

An Exploratory Study into the Reasons why Some UK Engineering Graduates are Unemployed

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This study, undertaken as part of the National HE STEM Programme, sought to better understand the reasons why there appears to be a mismatch between UK engineering employers requiring more engineering graduates and published data showing an unemployment rate amongst engineering graduates of 13%. The method adopted was based on interviews with employed and unemployed graduates from the 5 partner universities and employers. It was based in the Midlands region in England, where the partner universities were located. It sought to identify any common themes and any actions universities could implement to improve the employability of the graduates. The context to this is an increasingly demanding multi-stage recruitment process. In many cases a first stage web-based application, possibly including a CV, is followed for those successful candidates with a second stage screening and possible telephone interview. If successful, candidates are invited to a two-day assessment centre, where they undertake a number of tasks in groups and a possible interview. The study has identified reasons for potential failure at each stage of the process and each of the groups interviewed have suggested ways of the students being better prepared to deal with these thus enhancing their chances of success. These include the importance of much earlier planning by students and the determination to succeed. Students should make the most of the opportunities available during their studies to enhance their skills in putting together their applications and in preparing for assessment centres and interviews. Both graduates and employers stressed the importance of work experience. A number of actions for universities have been identified to help students better prepare themselves for future employment and these have been formulated into a guide that has been circulated to final year students in the first instance. However, the clear message to all students is to prepare early and to prepare well. Not only is it important that engineering education is attractive to potential students, it is also vital that the engineering graduate is attractive to employers.