

# **STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYABILITY AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT: SOUTH AFRICA**



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**Higher Education**

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# The study

The British Council commissioned the UCL Institute of Education, UK to lead a three-year (2013–15) research project, in partnership with: Kenyatta University, Kenya; University of Education, Winneba, Ghana; University of the Free State, South Africa; and University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

The study aims to provide policy makers with compelling evidence on how they can build a stronger link between their higher education sector and the labour market, ensuring graduates contribute to economic growth and building the inclusive societies Africa needs if it is to release its potential. This research brief reports on aspects only of the South Africa case study. It is authored by Melanie Walker, University of the Free State. It looks at key challenges and how students perceive employability in higher education.

## Key findings:

- Employability cannot be well understood without taking into account both university arrangements and how professionally and socially inclusive the labour market is. Thus blaming a 'skills gap' or 'mismatch' between graduates and what employers want is not helpful.
- The majority of graduates hold public-good values and commitments to contributing to a better society.
- Not enough students across all universities consider self-employment pathways, while most black<sup>1</sup> graduates hope to work in the public sector.
- The quality of teaching, and teaching methods significantly influences intellectual and personal development and the formation of critical knowledge and skills for working in a diverse society. However, there is a misalignment of theory and opportunities for knowledge applications through practical work or work experience in nearly all degree programmes.
- Students do not access careers offices even though they offer a valuable service. Nor do all students capitalise on extra-curricular opportunities, or realise the value of these for their work readiness.
- Individual inequalities persist, evident in student biographies and differing access to networks, including for vocational vacation work and internships. This affects job searching and economic opportunities.
- Social arrangements and history affect graduate employment. Some degrees are more sought after by employers than others. The reputation of the university and its geographical location affect employment opportunities.

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1. It is unfortunate that in South Africa we need to continue using race-based categories. Nonetheless, for now, this is needed to monitor progress in reducing historical inequalities; official statistics use the categories of African, Coloured, Indian and White. More generally 'black' is used to refer to African students, as is common in the media, reports and so on, unless otherwise indicated.

# Challenges to graduate employability and an inclusive society

South Africa's economic outlook is not as good as it should be, with stubbornly high unemployment among young people and a schooling system which is still failing to deliver good compulsory education for all. Inequality remains a tremendous problem.<sup>2</sup>

Given the severe inequalities in South Africa, higher education should contribute to educating ethical citizens and professionals with public-good values who can contribute to a more inclusive society.

Moreover, higher education is acknowledged to have a significant role to play in the country's economic development; it is central to the national innovation system and growing a knowledge economy through educating highly skilled workers.<sup>3</sup> It is thus good news that higher education is expanding and more students than ever have the opportunity to attend university. Black<sup>4</sup> students are in the headcount majority and gender parity has been achieved at undergraduate level, with 58 per cent of students female.

	2002	2012
African	405,914	662,123
Coloured	38,965	58,692
Indian	48,717	52,296
White	181,599	172,654
<b>Total</b>	<b>675,164</b>	<b>953,373</b>

However, there are historically generated inequities of access and participation rates between different race groups, as participation rates show:<sup>5</sup>

	2002	2012
African	11.1%	16.0%
Coloured	10.7%	14.2%
Indian	49.7%	47.4%
White	63.4%	54.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>19.2%</b>

Many talented young people are prevented from taking up the opportunity for further study that could help reinvigorate South Africa's development.

Quality across the sector is still a challenge. One way to consider quality is by looking at staff–student ratios which are higher at the historically formerly disadvantaged institutions (HDIs), compared to the historically advantaged (HAI) institutions.

Student–staff ratio, indicative examples<sup>6</sup>

University	Ratio
University of Cape Town (HAI)	19 to 1
University of Fort Hare (HDI)	31 to 1
Tshwane University of Technology (HDI)	44 to 1
University of Venda (HDI)	40 to 1
University of the Witwatersrand (HAI)	15 to 1

Another way is to look at graduation rates. In South African universities, 40 per cent of students drop out in the first year, only 15 per cent finish in the required time, and only 35 per cent graduate with a degree.<sup>7</sup>

At 11.5 per cent,<sup>8</sup> unemployment of graduates (degree and diploma holders) does not appear to be as severe as in many other African countries. However, South Africa cannot afford to have any of its skilled young people out of work. Moreover unemployment is uneven across race groups, with three per cent of white graduates and 8.5 per cent of black graduates unemployed in 2012;<sup>9</sup> this is a matter of inequality which goes against a fair and inclusive society. Moreover, more black graduates (76.7 per cent) enter the public sector,<sup>10</sup> which may constrain the development of a broadly-based entrepreneurial culture amongst graduates.

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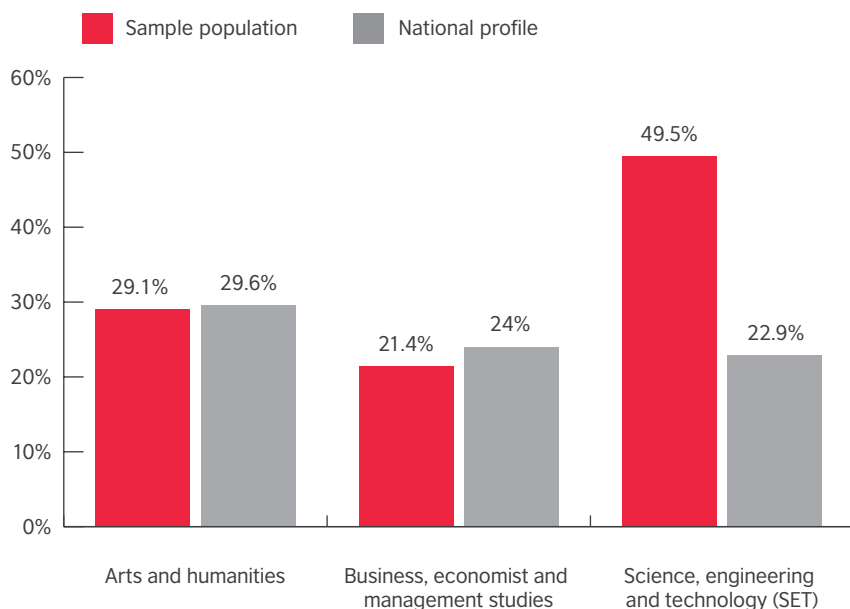
# Challenges which affect student perceptions of employability

The evidence is drawn from case studies at four South African universities, with different histories and national rankings: two HAI research and teaching universities – University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and University of the Free State (UFS), an HDI – University of Venda (Univen), and a comprehensive university, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU).

A total of 147 interviews were conducted with university leaders, lecturers and students, as well as teaching and learning staff and careers service officers across humanities, sciences and business degrees. Of the students interviewed 67.1 per cent were black compared to 69.5 per cent nationally, 25.5 per cent were white compared to 18.1 per cent nationally,

and 60 per cent were female, compared to the national average of 58 per cent.<sup>11</sup> 17.5 per cent of the final year students at the four universities were also surveyed. We draw on both the qualitative and survey data in this research brief.

## Project student sample population by field of study



11. IRR *op cit*.

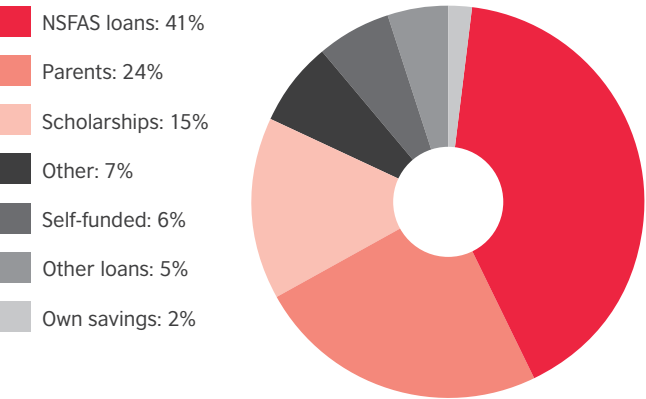
# Choices and opportunities

## a) Source of funding

Choices and opportunities varied for students. This is captured by how they were funded. The higher the number of means-tested loans and bursaries from the National Student Fund (NSFAS) to students, the more disadvantaged the student body is likely to be, and from our data, the less likely that individual students had other university and even degree options from the ones they have ended up studying. The data

shows that most students (39 per cent) from all the universities, except for University of Venda, have parents as the main sponsors of their fees. 44 per cent of the students in the aggregate sample are funded by NSFAS and 26 per cent sponsored by parents. The University of Venda has distinctive demographics compared to the other institutions as seen in the chart and table below:

Project student sample population by field of study



	Source of funding 1	Source of funding 2	Source of funding 3
NMMU	Parents (39%)	NSFAS loans (29%)	Scholarships (22%)
UFS	Parents (39%)	Self-funded (18%)	NSFAS loans (16%)
Univen	NSFAS loans (64%)	Parents (12%)	Scholarships (11%)
Wits	Parents (39%)	NSFAS Loans (24%)	Scholarships (19%)

## b) School attended

The study showed that different institutions had students from different schooling backgrounds. In South Africa schooling background serves as a rough proxy for socio-economic class and is a strong indicator for educational opportunity. Students from historically advantaged public schools comprised a larger percentage at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (32 per cent), University of the Witwatersrand (34 per cent) and University of the Free State (36 per cent). University of Venda is the anomaly, with a majority of its students (76 per cent) from rural or black township schools (where quality is

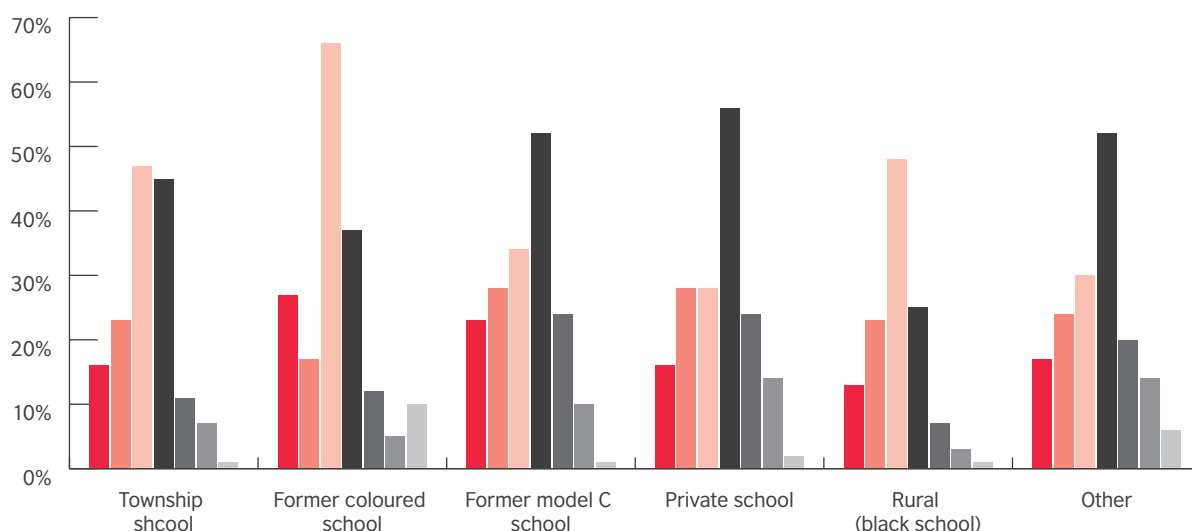
generally poor) and only three per cent coming from advantaged schools.

## c) Work aspirations

Most of the students from University of the Witwatersrand (60 per cent) and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (57 per cent) expect to work in the private sector whereas most at University of the Free State (39 per cent) and Venda (44 per cent) expect to work in the public sector. The data also shows that the majority of the students from former coloured schools (66 per cent), township schools (47 per cent) and rural schools (48 per cent) want to work in the public sector.

The majority of those from other types of schools prefer the private sector. There thus seems to be a correlation between type of schools (less or more advantaged) and aspirations regarding employment, where the public sector is arguably seen as 'safer'. 11.4 per cent of black students and 29 per cent of whites plan to be self-employed, with more students from University of the Witwatersrand (19 per cent) and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (25 per cent) and fewer from University of Venda (6 per cent) opting for this choice, suggesting a possible correlation between advantage and being in a position to take greater employment risks.

Student profile by school attended and future aspirations



	Township school	Former coloured school	Former model C school	Private school	Rural (black school)	Other
Academic	16%	27%	23%	16%	13%	17%
Further study	23%	17%	28%	28%	23%	24%
Public sector (government)	47%	66%	34%	28%	48%	30%
Private sector	45%	37%	52%	56%	25%	52%
Self employment	11%	12%	24%	24%	7%	20%
Charity/NGO	7%	5%	10%	14%	3%	14%
Other	1%	10%	1%	2%	1%	6%



A background photograph showing a group of young people, likely students, sitting on stone steps. In the foreground, a young woman with short dark hair, wearing a pink and white striped long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, is sitting and looking down. Behind her, another person in a blue top is partially visible. In the background, a young woman in a light blue short-sleeved shirt is standing and smiling. The scene is surrounded by lush greenery and vibrant pink and orange flowers. A large, stylized red quotation mark is overlaid on the lower right side of the image, framing the text.

**‘Higher education  
access and success  
is increasingly  
important for  
choosing good  
lives and building  
inclusive societies.’**





# The role of universities

## a) Developing graduate attributes

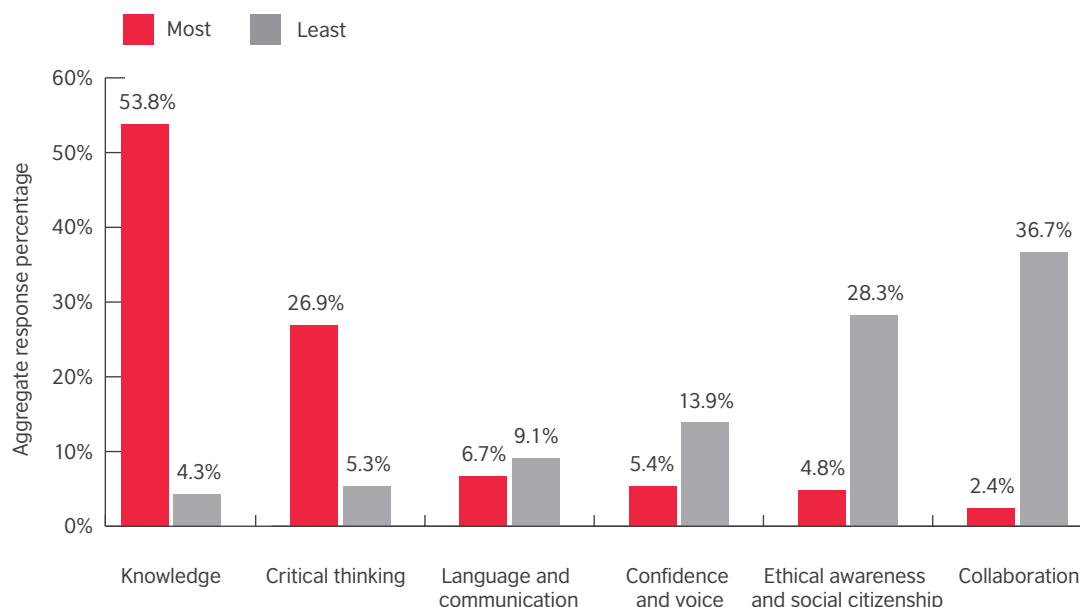
We asked students to rank a list of six graduate attributes which we drew up based on research and the project's concern for inclusive development.

Attributes	Indicative descriptors
<b>Knowledge</b>	Breadth and depth of disciplinary knowledge. Able to locate, analyse and synthesise information from a variety of sources and media. Intellectually curious and engages in the pursuit of new knowledge and understanding. Able to apply knowledge to solve diverse problems.
<b>Critical thinking and autonomy</b>	Identify, define and assess complex issues and ideas. Exercise critical judgement in evaluating sources of information and constructing meaning. Exercise critical judgement in work situations. Experience in self-directed learning and capable of independent work. Able to set own goals and aspirations and to review and evaluate these for career and personal development and lifelong learning.
<b>Language and communication</b>	Present ideas clearly and concisely in quality written language. Confident and clear in oral communication.
<b>Confidence and voice</b>	Able to lead. Able to engage in deliberation of ideas. Possess excellent interpersonal and social skills. Able to express and defend ideas and opinions in diverse settings. Able to weigh up and make career choices. Welcome feedback and able to act on this as appropriate.
<b>Collaboration</b>	Respect and value others' views and perspectives. Experienced in working or interacting with diverse individuals in groups and teams of varying sizes and in a variety of roles. Articulate complex ideas with respect to the needs and abilities of diverse audiences.
<b>Ethical awareness and citizenship</b>	Consider and act responsibly upon the ethical, social and global responsibilities of my actions. Welcome the richness of multi-cultural and international experiences, opportunities and ways of thinking. Understand importance of commitments to social contributions/common good for an inclusive/ democratic society.



Student ranking of significant graduate attributes across the four universities looked like this:

### Student ranking of graduate attributes



We can see that students valued knowledge and critical thinking highly. They made typical comments like this from a Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University black female BA student: 'My knowledge is very important to me, because that's what I'm here for, in university, to be able to gain the knowledge that's going to equip me to have the proper skills when I go into the working world.'

### b) Theory-practice misalignment

Our data shows a significant concern among students with the limited opportunities in both the curriculum and pedagogy to integrate and apply theory to practice and work experience. This particularly affects those students in our rural case study university, and those students from poorer backgrounds who lack the social capital to find vacation work which can enable them to apply their knowledge in a work situation and be better placed for employment.

However, when students have access to work experience they are uniformly positive about the benefits.

'I would have to say for the first year or so [after graduation] it's going to be a bit of a disadvantage because, as I've said, there's a lot of theory and not enough practical, and you need a lot of practical to get through.'

**UFS white male BCom student**

'Here we get theoretical information and you need experience. I would prefer to work for a big company where I gain practical experience and knowledge and by so doing I would be accumulating my own capital that I can use to start my own company. Here at Venda they are not offering practical learning, only theory.'

**Univen black male BCom student**

'I think in some ways the things I learnt here helped me to figure out some of the things at work but it's also very important that even with the studying it's still the practical aspect in terms of vacation work that's really important.'

**Wits male Indian BSc Civil Engineering student**

'I think that the internships give you the experience of what it's actually like to work in that field. Often studying something is quite different to working in it. They give you a chance to see what different employers are like, what different companies have as a culture.'

**Wits white female BA Law/English student**

### c) Teaching and learning

Good teaching matters and makes a difference to student learning. While knowledge is important, students want to gain more than book knowledge while at university. On the other hand, students value teaching which enables their access to knowledge. Students also emphasise the importance of excellence at the departmental level in the way teaching and learning takes place. Many students value the exposure through teaching methods to collaborative learning where students from different backgrounds are brought together. Students also learn leadership skills by working with diverse peers.

'When we then have to seek for employment, the only thing we know is what was in the book, and when you get to the work environment there is no book. There is no book... They expect you to know what to do because you come from university, you have a degree, so you're supposed to know when you walk into the office what is expected of you.'

**UFS black female Politics student**

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'I think what they are trying to do is empower us with the knowledge of agriculture, increase our interest in agriculture so that we can be the ones who will produce food for this country. Not only this country but also for Africa as a whole.'

**Univen black female Animal Science student**

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'I know that in my department they want to... make us as sharp as possible in terms of the knowledge of the course and what's happening and what you can do. And not only learning, like, taking in information and being able to regurgitate it back, but in terms of applying the work and being able to go into a field and being thrown into a project where I will be able to start and research from scratch... they're really aiming at teaching us the work and making us the best.'

**NMMU black male Microbiology student**

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'In the classroom, especially when we have to do things like group work, there you don't have [the divide between white and black students]... And then it exposes you to a person's life. You [tend to realise], this person is not that bad. Maybe I thought white people are like this, but this guy is different. So we've learned to appreciate other people.'

**UFS black female, Politics student**

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'In my faculty we have a lot of group work, and a lot of team work... you have to work with people, and you have to adapt to certain things... leadership, I've also gained that, because in high school I wasn't really anybody's leader, but through growing, and realising that people slack behind, you have to stand up and say, no, actually this is not what's happening, this is what must happen.'

**NMMU black male Politics student**

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### d) Extra-curricular activities (ECA) and student support services

Support services aimed at enhancing the employability of graduates have been established across the four universities, while universities also offer a range of extra-curricular opportunities such as sports, subject associations, students' council, volunteering, and so on. Not all of the students participate, or realise the importance of participating in ECA for their careers and personal development. Those who do indicate significant benefits, which expand their opportunity sets. Careers support services include: career guidance offices with the task of linking students to potential employers, providing opportunities for internships or work placements, as well as training final year students in job seeking skills such as CV writing, interviewing and work etiquette. However, overall, there is a low level of participation in activities aimed at supporting and enhancing the employment of graduates after graduation. In most of the universities, the students in their third year (in one university up to 90 per cent) do not know about the office for career development or do not know where the office is situated. Where students had heard of and knew about the work of the support services, some of the programmes of the careers office clashed with their academic timetables. Overall, from the survey less than 51 per cent of the students think the student placement office or careers service at their university was supportive and informative.

This percentage, coupled with 36 per cent who neither agree nor disagree, suggests that the placement office is not a primary source of support for students. 38 per cent of the students were neutral on the benefits of international experiences in enhancing employability. This could be an indicator that most students do not have international experiences to comment from; 43 per cent of the students, however, think international exposure enhances employability.

'I'm the kind of person who has always taken initiatives and I like to challenge myself. In first year I joined an organisation on campus... I had never heard of it, I had never been part until the December holidays and by January I was already president, I was recruiting people on campus... the association required me to go and speak to big business... I think that was where I got the practical experiences of being able to articulate myself in a professional manner.'

**UFS black female BCom  
Economics student**

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'There is no career guidance whatsoever, because this is a group that should be actually nurtured, these are the people that are supposed to be helped every time, but that doesn't happen around here... I think we don't have such an office, that's why I was saying we also lack in terms of equipping us for the working environment. I think the university has recruitment weeks, they go during the final year like this, the final year students where they prepare them for the workplace, they encourage them to interact with individual companies, like bursaries and internship membership. So, right now we are all depending on our individual strengths, because if we get to the workplace tomorrow we won't know what to do.'

**Univen black male Biochemistry/  
Microbiology student**

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'They send emails at the wrong time because we are busy with exams, when you get an email at that time you are not going to spend time trying to send the CVs or trying to research more because you need to pass first.'

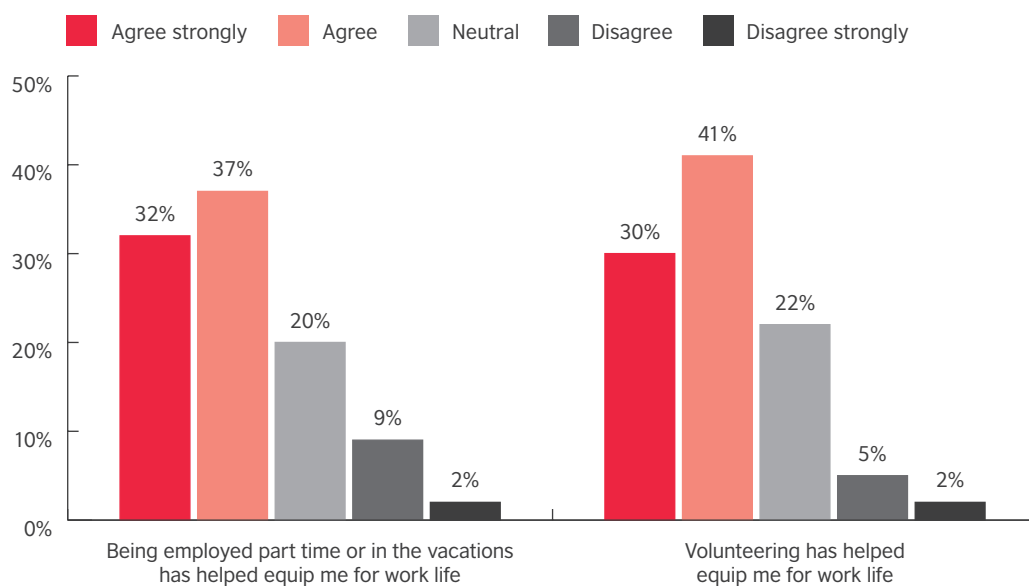
**NMMU black male BCom student**

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Volunteering helps equip students for employment as does part-time or vacation work. 71 per cent of students believe volunteering helps them and 69 per cent believe vacation/part-time work enhances employability.

### Importance of part time and volunteering work



Overall, ECA and student support structures are important and offer valuable services, but are under-utilised arguably by the students who could most benefit.

# Social arrangements that impact on employability

## a) Uneven access to social capital

The theory–practice misalignment has unexpected equity effects for students who do not have networks (family and friends) with potential employers, both public and private. They then struggle to develop work experience, while part-time work is not related to their degree programme. Nonetheless some students do understand the advantage of any workplace experience. Others are advantaged in having networks, or in knowing how to mobilise these, to enable work experience and subsequent employment opportunities. In some departments (notably at University of the Witwatersrand) students are assisted by lecturers using their own personal contacts in finding internships or vacation placements, but this is uneven across all departments and all universities.

‘I don’t think it’s about marks, it’s about contacts. If you look at it, a lot of the time it’s not the brightest people who may get good contacts, who end up doing vacation work or internships, just because their parents know a person in the company.’

**UFS white Female BSc Zoology student**

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‘Well, I’m very lucky with my uncle being there, he said he’ll take my CV and he’ll give it to the people that do the interviews.’

**UFS white male BCom student**

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‘If someone sees your name and they know it, or they put in a good word for you, you’re in with a chance....you do have an advantage over the others.’

**NMMU black male Political Science student**

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‘If you are from a poorer background... then the likelihood of you having strong contacts is unlikely. If you are from a wealthier white or advantaged background then it’s ten times easier... Irrespective of what they are studying or whatever, they can always land on their feet.’

**Wits black female BA/Law student**

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## b) Reputation and geographical location of university

There are systemic issues which are also historical. Students are very aware of these systemic differences between their universities and comment on how this affects their fair chances with employers who themselves rank the universities. Students at the rural university HDI and those in the financial hub of Gauteng say that this disadvantages or advantages them respectively in access to employers and finding employment. A University of Venda careers officer described the problem: ‘When you invite a company from Johannesburg or from Gauteng, they will ask you about the cost of accommodation and travel. They’ll ask you, where is this University of Venda? How do we get there? If we fly, is there an airport?’

‘The Wits name implies you are smart .... if you have a Wits degree then you are set.’

**Wits black female BA/Law student**

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‘I think a student from the University of the Free State would not have the same fair advantage.’

**UFS white male BSc Geology student**

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‘If you come from Wits... most of them get employment... opportunities are greater.’

**Wits black male BSc Engineering student**

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‘Cape Town and Stellenbosch and Wits and so on so, I think they get more opportunities, the companies market themselves more at those universities than they do here.’

**NMMU, white male Economics student**

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## c) Field of study

Field of study is affected by demand-side factors; these are not ‘natural’ but shaped by a discourse of ‘scarce skills’. This especially affects the humanities and social sciences. On the other hand accounting, business and commerce students and engineering students (especially those on state or company sponsored bursaries who are guaranteed a job on graduating) perceive positive employment prospects due to the demand for graduates with their qualifications. Thus some fields of study appear to be more employable than others – the subject knowledge is in greater demand and students and academics indicate that particular technical skills and subject fields are paramount in enhancing employment outcomes. As one academic from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University explained: ‘I would say 99 per cent of our B-Tech (Engineering) classes are employed.’ We found a great deal of evidence for perceptions about field of study and employers across all our university data.

‘I call this degree my useless but powerful degree....I love sociology, I’ve learned a lot of skills, I’ve learned how to use my brain, and in politics how to argue my case...I find it useless [for employment] but powerful in the knowledge that it has.’

**Wits black female BA Sociology/Law student**

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# The role of universities in inclusive development

From the case study data, all four universities as part of their various vision and mission statements observe the need to produce more than just excellence at academic level.

They all claim to aim to also produce graduates able to uphold the values of human development. Across all four universities, values like 'Ubuntu', respect for diversity and cultural differences, as well as social engagement are part of the institutional vision which should foster an institutional culture aligned to this vision. This is aligned with concerns for diversity and opportunities for students to work together preparing them for a diverse world of work through the inclusive nature of the university, classrooms and common areas which make it possible for people from different socio-economic and

racial backgrounds to come together. We found in all the universities an awareness amongst students of the need to contribute to society, but also some tensions between making money and 'giving back'. Valuing 'good' citizenship ranged from 74 per cent at University of Venda to 49 per cent at University of the Witwatersrand.

'I agree that universities are making better citizens. Here we are in a group and not doing schoolwork and we can conflict and disagree but we learn to settle down and iron out those issues. We may be discussing something as a group and quarrel, but after that we just sort it out and throw it away.'

**Univen black female BCom student**

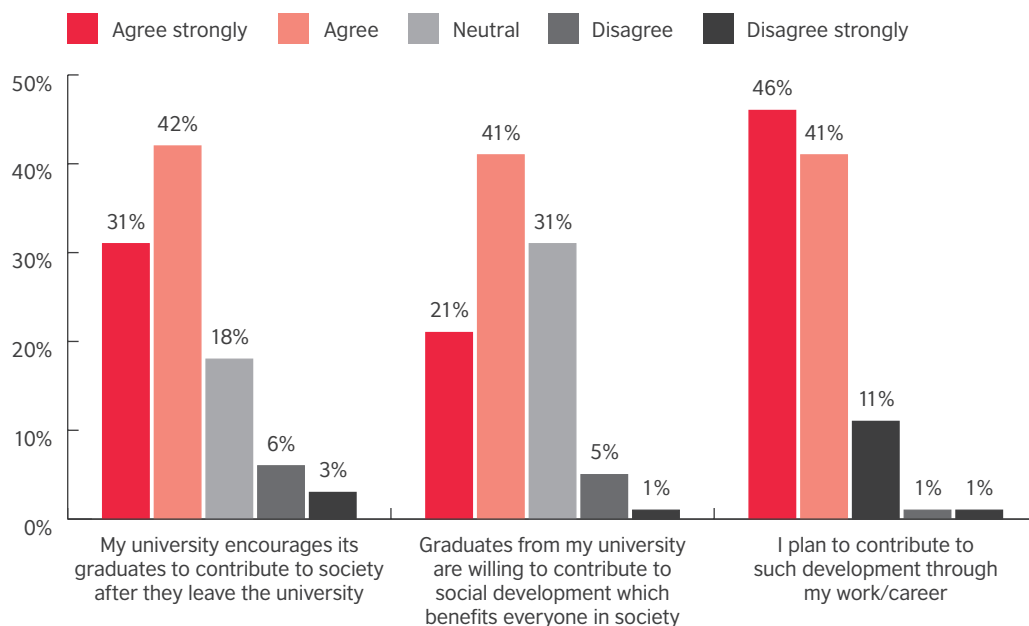
It does contribute to you becoming a good citizen because when you are at university you see yourself making a difference. You see yourself doing something to make your country better, to make the people around you live better.'

**Wits Indian female BSc Ecology and Zoology**

'The University has the Human Project and Academic project. It has the Charity division [such as the 'No Hungry Student Campaign']; it has so many things that it does in order to make the person or the student so much better when they leave here, not just academically but also holistically.'

**UFS female BSoc Sociology student**

## Student perceptions of their university and inclusive development contributions



# Pathways to change

## **a) An expansive understanding of employability**

How employability is understood shapes educational aims and practices. It can be narrowly understood as preparation for a job. This is how most of the students understand employability – preparation for the job market. The role of the university is then to produce human capital for the labour market. This definition generates claims about a supply side ‘skills gap’, and universities are blamed for not producing what employers (the demand-side) want. Human capital also does not take diversity into account, for example the gender and social class of the job-seeker.

But employability can also be considered more expansively to include non-market goods such as the formation of public good values, the valuing of diversity, critical knowledge, and so on. It can be understood as shaped not only by what universities do, but also to include external conditions in the labour market, public policies and society. The responsibility to develop the graduate attributes of individual job-seekers lies with a combination of the individual, the university and the society.

In this respect the university cannot do everything to get jobs for its students but it can do a great deal in terms of teaching and learning, ethos and values, and extra-curricular opportunities to enhance the employability of individual students. We would need to pay attention to what students are able to be and do, what appropriate university conditions are in place to foster individual

employability, what is missing in what universities are doing, and what external conditions influence employability. Thus what each student is able to do cannot be divorced from his or her opportunities set provided by the educational and social context. Moreover, our case studies show that students’ employability outcomes cannot be attributed solely to individual efforts. We found multi- and intersecting dimensions across the university, the graduate and the social conditions that shape individual employability, employment opportunities and orientations to inclusive development.

The key is to understand and act on those elements outlined in this brief which universities can change such as teaching quality, work experience, developing social capital, and so on. Universities and careers offices can also encourage an orientation to self-employment and entrepreneurship, as well as widening students’ aspirations to work in both the public and private sectors.

## **b) Teaching quality and work ethic**

Universities, supported by public policy and funding, should make quality teaching approaches available to all students, and in particular work to address the misalignment of theory and practice so that all students are exposed in the formal curriculum and pedagogies to opportunities to apply and integrate theory in practical and work-based contexts. As many of the poorer students will be struggling financially, universities might consider

implementing work-study programmes, which contribute to the payment of student fees and provide on-campus work experience. For students who are doing well academically, opportunities should be provided for paid work in tutoring and mentoring more junior students. Many students also remarked that hard work is of utmost importance, both before the degree ends, and in working life, whether or not it is promoted by the university. For example: ‘You have to work hard if you are here. ...I think being proactive, and being hardworking are some of the values that I’ve acquired... but not that they have been enforced in me or the value system that the department has put in place. (Univen black female Microbiology student). Another student comments ‘They don’t say, we promote your work ethic now, but you can see that they’re trying to instil that.’ (NMMU black male Political Science student). Universities should actively encourage this ethos of hard work.

### **c) Develop all students' social capital**

Universities need to find ways to address inequalities of social capital by using academic departments, careers services and student mentors to reach all students, especially those who lack existing networks. This should not be left solely up to students, as those from poorer backgrounds, may not understand the importance of building networks and engaging in extra-curricular experiences for their future economic opportunities. Where students have part-time jobs to finance their studies, they could be encouraged to reflect on what they can learn from these jobs and how they can build these experiences positively when constructing their CVs. Universities need to ensure that opportunities to meet employers are open to all students and not only those who can afford such events.

### **d) Systemic issues need attention systemically**

Universities still suffer the effects of historical inequalities. These cannot be solved by any one university on its own. Nonetheless, matters of (historical) reputation and advantage and employers' perceptions of reputation can unfairly affect the economic opportunities of students. Universities need to address this as a

body through their national vice-chancellors' organisation, and through their own engagements with employers. Public policy needs to support systemic change as well. Universities can also rally robustly in defence of the value of arts and social science degrees, and make the case to employers for what these have to offer. For example, research commissioned by the British Council<sup>12</sup> reveals that the humanities contribute significantly to the delivery of development programmes addressing social, economic or public health challenges around the world. Their study, carried out by Ipsos in 2014, shows that the humanities are valued by development agencies and organisations for the skills and attributes they cultivate. Extensive interviews with senior leaders, human resources managers and programme officers at 19 top international development organisations, donor agencies and non-governmental organisations revealed that humanities graduates are seen to have important skills that complement the scientific and technical expertise needed for development projects. Martha Nussbaum<sup>13</sup> similarly makes a compelling case that the arts and humanities have much to offer in building a decent and inclusive society. She is critical of the education of technically proficient graduates who are 'obtuse'. Universities should take up her challenge.

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12. British Council (2014) *Mobilising the Humanities: The Development Perspective*. Available online at: [www.britishcouncil.org/sites/britishcouncil.uk2/files/mobilising\\_the\\_humanities.pdf](http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/britishcouncil.uk2/files/mobilising_the_humanities.pdf)

13. Nussbaum, M (2010) *Not For Profit* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press).





