



Press Release *Strictly embargoed until 00.01hrs Monday 22nd June 2015*

New research shows the first graduates to pay £9,000-a-year university tuition fees are the most careers-orientated, organised and ambitious of their generation

As graduation ceremonies get under way at universities around the UK, a major survey of the career plans of more than 18,000 final year students from the 'Class of 2015' – many of whom have been the first undergraduates to pay the new £9,000-a-year university tuition fees – reveals that the proportion of university-leavers expecting to start a graduate job after their degree is at its highest level since 2001 and that unprecedented numbers of new graduates have already secured job offers from employers before leaving university.

The UK Graduate Careers Survey 2015 (to be published on **Monday 22nd June**) was conducted by **High Fliers Research**, an independent research company that specialises in researching the graduate employment market. The survey was based on face-to-face interviews with **18,412 final year students** from thirty leading UK universities, completed on campus in March 2015. This sample includes a **fifth** of the finalists due to graduate from these universities this summer.

The research confirms that a record number of students have done paid work placements or internships whilst at university, in order to develop the experience and employability skills that graduate employers require. Half of 2015's new graduates began researching their career options by the end of their first year at university – the highest proportion ever recorded – to improve their chances of getting a good job after graduation. But as a result of higher tuition fees and rising living costs, the average student debt for this year's university-leavers has jumped by almost 50%, compared with debt levels in 2014.

The key findings from *The UK Graduate Careers Survey 2015* about the 'Class of 2015' are:

- The percentage of final year students from the UK's leading universities who expect to start a **full-time graduate job** straight after university has increased to **26%**, the highest level for fourteen years, and there has been a corresponding drop in the number of graduates who expect to still be looking for work after graduation.
- A quarter of this year's new graduates are intending to do a **postgraduate course** and one in seven are hoping to take **time off** or go **travelling**. The number of finalists intending to **run their own business** after university has increased to 4%, twice the level of two years ago.

- There has been a **dramatic drop** in the number of final year students with ‘no definite plans’ for after university – just 9% are undecided about their future, the lowest proportion since 1998.
- **48%** of finalists from the ‘Class of 2015’ began researching their career options by the end of their **first year at university**, the highest proportion ever recorded by *The UK Graduate Careers Survey*. By comparison, just 30% of those who graduated in 2010 began job hunting during the first year of their degree
- Half of this year’s finalists have either done **course placements, internships, or vacation work** whilst at university, completing an average of at least six months work experience. But the number of students doing casual vacation work during university holidays – such as bar work, serving in restaurants and temping – has dropped to its lowest level ever.
- A **record 64%** of students made applications to graduate employers by March in their final year, up very substantially from 46% ten years ago. On average, finalists made **7.4 applications** each to graduate employers and together made an estimated **474,000 job applications** to employers, four-fifths more than during the equivalent recruitment period six years ago.
- For the first time since 2001, **consulting** is the top destination for new graduates and interest in the sector is now at an all-time high, having increased by two-thirds in the last five years. **Marketing**, the **media** and **charity & voluntary work** are the next most-popular graduate career destinations for 2015.
- The average **starting salary** that finalists expect to earn as new graduates has risen to **£23,700**, some £700 more than in 2014 and the largest annual rise for seven years. Salaries that finalists expect to be paid five years after leaving university have also increased, to an average of **£41,400**, and more than **1 in 6 finalists** believe they will be earning **at least £100,000** by age 30.
- An **unprecedented 37%** of the ‘Class of 2015’ had received a definite graduate job offer by Easter in their final year – either from an employer they had completed work experience with, or through the job applications they had made during their final year at university – the highest percentage reported by *The UK Graduate Careers Survey* since its launch in 1995.
- Following the introduction of the new **£9,000 per year university tuition fees** for many of those graduating in 2015, finalists’ average expected graduation debt has risen very sharply to **£30,000**, compared with averages of £20,400 in 2014, £20,300 in 2013 and £19,400 in 2012.

Managing director of High Fliers Research, **Martin Birchall** commented:

“Our survey shows that new graduates leaving the UK’s top universities this summer – many of whom have been the first to be charged £9,000-a-year tuition fees for their degree courses – are the most careers-orientated, motivated and ambitious of their generation. By researching their employment options earlier than ever and completing an average of 6 months’ work experience during their studies, they have prepared more thoroughly for the graduate job market than any other cohort in the last twenty years.

So although the ‘Class of 2015’ face the highest-ever graduation debts, an unprecedented number have already secured a graduate job offer before leaving university and the proportion who are uncertain about their future is at its lowest level for seventeen years.”

Notes to Editors:

1. *The UK Graduate Careers Survey* has been produced annually since 1995 by **High Fliers Research**, the independent research company that specialises in researching graduate recruitment at the UK's leading universities. The company also conducts regular surveys of the country's top graduate employers, recording the latest starting salaries, graduate vacancy levels and recruitment practices.
2. The **thirty universities** included in the survey in 2015 were: Aston, Bath, Belfast Queen's University, Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Durham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool, London Imperial College, London King's College, London School of Economics, London University College, Loughborough, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Reading, Sheffield, Southampton, St Andrews, Strathclyde, Warwick and York.
3. The **graduate employers** and **professional associations** who funded the research programme in 2013-2014 are: ACCA, Accenture, Aldi, American Express, Arcadia Group, Army, Arup, Atos, Bank of England, Barclays, BDO, Bloomberg, BP, BT, Capital One, Centrica, CIMA, Civil Service Fast Stream, Danone, Deloitte, E.ON, EY, ExxonMobil, Fidelity Worldwide Investment, Frontline, FTI Consulting, GCHQ, GlaxoSmithKline, Grant Thornton, HSBC, IBM, Institute of Actuaries, Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales (ICAEW), Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), Jaguar Land Rover, J.P. Morgan, KPMG, Lidl, Lloyds Banking Group, L'Oréal, Mars, McDonald's, Microsoft, National College for Teaching & Leadership, Nationwide, Network Rail, NHS, nucleargraduates, Police Now, PwC, Rolls-Royce, Royal Bank of Scotland Group, The Royal Navy, Sainsbury's, Shell, Siemens, Science and Technology Facilities Council, Teach First, Telefónica, Transport for London, Unilever and Zurich.
4. **Martin Birchall**, Managing Director of High Fliers Research is available for interview.
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