training objectives.
How do graduates feel about the availability of opportunities to progress?

90% of Real Prospects graduates think it is important that their current role should enable them to progress in their career.

We asked graduates how employers could better support their career progression.

• Graduates think regular appraisals are critical for career progression. They want line managers to help them plan a progression timeline by setting appropriate career goals and development objectives.

• They find it useful to discuss where they want to be and what they want to have achieved in 6 months, 12 months, 3 years and so on. This enables them to set short, medium and long term career goals, which provides them with a template to work from when they design their progression strategy.

• Some line managers have their own ideas as to how an individual should be progressing, and fail to take into account the graduate's own plans and aspirations. Graduates welcome advice and actively seek guidance, but ultimately they are responsible for managing their own careers and find overly autocratic managers unhelpful and demotivating.

• Graduates working in larger organisations are impressed by employers who identify a structured route for progression within the organisation, even if this is only in terms of progressing to a more senior grade within a particular job role. However, it is important to be clear about how employees can access this kind of internal progression, as graduates expect companies to be transparent about their employment practices where promotions and salary increases are concerned.

In Their Own Words…

“I recently moved to a different department where the management is much better, but I had to make a sideways move to achieve this. I was going nowhere, even backwards, in my previous role, and my former manager was not held accountable or being picked up on her failures as a manager”

“[Managers] understand that I am at the stage where I am searching for new opportunities, and have told me that I could suggest secondments or sabbaticals to them. I am also given lots of responsibility, which has been greatly beneficial to my career progression”

Do Graduates Feel that Employers are Offering Them Adequate Opportunities for Progression?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop their job role</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress within the organisation</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go on secondment to other departments to broaden their experience</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PROGRESSION
How do graduates feel about the availability of opportunities to progress?

62% of Real Prospects graduates are satisfied that their current role will enable them to progress in their career.

- Graduates are not only looking for promotions as a means of progression, they are looking for opportunities to develop in their existing job role. They are keen to gain experience in other departments, shadow more senior colleagues and take on additional responsibilities, and think it is important that line managers regularly review their job role as well as their performance.

- Bear in mind that as graduates are not always looking for a promotion, they may also be interested in internal vacancies which would give them the opportunity to move sideways into a new area.

- Graduates frequently observe that the assistance they could expect to receive with regard to career progression is dependent upon the capability and attitude of their line manager. They strongly feel that employers could do more to support and improve the guidance graduates receive from line managers and other mentors by providing them with proper training and regularly reviewing their performance.

- Graduates think that both they and their managers would find it useful to have more administrative support when they are discussing progression. They suggest that employers provide more in the way of career maps, career development plans, and templates for one-to-one meetings about progression.

- They would also like to be able to access career development material themselves, and suggest that graduates might find it useful if they could access this information in a careers library or other online repository.

- Graduates warn against overselling opportunities for progression during the recruitment process. Those who joined a company expecting to be able to gain experience in a variety of departments, or who expected to progress rapidly within the organisation rapidly become disillusioned when they realise that in reality placements are oversubscribed and opportunities for promotion are few and far between. Graduates prefer employers to manage the expectations of applicants and to be honest about the level of responsibility they will have and the opportunities there will be for progression within their first few years.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“Have more discussions about long term career goals. At this point, the focus is on short/medium term goals”

“Set out guidelines and maps that indicate different [career] paths… currently progression is ambiguous, which leads to uncertainty about what paths are actually available and how they can be achieved”

“Have a more flexible attitude and actually encourage secondments. Ask what my career aspirations are and explore what I might do within the organisation to progress towards them”

“Give me fewer objectives and ensure that these are actually achievable and realistic”

“Allow a degree of job shadowing to allow some of the more junior members of the team to work alongside senior staff so that they can get more involved in the management of projects etc”
PAY AND COMPANY BENEFITS

‘LOOKING FOR A ROLE WITH A BETTER WORK-LIFE EXPERIENCE’
The median salary reported by Real Prospects graduates is £22,000.

43% think their salary compares well with the salaries received by other people in similar roles, but 28% feel that their pay compares unfavourably with salaries offered by other employers.

Graduates do not consider salary to be the most important feature of a job, but they do expect to be adequately rewarded for the work that they do.

If the pay and benefits are poor graduates feel less inclined to overlook any other negative aspects of their job.

47% of Real Prospects graduates feel that they are expected to work in excess of their contracted hours. Managers should make sure that graduates who work overtime know that their efforts are appreciated, as graduates are unimpressed by employers who fail to acknowledge their contribution or compensate them for their time.

55% of Real Prospects graduates are satisfied with their pay and benefits.

In Their Own Words…

“I really like my job, but I have just been told ‘no pay rise until July’ and I am furious. I am on less money than I was 2 years ago due to rising living costs and I have twice the responsibility. It has been nearly 2 years since my last promotion and I am doing such a different job. I feel very undervalued and have no incentive to stay other than the team that I love working with”

“I work an average of 50 hours every week, I do not have any benefits, I do not get paid for the extra hours and I do not feel my work here is being appreciated”

Which Additional Benefits Do Graduates Think Employers Should Offer?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pension contributions</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance with travel costs</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study leave/support</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for overtime payments</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidised social/gym facilities</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidised healthcare</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidised meals</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of a company car</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
64% of Real Prospects graduates are satisfied with their work-life balance.

• 70% of Real Prospects graduates receive to between 21 and 29 days’ paid holiday a year, but only 61% used their full holiday entitlement in the last leave year.

• Dissatisfaction with their work-life balance is one of the reasons Real Prospects graduates cited when they were asked why they might leave their employer.

• 75% of Real Prospects graduates think it is important that their employer recycles waste paper, and 73% think their employer should promote energy-saving measures.

• 61% would like their employer to promote ‘ethical’ business relationships (such as using Fairtrade products).

• 56% of Real Prospects graduates think their employer should encourage energy-efficient travel.

• 54% would like their employer to support a named charitable cause and encourage employees to take part in charitable fundraising.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS…

“I plan to leave due to… an unhappy work life balance as a result of long unpaid unsociable hours”

“There is no option for flexible working in your first 3 years at my company and this should be made far clearer. It’s disingenuous to use it in promotional materials”

“Although the job is challenging and suits my skills, it takes up too much of my life”

WHICH FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS DO GRADUATES THINK COMPANIES SHOULD OFFER EMPLOYEES?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flexible Working Arrangement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take flexi-time</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take time off in lieu</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work condensed hours</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work at home</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take paid leave to care for dependants</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job share</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work only during school terms</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

‘I DO NOT FEEL MY WORK HERE IS APPRECIATED’
EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS AND FUTURE PLANS
57% of Real Prospects graduates are considering leaving their employer in the next twelve months.

We asked these graduates why they are considering leaving their employer.

- They are bored in their role because the job is not challenging, enjoyable or interesting.
- Graduates do not feel that they are adequately rewarded for the work they do, either because the pay is too low or because they are working excessively long hours and have a poor work-life balance.
- Graduates feel that they are stagnating because there are few opportunities to develop their job role or progress within the organisation.
- They want to broaden their experience in order to progress in their career, and they are unable to do this with their current employer.
- Graduates feel that there is a lack of support from line managers or other colleagues, including the senior management team.
- They feel that their employer is unable to support their development, either because the company is unwilling to offer development opportunities, or because an excessive workload is preventing them from accessing training opportunities or taking on additional responsibilities.
- Graduates feel undervalued because they have not received any recognition for their work or any feedback on their performance.
- Graduates do not feel that the organisation is a fair employer because its employment practices are opaque, particularly with regard to pay and progression.

DO GRADUATES THINK THAT WORKING FOR THEIR EMPLOYER HAS LIVED UP TO THEIR EXPECTATIONS?

48% Yes, it has lived up to my expectations, but not exceeded them
22% No, my experience has not lived up to my expectations
23% Yes, it has exceeded expectations
7% Undecided

IN THEIR OWN WORDS…

“I am not enjoying the role, I feel undervalued and I’m no longer prepared to work the hours I do for something I’m not passionate about”

“I enjoy the role, and believe in the company, but do not feel rewarded sufficiently this year for my time and effort. I will be looking for a similar role that will allow me to progress faster”

“Looking for a role with a better work-life balance”

“The job is not what I expected/as described. I feel unsupported by my team leader and the rest of the team and it has made me unhappy”
‘FREEDOM FOR GRADUATES TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN CAREER PATHS’
BEST PRACTICE
What do graduates look for in an employer?

APPLICATION, SELECTION AND INDUCTION

• Graduates are most impressed by companies who seem genuinely interested in helping candidates to perform at their best.

• Graduates expect the selection process to be challenging and rigorous, but are unimpressed by a process that is too long or overly complex.

• They see interviews and assessment centres as a two-way process, and expect to come away from these events knowing more about both the company and the job role.

• Graduates expect employers to be honest about the opportunities they will have with the company, and to manage applicants’ expectations with regard to training, development and progression.

• When graduates first join the company they find it useful to participate in an induction programme which includes: an introduction to both the company and the wider sector in which it operates; an opportunity to meet their colleagues and other senior members of staff; a detailed explanation of their job role; an assessment of any initial training needs; any relevant preparatory training or refresher courses; details of people they can contact if they need help or advice in their first few weeks.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

• Graduates have two main priorities: to meet the demands of their current job role, and to develop as a professional. They expect their employer to offer them sufficient opportunities to satisfy both of these development needs.

• Graduates are keen to work towards professional qualifications where possible.

• They expect training courses to be challenging, relevant, delivered by an expert, and pitched at the appropriate level.

SUPPORT AND SUPERVISION

• Graduates like to receive regular performance reviews. Graduates who do not receive feedback feel undervalued when their contribution is not acknowledged and overlooked when managers fail to offer constructive criticism of their work.

• Graduates look to their employer for three kinds of support: support in their job role; career guidance; and development support. They need to have someone accessible and approachable to turn to for this help and advice, whether that be a line manager, mentor or colleague.

PROGRESSION

• Graduates think regular appraisals are essential for career progression. They want line managers to help them plan their progression by setting appropriate long-term career goals and short-term development objectives.

• Where possible, they like employers to offer structured routes for progression, even if this is only in terms of progressing to a more senior grade within the same role.

• Graduates are not just looking to be promoted. They are looking for opportunities to develop their existing job role, or to move sideways into a new area.

PAY AND BENEFITS

• Graduates do not consider the salary to be the most important feature of a job, but they do expect to be adequately rewarded for the work that they do. They are less inclined to overlook any negative aspects of their job if they feel that they are poorly paid.