



The British
Psychological Society

BPS Careers Destinations (Phase 3) Survey 2016 Report

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August 2017

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Background

In August 2011, the Society launched a longitudinal study to determine the career destinations of psychology graduates 1, 3, 5 and 7 years post-graduation.

Whilst there are quite a number of careers destinations reports produced by official HE agencies (HECSU, HEFCE, HESA etc.) and other cognate organisations (HEA Psychology Network, CBI Education and Skills survey) – most of these focus on destinations at 6–12 months after graduation. However, most psychology graduates do not enter full-time employment in their intended career until several years' post-graduation. This is for a variety of reasons (postgraduate training; career breaks; work experience needed; and competitive job market etc.) which cannot be fully elucidated in the absence of a longitudinal study.

The project is following the 2011 cohort of psychology graduates over 7 years, evaluating their career progression at 4 key points – 1, 3, 5 and 7 years post-graduation; as well as the current careers of graduates either side of the 2011 cohort (i.e. those graduating at 1, 3, 5, 7 years at each phase of data collection) as a comparator. This will enable us to pinpoint key landmarks in the early years of employment for these cohorts (such as completion of postgraduate training, entrance into postgraduate training, completion of supervised work experience, progression/transition into a stabilised period of employment in their chosen profession). Phase 1 of the project was conducted in 2012 and Phase 2 in 2014.

Phase 3 was conducted in 2016 and the outcomes are presented in this report. As the success of this project depends on being able to contact as many graduates as possible, in accordance with phase 2 of the project, departments of psychology, alumni associations and HEI careers services were approached with a request to become a partner in the project and to contact their 2009–2015 graduates on our behalf. At the time phase 3 of the project was launched, 42 partners had been recruited.

This report details the outcomes of phase 3 of the survey in which data was captured for the first year post-graduation for the 2015 graduates and through to seven years post-graduation for the 2009 graduates. The data for the overall number of respondents, and then in comparison for the 2009, 2011, 2013, and 2015 graduates is reported. A comparison with the data obtained for the same cohorts from phase 1 and 2 is also presented.

Number of respondents: 2387.

Careers destinations survey 2016

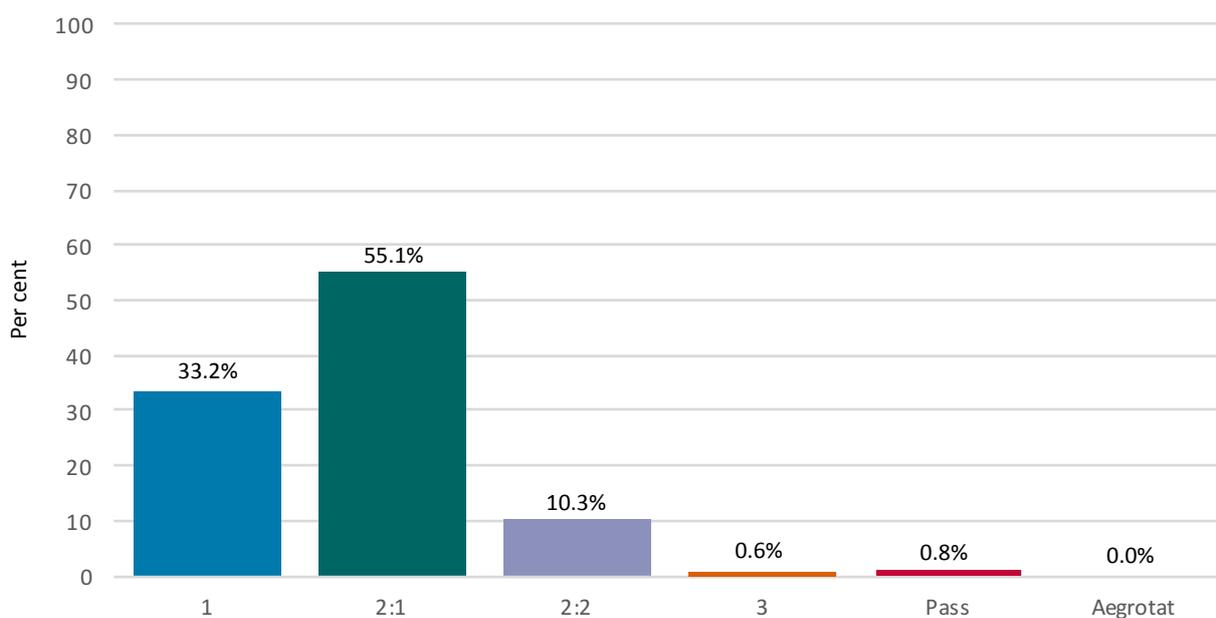
2387 graduates responded to this survey; 84% were female. 70.9% of the respondents were aged between 21 and 30, 16.5% between 31 and 40, 4.2% from 41–60 and 0.3% aged over 61.

Respondents were graduates from the following institutions:

Aberdeen, Abertay, Aberystwyth, Anglia Ruskin, Aston, Bangor, Bath, Bath Spa, Bedfordshire, Birkbeck, Birmingham, Birmingham City, Birmingham University College, Bolton, Bournemouth, Bradford, Brighton, Bristol, Brunel, Buckingham, Cambridge, Canterbury Christ Church, Cardiff Metropolitan, Cardiff, Central Lancs, Chester, Chichester, City, Coventry, Cumbria, De Montfort, Derby, Dundee, Durham, East Anglia, East London, Edinburgh Napier, Edinburgh, Essex, Exeter, Glasgow Caledonian, Glasgow, Gloucestershire, Goldsmiths, Greenwich, Heriot Watt, Hertfordshire, Huddersfield, Hull, Keele, Kent, King’s College London, Kingston, Lancaster, Leeds Beckett, Leeds Trinity, Leeds, Leicester, Lincoln, Liverpool Hope, Liverpool John Moores, Liverpool, London Metropolitan, London South Bank, Loughborough, Manchester Metropolitan, Manchester, Middlesex, Newcastle, Newman University, Northampton, Northumbria, Nottingham Trent, Nottingham, Open University, Oxford Brookes, Oxford, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Queen Margaret, Queen Mary London, Queen’s University Belfast, Reading, Roehampton, Royal Holloway, Salford, Sheffield Hallam, Sheffield, South Wales, Southampton Solent, Southampton, St Andrews, St Marys, Staffordshire, Stirling, Strathclyde, Sunderland, Surrey, Sussex, Swansea, Teeside, Ulster, University College London, Warwick, West London, West of England, West of Scotland, Westminster, Winchester, Wolverhampton, Worcester, York St John and York.

The overall degree classifications for respondents are depicted below:

The grade or classification of your degree:



N = 2372

Interestingly, looking across the four cohorts, there has been a distinctive increase in the number of 1st class Honours degrees awarded, with a rise from 29% in 2009 to 41.5% in 2015.

78% of respondents undertook a Single Honours degree in psychology.

In relation to the four specific cohorts this stage of the project is focusing on, the number of respondents in each were as follows: 2009 – 230, 2011 – 301, 2013 – 439 and 2015 – 317.

56.8% of respondents were current members of the BPS (85.1% of these are Graduate Members). Examination of the data across the 4 cohorts, revealed that of those that were members, the majority were Graduate Members (with 96% of the 2015 cohort having this grade of membership), and for the 2009 cohort 16.3% were Chartered. However, only 44.3% of the 2013 cohort are members of the Society. This may reflect the drop-off in membership as a result of the increase in subscription fees three years post-graduation.

Overall, 64.8% of respondents were in full-time employment; 11.4% in part-time employment and 25.5% in postgraduate study. The highest percentages of respondents in full-time employment were found in the 2009 and 2011 cohorts (74% and 71.3% respectively). Looking across the four cohorts, 12 months after graduation, almost 87% of respondents were in full-time employment or postgraduate study. Within two years of graduation, this had risen to over 91% and peaks at over 93% at seven years post-graduation. Analysis of the 'other' responses provided by 3.4% of respondents indicated that 11.2% were engaged in voluntary work, 6.2% were not working due to ill-health, and 5% were on maternity leave.

Overall, 77.9% of respondents indicated that their current employment was related to their long term career plan. Looking more closely at the 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2015 cohorts, 85.9% of 2009 graduates and 83.8% of 2011 graduates confirmed this was the case. The 2013 and 2015 cohorts had higher numbers of respondents indicating that it was not related to their long-term career plan (18.5% and 23.8% respectively) and a relatively consistent number of respondents across all four cohorts (around 10%) indicated that they had no career plan.

Overall, 61.1% of respondents were employed on a permanent contract and 25.1% on a fixed term contract. Closer examination of the responses from the different cohorts shows no discernible difference to the overall responses. Analysis of the 1.2% of 'other' responses revealed that 22.7% were on zero-hours contracts and 13.6% were employed as bank staff within the NHS.

The length of time for respondents in their current employment is depicted overleaf (Chart 2).

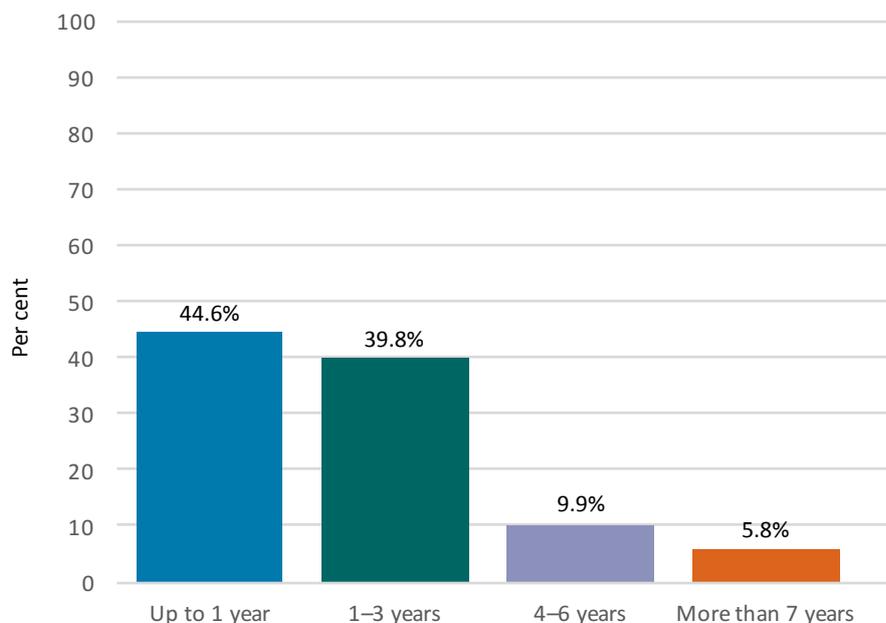
Looking at the responses from the specific cohorts, the expected pattern of responses is found with higher rates of longer-term employment in the 2009 and 2011 cohort (18.2% and 11.7% between 4–6 years; and 5.6% and 4.2% for over seven years).

Overall, 67% of respondents indicated that the possession of a degree in psychology had been a requirement for securing their current job. Looking across the four cohorts, a higher number of the 2009 and 2011 respondents indicated that this was also the case (78.3% and 76.7%) compared to the 2013 and 2015 cohorts (55.6% and 49.1%). This is most likely to be reflective of the early career stage for the newer graduates.

Overall, 63.1% of respondents were employed in the public sector; 26.4% in the private sector and 10.5% in the not for profit sector. Interestingly, looking across the different cohorts again, there was no significant diversion from this pattern of responses.

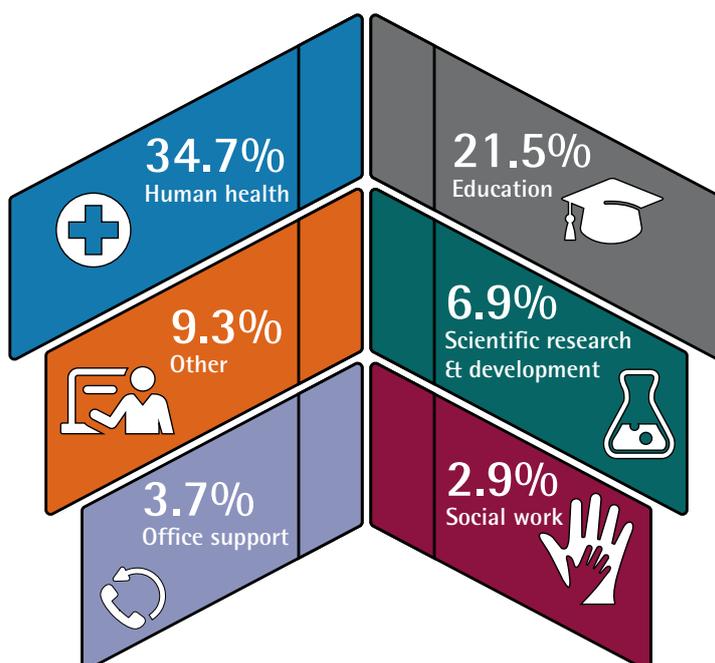
Overall, 59.3% of respondents indicated that their current job is in the field of psychology. Closer examination of the specific cohorts, revealed that the highest number of respondents with jobs in the field of 'psychology' were in the 2009 cohort (65.2%), then the 2011 cohort (57.1%), the 2015 cohort (53.5%) and then 2013 cohort (50.7%). 5.3% of the 2013 cohort were unsure.

Chart 2: Please indicate for how long you have been employed in your current job:



N = 1878

Respondents indicated that they were employed across a very wide range of employment sectors, with 34.7% in Human health, 21.5% in Education, 9.3% other, 6.9% in scientific research and development, 3.7% in office administration, office support and other business support activities and 2.9% in social work.



Looking across the four cohorts, the following table depicts the main occupational sectors in which those graduates are currently employed:

Sector/ Cohort	2009	2011	2013	2015
	Human health 37.9%	Human health 38.2%	Human health – 25.3%	Human health 28.5%
	Education 19.7%	Education 21.6%	Education 22.7%	Education 22.9%
	Scientific research and development 6.6%	Scientific research and development 4.6%	Scientific research and development 6.7%	Office admin 7%
	Social work 4%	Office admin 3.7%	Office admin 5.2%	Residential care 4.2%
	Other professional, scientific and technical 3.5%	Banking; finance 3.3%	Other professional 3.7%	Social work 4.2%
	Advertising and marketing 3%	Public administration 2.9%	Social work 3.7%	Wholesale and retail 3.3%

This highlights that for psychology graduates there are a wide range of potential career destinations. In the immediate first few years post-graduation, general administrative jobs and those in which relevant experience for future careers in psychology feature more highly than for the 2011 and 2009 cohorts.

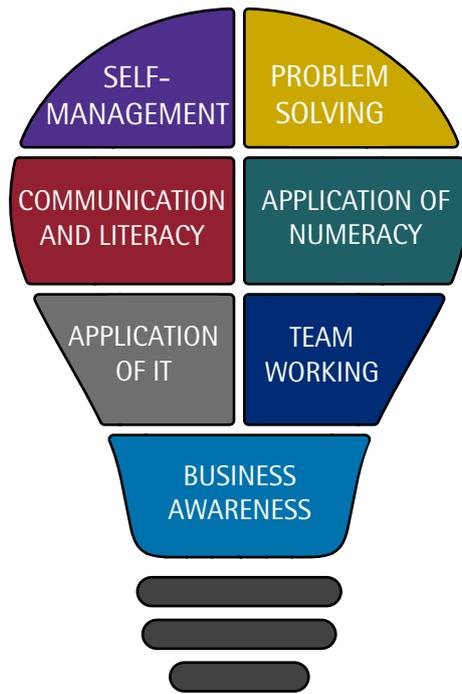
In relation to the employability characteristics that best describe their current job, over 70% of respondents indicated that *continual skill/knowledge development, interesting work, challenging work, varied work, long-term security* and *a progressive and dynamic organisation* were important or very important. Just under 60% of respondents indicated that *competitive salary* was important or very important.

The 2013 and 2015 cohorts indicated that *competitive salary* was less important than for the other cohorts (29.1% and 27.9%). The 2015 cohort also showed lower levels of importance for *long-term security* (34.9% either neutral or not important) compared to other cohorts.

In relation to the ‘employability skills’ acquired during their psychology degrees, over 70% of respondents indicated that *self-management, problem solving, communication and literacy, application of numeracy, application of information technology* were, at least, *well developed*. However, lower numbers of respondents felt that *team working* was *well developed*, and even lower numbers of respondents felt that skills in *business and customer awareness* were *well developed*. The 2015 cohort had higher levels of respondents that indicated that *team working, business/customer awareness and problem solving* were well developed, more than other cohorts.

In relation to ‘psychological skills’, overall the majority of respondents indicated that *a basic knowledge of the critical subject matter of psychology, scientific and critical analysis/problem solving, applying psychological knowledge to work, relationships and the broader community, behaving ethically, recognising, understanding and fostering respect for diversity, and being insightful and reflective about one’s own and others’ behaviour and mental processes* were, at least, *well developed* during the completion of their psychology degree.

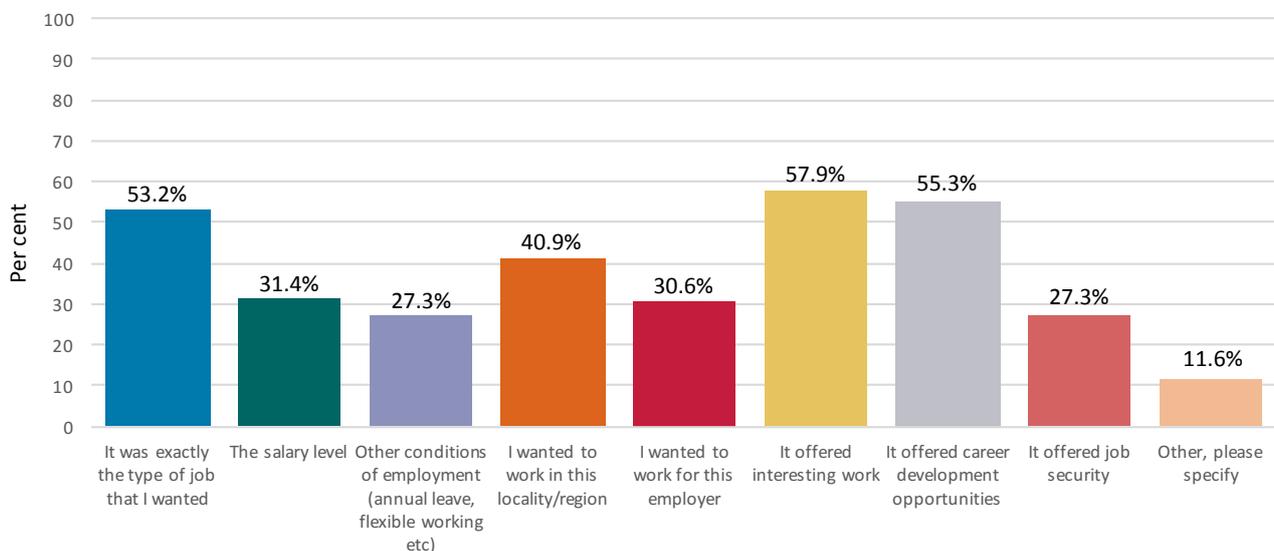
Employability skills



Many of these ‘employability skills’ were also *used most of the time* in their current job by the majority of respondents. With the exception of a *basic knowledge of psychology*, the majority of ‘psychological skills’ acquired were used at least most of the time by the majority of respondents. An in-depth analysis across the four cohorts revealed that the 2015 cohort respondents were again more likely to say that *self-management, problem solving, communication and literacy, application of information technology and scientific and critical analysis* were used only some or a little of the time. The 2013 and 2015 graduate were also more likely to indicate that they used *applying psychological principles* only some or a little of the time.

With regard to the factors that contributed to respondents’ decisions to take up their current job, the overall responses are depicted in Chart 3 below.

Please indicate which of the following factors contributed to your decision to take up your current job:



N = 1875

Analysis of the 11.6% ‘other responses’ highlighted that ‘to gain relevant experience’, ‘it was the only job I could get’ and ‘it suited my needs and circumstances’ were the most common other reasons (with 32.2%, 22% and 10.7% of responses respectively). With regard to what factors were relevant in relation to obtaining their current job, overall, the following responses were received:

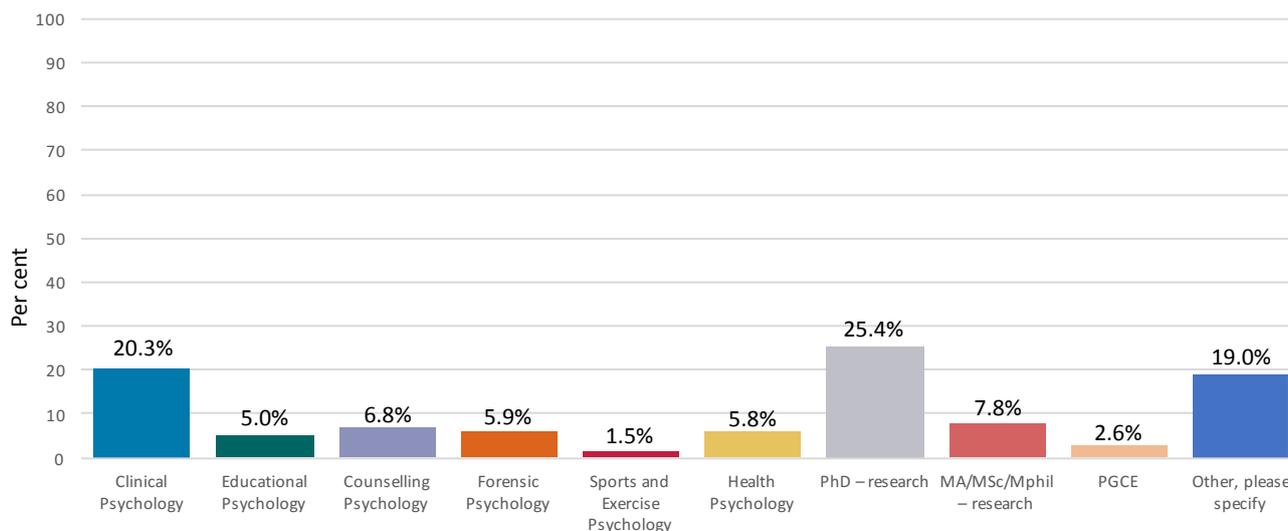
Response	Per cent
Your psychology degree	69.5%
The grade/classification of your degree	44.0%
GBC accreditation of your degree	25.1%
A postgraduate qualification that you have completed following your psychology degree	45.4%
A professional qualification that you have completed following your psychology degree	18.5%
Employment experience in this organisation in a different job	31.9%
Employment experience in a different organisation	62.8%
Other, please specify	5.5%
<i>N</i>	1766

Examining the responses from the different cohorts, the 2009 and 2011 graduates indicated that *postgraduate qualification* was a key factor compared to the 2013 and 2015 cohorts (66.7% and 48.9% compared to 31.5% and 11.6%).

The table below depicts the other most cited factors across the cohorts:

Factor/ Cohort	2009	2011	2013	2015
	Psychology degree 73.5%	Psychology Degree 72.7%	Employment experience in a different organisation 64.9%	Psychology degree 66.8%
	Postgraduate qualification 66.7%	Employment experience in a different organisation 68.4%	Psychology degree 63.3%	Employment experience in a different organisation 55.8%
	Employment experience in a different organisation 59.3%	Postgraduate qualification 48.9%	Grade/classification of my degree 45.4%	Grade/classification of my degree 41.8%
	Grade/classification of my degree 41.8%	Grade/classification of my degree 46.8%	Postgraduate qualification 31.5%	Employment experience in same organisation in a different job 20%

57. Please indicate the nature of the postgraduate study or training you are currently undertaking by selecting one of the following categories provided below:



$N = 606$

Of the 19% of ‘other respondents’, 9.5% were studying occupational psychology, 8.6% were studying social work, 3.5% speech and language therapy and 1.7% low intensity CBT. Interestingly, around 40% of the 2011 and 2013 cohorts indicated that they are currently undertaking a research PhD; over 30% of the 2009 and 2011 cohorts are in clinical psychology training and 20.8% of the 2015 graduates are undertaking a research Masters degree.

When asked to reflect on their experience of their psychology degree and how valuable it has been to their career, respondents gave a mixed range of responses. Positive comments included that their degree was very important to their career development and provided a strong set of transferable skills. Some respondents reflected that it was a good gateway degree for careers in education, counselling, social work and special educational needed co-ordination/support.

However, a re-occurring theme centred on the lack of practical work experience provided; that their degree did not actively prepare them for work. It was suggested that all courses should have placement-based modules to provide practical experience. Other comments concerned a lack of awareness and understanding of the transferable nature of the skills acquired, both from themselves and their careers advisors; and that there should be more active focus on careers during the degree course. In addition, some respondents reflected on the difficulties that they had experienced in progressing their careers in psychology, especially in relation to competitive areas such as clinical psychology. It was felt that realistic careers advice would be particularly beneficial (especially in relation to details of bottle necks, length of training etc.).

Comparison of cohorts – longitudinal data

Data from the 2009, 2011 cohorts and 2013 cohorts were compared for Phase 1, Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the project to track the career progression of those graduates. The results of this analysis must be treated with some caution as the percentage of respondents in each cohort has varied across the project (from 104 to 310 then 230 for 2009 graduates and from 330 to 472 then 301 for 2011 graduates and from 349 to 439 for 2013 graduates).

For all three cohorts, there was an increase in the percentage of respondents reporting that their current job was related to their long-term career plan (2009 – 78.3% increased to 85.9%; 2011 – 73.1% increased to 83.8% and for 2013 – 61% increased to 71.1%). This further supports the evidence from Phase 2 that for psychology graduates that it takes at least 3 years post-graduation to reach their intended career destination.

For all cohorts there was also an increase in the percentage of respondents reporting that their current job was in the field of psychology (for 2009 graduates this had increased from 55.3% to 65.2%; for 2011 graduates 47.4% to 57.1% and for the 2013 graduates from 40.1% to 50.7%). There were no significant changes in the type of contract for current employment for 2009 graduates. For 2011 and 2013 graduates, the percentage of respondents in full-time employment (and a consequential decrease in part-time and unemployment) was found from Phase 2 to Phase 3 – 57.8% to 71.3% and from 48% to 63.6% respectively.

For all cohorts, a shift in employment in the private and public sectors was found between Phase 2 and 3 – with more respondents from all cohorts reporting employment in the public sector for Phase 3 (2009 – 55.1% to 59.9% and for 2011 – 58.9% to 62.5% and for 2013 – 50.9% to 58.5%).

Again, for all cohorts, the views on the extent to which ‘employability skills’ and ‘psychological skills’ had been acquired during the completion of their degrees, remained almost entirely consistent across both Phases of data collection. However, increases were observed in the percentage of respondents indicating that they use ‘psychological skills’ *all of the time* in their current role across all cohorts. This was most noticeably observed for *a basic knowledge of psychology, scientific and critical analysis, applying psychological principles, behaving ethically, and being insightful*. There was also a slight increase across the cohorts that having a *degree in psychology* had been an important factor in gaining their current job.

Taking these outcomes all together, the data suggests that for the cohorts in Phase 3, the 2011 and 2013 cohorts careers had continued to show progression towards their final destinations in and beyond psychology and that consequently, the ‘psychological’ and ‘employability skills’ acquired during their degrees had started to be used more and be more relevant to their current occupation. For the 2009 cohort, now eight years post-graduation, a steadier career stage has been reached for a greater proportion of graduates.

Discussion

The outcomes of Phase 3 build upon those of Phases 1 and 2, indicating that to a greater extent, the type, pattern and duration of employment confirms that for psychology graduates, the early career destinations are often not linked to their intended careers destination and it can take around 5 years post-graduation for graduates to settle into a traditional career pathway (see for example, Purcell et al., 2004). For example, in relation to the 2013 cohorts, 61% of respondents indicated that their current employment was related to their long-term career plan. This percentage then increases for the 2009 and 2007 cohorts (78.3% and 89.4% respectively).

With respect to the type of employment, a higher percentage of 2009 graduates are on permanent contracts than for other cohorts. A higher percentage of 2015 graduates are on temporary/casual contracts than respondents from other cohorts. Again, reflecting more that early career destinations are often related to ensuring an initial income whilst gaining relevant, experience prior to postgraduate study. For some graduates, this initial work may be unpaid.

Consistent with this, the 2013 and 2015 cohorts indicated that *competitive salary* was less important than for the other cohorts. The 2015 cohort also indicated lower levels of importance for *long-term security* than for other cohorts. Other responses elicited for this question confirms that these initial roles were 'to gain relevant experience', 'the only job I could get' and 'suited to my needs and circumstances' were the most common other reasons (with 32.2%, 22% and 10.7% of responses respectively).

In terms of the value of a degree in psychology, possession of a degree in psychology as a requirement for obtaining their current job more likely for 2009 and 2011 graduates (78.3% and 76.7%) than for 2013 and 2015 graduates (55.6% and 49.1%). Again, reflecting the differing pressures on new graduates and that career destinations in psychology typically require at least 3 years postgraduate training and experience.

From the sample in this study, 65.2% of 2009 graduates responded that their current job is in *the field of psychology*. This percentage then declines for the 2011, 2013 and 2015 cohorts. For all of the cohorts, higher numbers of graduates were employed in the *education* and *human health sectors*. For the 2013 and 2015 cohorts, there is also an increase in the number employed in other sectors (notably *office admin*, *residential care* and the *social work sector*). Once more, this is indicative of the immediate need to seek paid employment both within and beyond psychology. Echoing responses from Phase 1 and 2 of the project, comments from respondents also indicated that this was due to a lack of employment opportunities in psychology (assistant posts for example) and the level of competition for entry onto postgraduate training.

The acquisition of a broad range of 'employability skills' acquired during their psychology degrees is confirmed with over 70% of respondents indicating that *self-management*, *problem solving*, *communication and literacy*, *application of numeracy*, *application of information technology* being, at least, *well developed*. These skills were also *used most of the time* in their current job by the majority of respondents. However, *business and customer awareness* and *team working* were far less well developed during their degrees, despite being needed in their current occupation.

The majority of respondents confirmed the development of ‘psychological skills’ during the completion of their psychology degree. With the exception of *a basic knowledge of psychology*, the majority of these skills acquired were used at least most of the time in their current job by over 50% of respondents. For the 2015 cohort, fewer respondents indicated that these skills were used all or most of the time, perhaps again reflecting their current career stage.

Comparing the data from Phases 1, 2 and 3, enables some identification of the career paths and usefulness of a psychology degree for the 2009 and 2011 cohorts (bearing in mind the need to exert some caution due to the variation in the numbers of respondents in each cohort across the three phases of data collection). However, the data suggests that an increased number of graduates in these cohorts are now in employment that is related to their long-term career plans, that is in the field of psychology and that the ‘psychological skills’ acquired are utilised more. This supports the results from Phase 2 that it takes time for a career in psychology to be established (at least 3–5 years).

So what do these findings overall suggest?

In accordance with the outcomes of Phases 1 and 2 of the project, the expected pattern of early career destinations is supported to a greater extent by the Phase 3 data, with more established careers being increasingly evident in the 2009 and 2011 cohorts. The lack of representation of final career destinations in the early careers of psychology graduates is evident in the 2013 and 2015 cohorts, with greater variation in employment sectors and types of contract; as well as the number of respondents indicating that their current employment is not related to their long-term career plan. The career progression is as expected – employment prospects improve over time, with increased experience and/or postgraduate training. This is consistent with Phases 1 and 2 as well as the last main Society survey conducted on psychology graduates from 2000 (Van Laar & Udell, 2008). The data also obtained provides additional evidence of the long-lasting usefulness and applicability of the ‘employability’ and ‘psychological skills’ acquired from a degree in psychology.

Most psychology graduates see significant value in their degree but perhaps not the actual extent to which the skills acquired are generic and extremely transferrable. Concern was expressed by respondents regarding the lack of practical experience and preparation for the world of work provided in their degree, as well as difficulty in gaining entry into their career of choice.

As employability data is becoming increasingly significant to academic departments and prospective students (and their parents), the Society will utilise the data obtained so far to provide information on the generic and highly transferrable skill sets acquired by completing a psychology degree; as well as demonstrating the career prospects and progression attainable by psychology graduates. These will be available in hard copy on request from the Society as well as being downloadable from the Society’s website.

Individual reports will now be prepared for each of the partner organisations. As the members of the Association of Heads of Psychology Departments continue to show interest in the project, further approaches will be made to recruit a higher number of partner organisations through which Phase 4 of the data collection will be launched in 2018 to capture the progression of the 2015, 2013, and 2011 cohorts. This will be the final phase of the project tracking the final career destinations for the 2011 cohort who will have then been followed for seven years post-graduation.

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