

2015

Student & Graduate Employability Skills Survey

The role of work ethic and academic achievement
in graduate recruitment & selection

Supplementary Report
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of the **ROLE OF WORK ETHIC AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN GRADUATE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION** project. The project was carried out as an extension to the 2015 Student & Graduate Employability Skills Survey, following some unexpected changes in this year's results. The project aimed to inform the survey findings with regards to the high ranking of work ethic and the low ranking of academic achievement. The report compares the responses of employers who recruit students and graduates from the Victoria Business School (VBS) with employers who recruit from other Faculties (non-VBS).

INTERVIEW DATA

In this project, we adopted a qualitative approach that included in-person and phone interviews as well as written comments obtained from a sample of employers who had participated in the survey. Overall, 41 employers contributed their comments (23 non-VBS and 18 VBS employers).

The respondents were provided with three questions:

- What, in your opinion, contributes to strong work ethic?
- What sort of evidence would you expect students/graduates to present in order to demonstrate strong work ethic in the recruitment and selection process?
- What role does academic achievement play in the student/graduate recruitment and selection in your organisation?

WORK ETHIC

Five main themes were identified from employers' responses to the first question in relation to work ethic:

- attitude
- working hard
- working with others
- time-related
- commitment

The scope of each theme was determined by both the number of references made and the number of employers whose comments were coded under it. Several sub-themes were further identified as components of each theme, and the report illustrates those with quotes.

There were a number of sub-themes that were more unique to each group of the interviewed employers. VBS employers tended to focus more on accountability, generation gap, academic achievement and graduates' ability to contribute at work. Non-VBS employers, on the other hand, tended to highlight resilience, asking questions, as well as personal motivation and drive.

Subsequent analyses resulted in conceptualising work ethic across three dimensions:

- personal
- organisational
- societal

These dimensions are seen as interlinked, each highlighting a different aspect of work ethic rather than separate elements. The personal dimension brings personal attitude, values and qualities to the foreground. The organisational dimension highlights the organisational values, the behavioural expectations driven by those values, and links work ethic with professionalism. The societal dimension links work ethic to social norms and influence; it also takes into account the processes of change that result in differences in perceptions of work ethic among the different generations.

EVIDENCE OF WORK ETHIC

The second interview question aimed to gather information about the type of evidence employers expect graduate candidates to present in order to demonstrate their work ethic during recruitment and selection. Four main themes were identified from the content of employers' contributions:

- CV & cover letter
- candidate behaviour
- interview questions
- references

Each of these themes was explored in the analysis for specific types of information expected, and aspects of work ethic that they would inform employers about.

When mentioning CV and/or cover letter in their response to the question, many employers pointed to work experience and extracurricular activities as significant in helping them gauge the candidate's work ethic. Both were linked to the candidate's ability to balance priorities, stick to a job (e.g., continue despite difficulties), and gathering a variety of experiences that contribute to being a 'well-rounded person'.

Employers who mentioned candidate behaviour commented on the importance of observations made of graduates dealing with interview questions or during assessment, and linked it to their ability to solve problems, attitude to work, and the extent to which they are able to work effectively with others.

Interview questions were mentioned by a number of employers, but typically as an indirect way to gauge the candidate's work ethic. A number of employers highlighted the importance of the candidate's ability to engage in a personalised narrative that demonstrates their understanding of how their study and life experiences link with the required skills and competencies and their future work performance.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The content analysis of employers' comments in response to the third interview question revealed a wide spectrum of attitudes towards the role of academic achievement in the recruitment and selection process. A continuum model was therefore used to illustrate the range of functions that academic achievement plays in the process. The continuum consists of three parts. The report illustrates each with a number of sub-themes and quotes that provide context (e.g., reasons why/links to assessment) for each end of the scale:

- cull vs inform
- grades vs qualification
- subject knowledge vs workplace skills

GRADUATE PACKAGE

The qualitative data collected in this supplementary project sheds more light on the role of work ethic and academic achievement in the graduate recruitment and selection process. The findings presented in this report highlight the complexity of graduate recruitment and selection both for the recruiters and graduate candidates. Many employers who contributed their comments often stressed that academic achievement does not stand on its own and forms only 'part of the story', regardless of how it was ranked in the survey. The role of activities that students engage in beyond their study such as extracurricular activities and part-time work also became salient elements that contribute to what can be seen as the **GRADUATE PACKAGE**. The report concludes with a visual illustration of the concept, together with employer quotes that summarise the findings of this project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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1. 2015 STUDENT & GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS SURVEY OVERVIEW

The 2015 Student & Graduate Employability Skills Survey was carried out by Victoria University's Careers and Employment Service in order to identify the top ten skills and attributes which employers look for in new graduates and students. The survey gathered 346 responses, and to the best of our knowledge it is the largest response set of an employability skills survey in New Zealand and Australia to date. The following skills and attributes were ranked as top ten by the survey respondents:

1. Work ethic
2. Verbal communication skills
3. Energy & enthusiasm
4. Analytical & critical thinking
5. Problem solving
6. Team work
7. Interpersonal skills
8. Written communication skills
9. Self-management
10. Initiative & enterprise

Overall, the top ten list of skills and attributes has remained more or less the same since the last such survey carried out by Careers and Employment in 2006. However, a couple of unexpected changes emerged in the overall results:

- Work ethic was consistently ranked high by the respondents (84% ranked it within the top ten). Even though competencies associated with work ethic were provided on the lists in previous years, the 2015 survey was the first time to place it so high
- Academic achievement did not appear in the top 10 (ranks 15), in contrast to the 2006 and 2003 surveys, where it was ranked in 5th and 4th position respectively

The full 2015 Student & Graduate Employability Skills Survey report can be found on Victoria Careers and Employment website:

http://www.victoria.ac.nz/st_services/careers/resources/employment_skills_survey.aspx

2. RATIONALE FOR THE SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

The significant changes in the positioning of work ethic and academic achievement in the 2015 Student & Graduate Employability Skills Survey generated additional questions regarding the role of these attributes in student and graduate recruitment. With regard to work ethic, the results highlighted a need to gain a better understanding of the employers' conceptualisation of work ethic as a crucial candidate attribute, together with a wider context of how it is to be manifested and assessed during recruitment.

As far as academic achievement is concerned, in our conversations with a number of employers prior to sending out the survey, grade average was mentioned as one of the

criteria that they select candidates on. Therefore, the low ranking of this particular attribute might have not reflected the actual selection criteria that respondents use in graduate recruitment. Additional research was thus required to delve deeper into the role that academic achievement plays in student and graduate recruitment in order to help us understand the results of the survey more fully. In particular, the different approaches taken by recruiters to assessing the candidate's academic record, the extent to which a grade average impacts on candidate selection, and its relation to the skills and attributes identified as the top ten in the survey.

The report compares the responses of employers who recruit students and graduates from the Victoria Business School (VBS) with employers who recruit from other Faculties (non-VBS).

3. DATA COLLECTION & INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

A sample of respondents who participated in the 2015 Student & Graduate Employability Skills Survey was identified for additional data collection following the completion of the survey report in October 2015. 208 employers (68 VBS employers and 140 non-VBS employers) who ranked work ethic and/or academic achievement as one of the top ten attributes in the survey were included in the sample. A personalised invitation to participate in a short interview was sent via email, which also contained a simple guide with questions (see Appendix 1):

- What, in your opinion, contributes to strong work ethic?
- What sort of evidence would you expect students/graduates to present in order to demonstrate strong work ethic in the recruitment and selection process?
- What role does academic achievement play in the student/graduate recruitment and selection in your organisation?

We received responses from 41 employers – 18 from VBS and 23 from non-VBS employers (19% response rate). 6 employers were interviewed in-person at their office, 16 interviews were carried out over the phone, and 19 employers sent through written comments which were further followed up either by additional questions via email or a phone interview. Within a few days after the interview, the employer received the researcher's notes via email, with a request to read over and incorporate any changes as necessary. Employers were also invited to include any additional comments if they wished to. The revised notes formed the data set for the analysis.

The data was coded using NVivo – a qualitative analysis software that allows for a systematic content analysis and extensive content query in identifying coding categories.

3.1. BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS

18 employers who recruit students and graduates from within Victoria's Business School, and 23 non-VBS employers participated in the additional data collection. 73% (30) were from the private sector, 21% (9) from public, and 6% (2) from the non-profit sector. Although the percentage breakdown is representative of the overall population breakdown in the 2015 Employability Skills Survey, international organisations comprised 63% of the respondents, making this group somewhat overrepresented (42% in the survey); national organisations comprised 22% and thus were underrepresented (44% in the survey). 37% interview respondents came from enterprise (overrepresented; 25% in the survey), 21% from large, 27% from medium, and 15% from small organisations (underrepresented, 22% in the survey).



4. WORK ETHIC

4.1. WORK ETHIC RANKING BY INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

63% of the employers who contributed comments ranked work ethic as 'extremely important' in the survey, with further 31% ranking it as 'important'. One VBS employer, who was invited to participate in the research based on their ranking of academic achievement, initially ranked work ethic as 'least important'. During the interview, however, they revised their ranking of work ethic to 'important'. Another non-VBS employer commented that their ranking of work ethic as 'less important' was linked to the perception that other skills and attributes on the list were intricately linked to it (e.g., problem solving, team work, initiative & enterprise).



4.2. MAIN THEMES

During the initial analysis, employers' comments were coded into broad themes, with subsequent analysis allowing to break those down into smaller sub-themes.

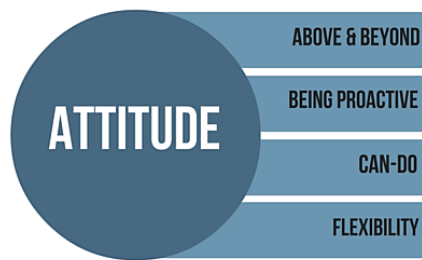


The themes presented here were identified from the employers' comments in response to the first question – *What, in your opinion, contributes to strong work ethic?*

The scope of each theme was determined by the number of references and the number of employers whose comments were coded within the theme.

The most prevalent themes that emerged here were related to **ATTITUDE**, **WORKING HARD**, **WORKING WITH OTHERS**, **TIME-RELATED**, and **COMMITMENT**. The sections below present these themes in more detail.

ATTITUDE



When responding to the question regarding elements that contribute to strong work ethic, 26 of the interviewed employers made 57 references that were coded as relating to **ATTITUDE**. They were then classified in four sub-themes, which are illustrated with quotes below.

11 employers made 13 references to going **ABOVE AND BEYOND** as an attitude that contributes to work ethic. The comments were in reference meeting and exceeding the requirements of the role description, general task expectations, and hours of work.

16 employers made 22 references to **BEING PROACTIVE**, in particular in relation to anticipating issues, and adding value where possible.

SOMEONE WILLING TO DO THINGS ABOVE AND BEYOND – WILLING TO JUMP IN AND HELP ON PROJECTS OR WORK WHERE THEY CAN SEE THEY CAN ADD VALUE

PR, E, NVBS

LOOKING BEYOND YOUR TASKS AND OBJECTIVES THAT ARE WRITTEN DOWN AND THINKING ABOUT HOW ELSE YOU CAN ADD VALUE TO YOUR ROLE, TO YOUR TEAM

PB, E, VBS

BEING PROACTIVE AND ANTICIPATING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE, NOT JUST WAITING TO BE TOLD

PB, E, NVBS

SOME CANDIDATES WILL ONLY STICK TO WHAT THE JOB DESCRIPTION SAYS AND ARE NOT WILLING TO DO EXTRA TASKS THAT MIGHT NOT BE ON IT – WORK ETHIC IS LINKED TO EXTRA TASKS SEEN AS LEARNING OPPORTUNITY RATHER THAN A BURDEN

PR, M, VBS

5 employers made 6 references to a **CAN-DO** attitude, and 11 employers made 13 reference to **FLEXIBILITY**, mostly when talking about graduates not seeing more menial tasks as 'beneath them' and seeing extra tasks as opportunities to learn.

Legend:

NVBS - NON-VBS EMPLOYER

PR - PRIVATE

PB - PUBLIC

NP - NON-PROFIT

VBS - VBS EMPLOYER

S - SMALL

M - MEDIUM

L - LARGE

E - ENTERPRISE

WORKING HARD

The second most salient category that emerged from the comments related to **WORKING HARD**, with 40 references made by 20 employers. Comments coded under this theme were subsequently divided into four sub-themes, illustrated in more detail below.



IF THERE IS A PROJECT WITH AN URGENT DEADLINE, BEING READY TO STAY ON AND WORK TO MEET THE DEADLINE; NOT JUST 'CLOCKING IN THE HOURS'

PR, E, VBS

GRADUATES SOMETIMES NEED TO COME IN ON THE WEEKEND – PART OF THE WORK, 'ALL HANDS TO THE PUMPS' IN ORDER TO COMPLETE A PROJECT

PR, L, VBS

7 employers made 9 references to **STAYING AFTER HOURS** as graduates might be required to work overtime during peak project times. Most of the comments classified in this sub-theme came from VBS employers.

9 employers made 16 references to **WORK QUALITY** as an important aspect of hard work – a result of work that is **FOCUSED**, with effort spread effectively so that the task is completed to a high standard.

Additionally, several employers mentioned the importance of graduate candidates demonstrating **INTEGRITY**, especially the ability to admit if work done is not of the highest standard and/or seek help to remedy the situation.

IF HANDING IN A JOB NOT DONE WELL, BEING ABLE TO ADMIT IT – SAYING 'I STUFFED UP'

PR, M, VBS

SHOWING INTEREST, ASKING QUESTIONS, DOING THE HOURS, MEETING THE EXPECTATIONS; SHOWING YOURSELF AND BEING INVOLVED, NOT GOING OFF EVERY HALF HOUR ON THE PHONE, NOT HAVING YOUR BROWSER OPEN WHILE YOU'RE DOING WORK YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO DO

PR, M, NVBS

WHAT IT MEANS TO WORK HARD: WORKING IN AN APPLIED WAY, FOCUSED, BEING SELF-MOTIVATED; WORKING TOWARDS THE GOAL

PR, E, VBS

WORKING WITH OTHERS



Furthermore, 17 employers made 25 references to **WORKING WITH OTHERS** as part of work ethic. The four sub-themes identified in this category are illustrated with quotes below.

14 employers made 16 references to **TEAMWORK** as a set of behaviours that facilitate achieving goals in a team environment, paired with communication and understanding of team dynamics. Further 4 references were made by 4 employers with regard to **RESPECT** given to peers, not only in terms of interpersonal communication, but also in relation to updates on progress.

SOMEONE WITH A HIGH SENSE OF TEAMWORK HELPS THEIR TEAM TO MEET GOALS AND DELIVER QUALITY WORK. THESE EMPLOYEES RESPECT THEIR PEERS AND HELP WHERE THEY CAN, MAKING COLLABORATIONS THRIVE

PR, L, NVBS

EXCEPTIONAL INDIVIDUALS UNDERSTAND THE WEAKNESSES AND STRENGTHS OF THEIR TEAM AND PEERS TO BE ABLE TO MOTIVATE, DIRECT AND APPLY THEIR TALENTS

PR, E, NVBS

IF THEY SEE THEIR TEAM IS SNOWED UNDER WITH WORK THEY DON'T WAIT UNTIL THEY ARE ASKED TO STAY OVER, THEY JUST DO IT

PB, L, VBS

IMPORTANT TO BE CONNECTED WITH WORKMATES AND SOCIALISE BUT UNDERSTANDING WHEN YOU NEED TO FOCUS; UNDERSTANDING THE LINE BETWEEN SOCIAL TIME AND WORK

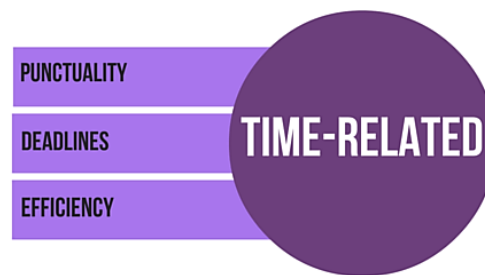
PR, E, VBS

5 employers made 5 references to **HELPING OTHERS**, especially when it emerges as an unprompted behaviour.

Socialising was brought up 3 times by 3 employers, mostly in relation to the distinction between **SOCIALISING** and work time.

TIME-RELATED

TIME emerged as another element closely related to work ethic. The theme comprises of 23 references made by 16 employers, with three sub-themes presented in more detail below.



BEING ABLE TO TURN UP TO WORK EVERY DAY IN A TIMELY MANNER AND WORK EFFICIENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY (NO TIME WASTING).

PR, L, NVBS

PUNCTUALITY MEANS IF STARTING AT 8.30AM MEANS BEING READY TO START WORK AT 8.30AM

PB, E, VBS

TURNING UP EARLY AND BEING READY TO GO AT THE TIME WHEN WORK NEEDS TO BE STARTED; ALSO IN TERMS OF MEETINGS, APPOINTMENTS, HAVING YOUR MIND FOCUSED AT THOSE MEETINGS AND APPOINTMENTS

PR, E, VBS

12 employers made 13 references to **PUNCTUALITY**. Interestingly, the respondents pointed out that punctuality was not only about arriving on time, but also being ready to do work or participate in meetings at the expected time.

5 employers made 6 references to **DEADLINES**, and 2 employers made 2 references to being **EFFICIENT** with time (see quotes above).

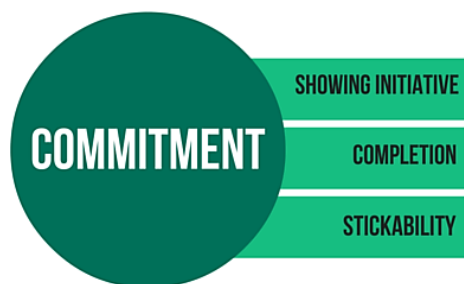
TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN WORK, CONTROL YOUR OWN TIME AND DELIVER ON TIME

PB, L, NVBS

WE WANT GRADS TO BE SELF-MOTIVATED, CONFIDENT OF THEIR OWN SKILLS, TAKE THE INITIATIVE AND DELIVER CONSISTENTLY, TAKING UP TASKS AND DELIVERING ON TIME, TO DEADLINES

PR, E, VBS

COMMITMENT



The final theme of **COMMITMENT** comprises of 20 references made by 17 employers, with three sub-themes illustrated with quotes below.

12 employers made 17 references to **SHOWING INITIATIVE**, typically when commenting on taking up tasks and seeking work unprompted (see also **PROACTIVE ATTITUDE** earlier in this section)

DEVELOPING HIGH LEVEL OF INITIATIVE – 'I CAN SEE THAT NEEDS DOING, I DON'T NEED TO BE TOLD THAT THIS NEEDS DOING'

PB, L, NVBS

SEEKING WORK RATHER THAN JUST SITTING THERE WAITING FOR THE NEXT JOB TO BE GIVEN TO THEM

PR, S, NVBS

SOMEONE WHO HAS CONSISTENTLY DEMONSTRATED THE ABILITY TO COMPLETE TASKS, WHEN THEY ARE FACING MULTIPLE DEMANDS

PB, E, VBS

STAYING FOCUSED ON THEIR GOALS AND BEING DETERMINED TO COMPLETE PROJECTS/TASKS. IT TAKES A LEVEL OF COMMITMENT TO FINISH YOUR TASKS EVERY DAY. THESE EMPLOYEES SHOW A HIGH LEVEL OF DEDICATION TO THE COMPANY, ENSURING THAT THEY DO THEIR PART

PR, L, NVBS

BEING CAPABLE OF SETTING PRIORITIES, BEING ABLE TO HOLD DOWN A JOB, E.G. WHEN SOMEONE HAS GONE BACK TO WORK FOR THE SAME EMPLOYER SUMMER AFTER SUMMER OR WORKED BEYOND SUMMER AND IS VALUED BY THE EMPLOYER, CAN STICK TO THE JOB

PB, L, VBS

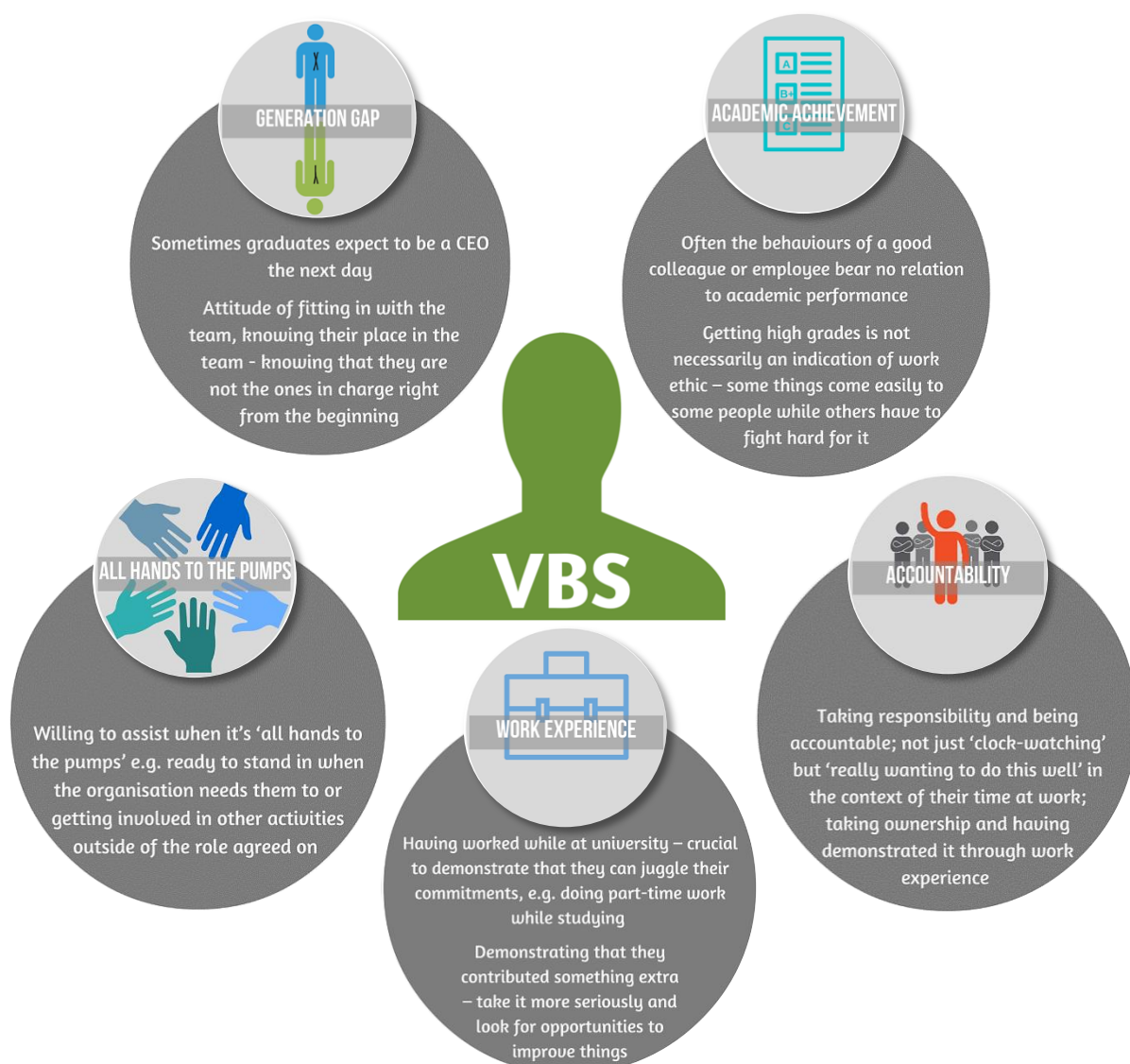
8 employers made 9 references to **COMPLETION**, both in relation to everyday tasks at work and long-term commitments. Further 2 employers made 2 references to **STICKABILITY** in the context of sustained effort and/or employment.

4.3. VBS VS NON-VBS EMPLOYERS: UNIQUE SUB-THEMES

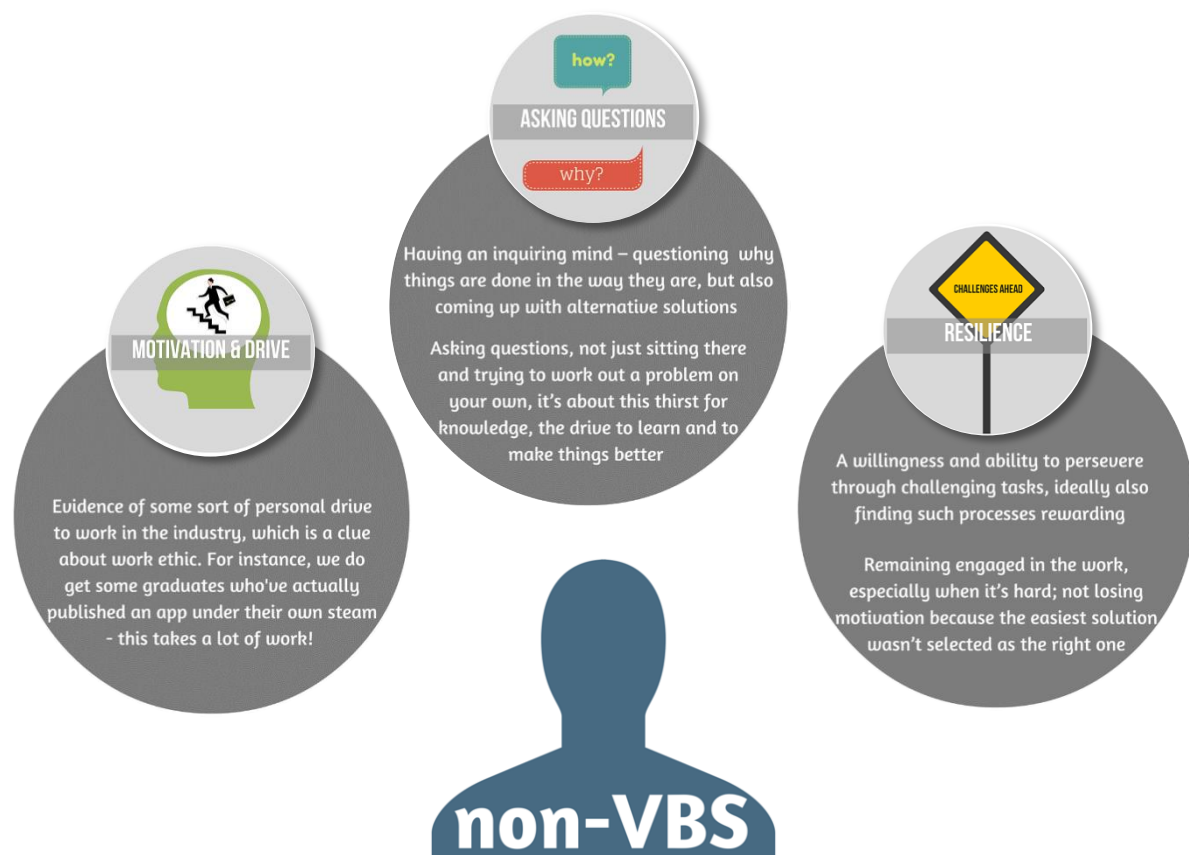
There were a number of sub-themes that were more unique to each group of the interviewed employers.

In the data set, there were 13 references (10 employers) to what was coded as **GENERATION GAP** – comments that highlighted the differences in the way in which graduates nowadays conceptualise work, see their career, and behave in the workplace. 11 out of these references were made by VBS employers, thus this sub-theme was classified as a VBS-unique theme.

VBS employers were also the ones who mentioned **ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT** in relation to work ethic, often commenting on a lack of direct connection between one's high grades and their workplace behaviours linked to work ethic. Similarly, VBS employers brought up the importance of graduates being ready to contribute beyond their role description, often referring to such behaviours as **ALL HANDS TO THE PUMPS**. The concept of **ACCOUNTABILITY** was also more predominant in VBS employers' comments, together with part-time/summer and unskilled **WORK EXPERIENCE** as an important source of work ethic.

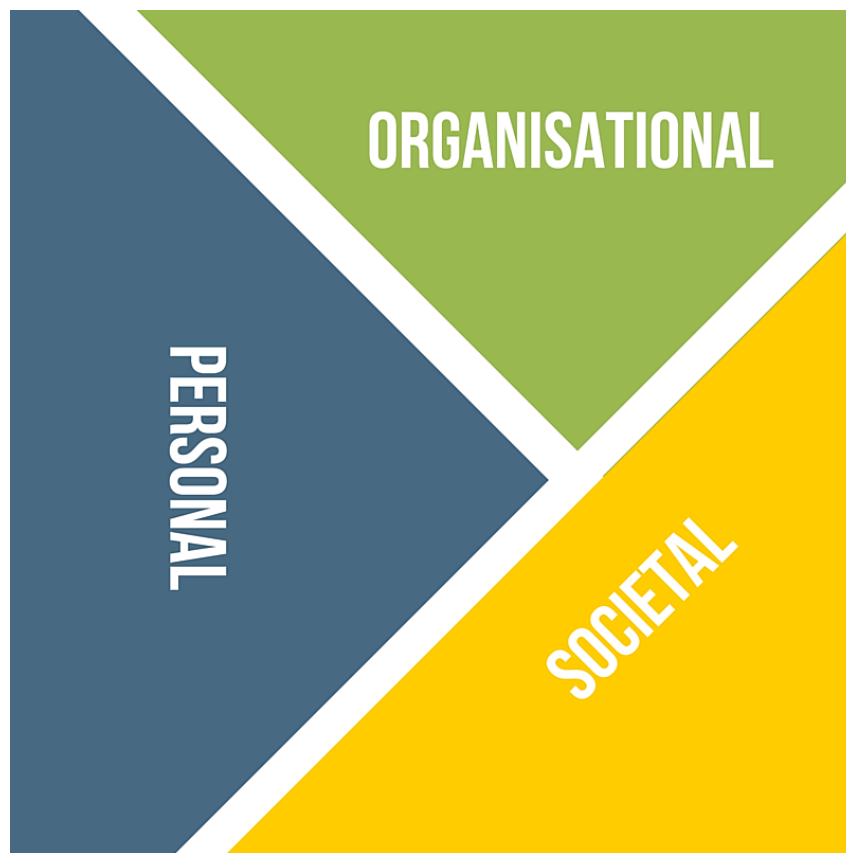


Non-VBS employers tended to mention intrinsic **MOTIVATION** and **PERSONAL DRIVE** in relation to work ethic (8 out of 9 references came from non-VBS employers). Another aspect brought up by this group of respondents was **ASKING QUESTIONS**, both as a result of genuine interest, but also in search of understanding and solutions to problems. **RESILIENCE** was another sub-theme unique to non-VBS employers – most of the 18 references coded under resilience were made by this respondent group.



4.4. DIMENSIONS OF WORK ETHIC

In the subsequent analysis, it became apparent that employers tended to refer to a range of behaviours that span across different areas of one's life – personal, organisational, and societal. They were thus coded as 'dimensions' as these areas are interlinked with each other, each highlighting a different aspect of work ethic rather than seen as separate elements. The sections below present each of the dimensions in more detail and illustrate them with quotes.



PERSONAL

- VALUES & ATTITUDE
- PERSONALITY
- PERSONAL QUALITIES

When talking about work ethic, most employers linked it to values and attitudes (i.e. personal view that impacts on one's behaviours). In this dimension, individual character was brought to the foreground.

ATTITUDE & VALUES

Often, a reference to **ATTITUDE** and **VALUES** was made, with mention of how 'personal' attitude translates into one's behaviours at work; typically, attitude was also linked to personality and family background.

WORK ETHIC – MORE A VALUE SYSTEM RATHER THAN COMPETENCY; YOU EITHER HAVE IT OR YOU DON'T; BASED ON OBSERVATIONS NOT A COMPETENCY AS SUCH

PR, M, VBS

I THINK IT IS LARGELY A PERSONAL ATTRIBUTE

PR, S, NVBS

YOU WANT TO MAKE AN EFFORT YOU WANT TO BE GOOD YOU WANT TO IMPROVE – THIS IS WHAT IS GOING TO DRIVE YOU TO ACHIEVE, IF YOU DON'T YOU'LL JUST PLOD ALONG AND IT WILL SHOW YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS WORK

PR, M, NVBS

WELL-ROUNDED PERSON

Work ethic was also linked to being 'well-rounded', typically presented as a process by which an individual gathers various experiences outside of their study (e.g., sport, community engagement, volunteering, part-time work)

VALUE ADDED BY BEING INVOLVED IN ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES OUTSIDE OF ONE'S STUDY; THE APPLICATION OF DOING THINGS OUTSIDE OF THE DEGREE - THE WELL-ROUNDED PERSON

PR, E, NVBS

BEING WELL-ROUNDED: GETTING DECENT GRADES, HAVING OTHER THINGS GOING ON OUTSIDE OF UNIVERSITY – MANAGING TO BALANCE THINGS; KEEPING THEIR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT UP WHILE BEING INVOLVED WITH OTHER THINGS

PR, E, VBS



- ORGANISATIONAL VALUES
- BEHAVIOURAL EXPECTATIONS
- LINKED TO PROFESSIONALISM

Employers also talked about work ethic from the perspective of organisational values and how these drive expectations of specific behaviours (which are also mentioned as part of candidate assessment). Some employers linked these behaviours to the concept of 'professionalism'.

VALUES AND BEHAVIOURAL EXPECTATIONS

WORK ETHIC FALLS UNDER THE 5 CORE COMPETENCIES ASSESSED DURING THE SELECTION PROCESS (CORE COMPETENCIES IN THE ORGANISATION)

PR, E, VBS

ONE OF THE COMPANY'S GOAL IS TO BE THE BEST YOU CAN BE – DOING EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO BE THE BEST YOU CAN BE; YOUR ATTITUDE, YOUR PROFESSIONALISM, YOUR KNOWLEDGE

PR, M, NVBS

WILLING TO DO ANYTHING THAT MIGHT BE REQUIRED – ABOVE AND BEYOND OF WHAT IS REQUIRED – IT AS RELEVANT TO A WIDER CULTURE AT THE ORGANISATION

NP, M, VBS

PROFESSIONALISM

UNDERSTANDING OF PROFESSIONALISM AND WHAT IT MEANS IN THE WORKPLACE: THAT THERE ARE EXPECTATIONS, AND YOU ARE EXPECTED TO EXCEED THESE EXPECTATIONS NOT JUST AS 'THIS IS A NICE THING TO DO', BUT IN A WORKPLACE YOU NEED TO BE AWARE OF WHAT THEY ARE AND VALUE THE OPPORTUNITY

PR, M, NVBS

TURNING UP MENTALLY READY FOR WORK - FOCUSED TO DO WORK – IT'S ALSO LINKED TO PROFESSIONALISM

PB, E, VBS

AN UNDERSTANDING OF PROFESSIONALISM IN THE WORKPLACE, AND AN ABILITY TO PUT ASIDE PERSONAL BIASES AND PREFERENCE WHEN IT COMES TO PERFORMING A VARIETY OF TASKS

PR, M, NVBS



- SOCIAL NORMS
- SOCIAL INFLUENCE
- SOCIAL PROCESSES OF CHANGE

The element that completed the picture for many employers linked to social norms and how others influence one's work ethic, as well as social processes of change that impact wider views on work ethic such as the generation gap.

SOCIAL NORMS & INFLUENCE

THERE ARE POTENTIAL DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS OF WORK ETHIC DEPENDING ON CULTURAL BACKGROUND (E.G. SHOWING UP ON TIME)

PB, L, NVBS

BEING BROUGHT UP IN AN ENVIRONMENT THAT PROMOTES AND REWARDS WORK OR COMPLETION OF ACTIVITIES

PB, E, VBS

GENERATION GAP

Employers (predominantly VBS) talked about the changing hierarchies and the evolving nature of work itself in relation to expectations that graduates bring to the role. On the one hand, several employers commented on the fact that graduates come in with very high expectations of themselves and need to be ready to fail. On the other hand, they also expect to move up quickly (becoming a 'CEO in a year') and this was linked to a sense of 'entitlement' (see also Section 4.3).

I TELL OUR GRADS THAT THEY WON'T BE A CEO TOMORROW; THEY HAVE TO WORK HARD TO MAKE IT THERE

PR, E, VBS

5. EVIDENCE OF WORK ETHIC DURING RECRUITMENT & ASSESSMENT

The second question presented to the employers concerned the types of evidence that they would expect student/graduate candidates to present in order to demonstrate strong work ethic in the recruitment and selection process. This section outlines the main themes identified from the comments, specifies the type of information provided by the candidates, and links it to evidence that is drawn from it by the recruiters.

5.1. EVIDENCE OF WORK ETHIC: MAIN THEMES

More than half of the employers referred to the **CV AND COVER LETTER** as a source of information about one's work ethic. There were also 23 references to **CANDIDATE BEHAVIOUR**, and 20 references to the way in which **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS** help employers gauge the candidate's work ethic. The least salient theme related to **REFERENCES**, but was still highlighted by 11 employers as an important source of evidence of work ethic.



CV & COVER LETTER



When mentioning CV and/or cover letter in their response to the question, many employers pointed to work experience and extracurricular activities as significant in helping them gauge the candidate's work ethic. Both were linked to the candidate's ability to balance priorities, stick to a job (e.g., continue despite difficulties), and gathering a variety of experiences that contribute to being a 'well-rounded person' (see Section 4.4).

WORK EXPERIENCE WOULD BE A BENEFIT – BUT ONLY IF DEMONSTRATED TOGETHER WITH GOOD MANAGEMENT OF ONE'S UNIVERSITY STUDY

PR, L, NVBS

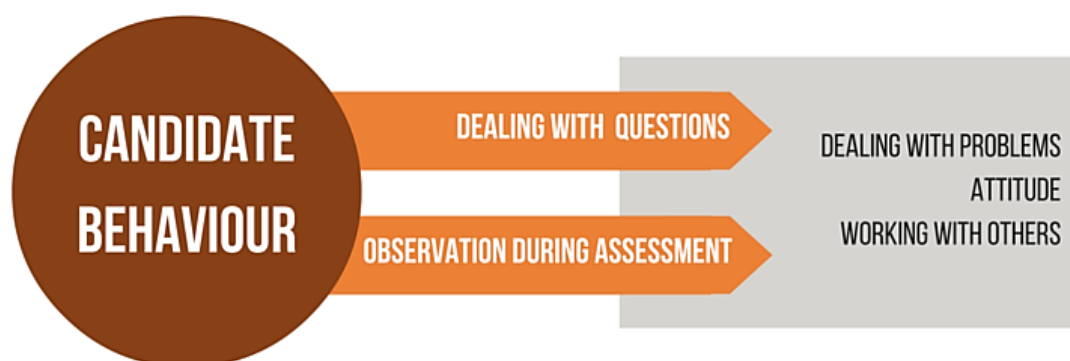
HAVING DONE SIMPLE BUT DEMANDING JOBS (E.G. WORKING ON A FARM; LATE HOURS IN HOSPITALITY) – HOW MUCH HARD WORK WERE THEY CALLED ON TO DO AND HOW THEY REACTED TO IT

PR, E, VBS

PART-TIME JOBS, EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES SUCH AS TEAMS, COMMUNITY GROUPS; 'ARE YOU MOVING EVERY TWO-THREE MONTHS OR IS THERE CONSISTENCY'

PB, E, VBS

CANDIDATE BEHAVIOUR



12 employers commented on the fact that they can gauge a candidate's work ethic by observing their behaviour during the recruitment and selection process. The way in which a graduate deals with questions (e.g., in the job interview), as well as their overall conduct during assessment is interpreted in relation to their ability to deal with problems, their attitude, and the extent to which they are able to work effectively with others. Interestingly, a number of employers referred to 'body language' displayed by the candidate during the interview in relation to work ethic.

PARTIALLY GAUGED FROM THE WAY THAT CANDIDATES ANSWER QUESTIONS RATHER THAN THE CONTENT ITSELF – E.G. GETTING A HARD QUESTION – DO THEY WORK HARD TO ANSWER THE QUESTION; HOW DO THEY WORK TO GIVE THE ANSWER

PR, E, VBS

IN THE INTERVIEW, GRADS ARE OFTEN GIVEN PROBLEMS TO SOLVE – LOOKING FOR HOW THEY DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM (E.G., IF THEY CANNOT SOLVE IT, WHAT DO THEY DO ABOUT IT?), WORK ETHIC HERE IS DEMONSTRATED IN TERMS OF THE INITIATIVE TO GO OUT AND FIND WAYS TO SOLVE ISSUES

PR, E, VBS

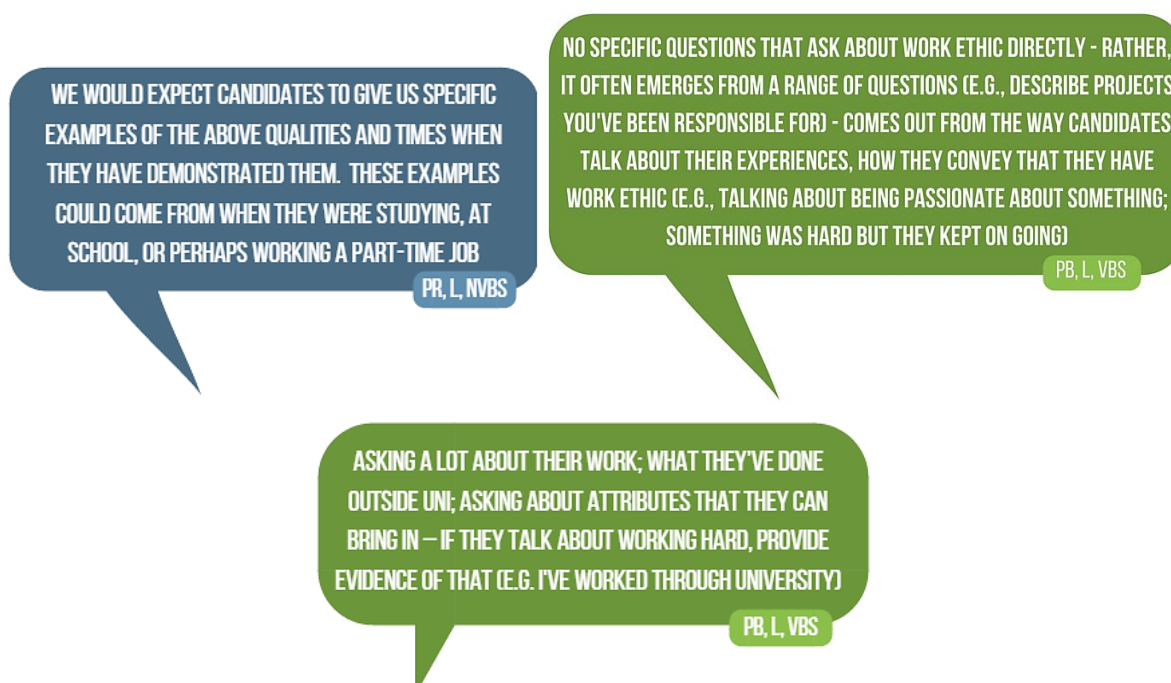
THE OTHER WAY TO GAUGE WORK ETHIC IS IN THE CANDIDATE'S BODY LANGUAGE. IF A CANDIDATE IS TALKING ABOUT THE ROLE THEY HAVE HAD IN THE PAST AND QUITE ENJOYED THEY CAN BECOME QUITE ANIMATED AND IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THEY ENJOY THEIR ROLE

PB, E, VBS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



12 employers mentioned examples of specific questions asked during the interview as a way of sampling one's work ethic. Most, however, pointed out the indirect way in which these questions help them gauge the candidate's work ethic. Even though work ethic is perceived as a crucial attribute of a graduate candidate, it typically remains implicit in the assessment process. Interestingly, a number of employers highlighted the importance of the candidate's ability to engage in a personalised narrative that demonstrated their understanding of how their study and life experiences link with the required skills and competencies and their future work performance.



REFERENCES



14 out of 41 employers interviewed mentioned that they also use referees or references to gauge the candidate's work ethic, with several employers commenting on the fact that referees provide an 'independent voice' for the candidate's reliability, punctuality and attitude.

REFERENCES ARE ALSO IMPORTANT – WHAT THAT PERSON
WOULD SAY ABOUT THEIR RELIABILITY, INTEGRITY, HONESTY;
REFERENCES ARE THE VOICES OF OTHERS AS EVIDENCE OF
WORK ETHIC; IT'S INDEPENDENT VERIFIABLE EVIDENCE

PB, M, VBS

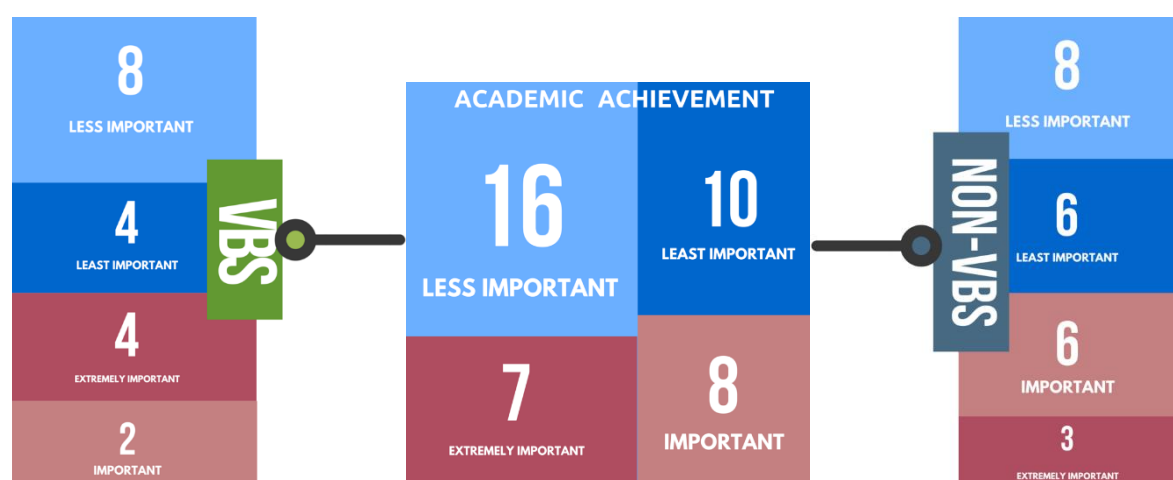
REFEREES ARE ASKED ABOUT PUNCTUALITY, RELIABILITY,
HOW THE APPLICANTS WERE IN TERMS OF THEIR
APPROACH TO WORK (WERE THEY HARD-WORKING?)

NP, M, VBS

6. ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

6.1. RANKING OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT BY INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

24% of the employers who contributed comments ranked academic achievement as 'least important' in the survey, with further 39% ranking it as 'less important'. 19% saw this element as 'important', with 17% ranking it as 'extremely important'. In general, VBS employers were more likely to rank academic achievement as 'least' or 'less important' (66%), compared to 40% of non-VBS employers who ranked it as such.



As the sections below illustrate, however, these results are not as clear-cut. Many respondents in both groups pointed out that ranking it as 'less' or 'least' important does not mean academic achievement is not taken into account during recruitment and selection process. The section below illustrates in more detail the range of approaches taken and their effect on how candidates' achievement is treated during recruitment and selection.

6.2. ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: THE CONTINUUM

The content analysis of employers' comments revealed a wide spectrum of attitudes towards the role of academic achievement in the recruitment and selection process. All comments were therefore coded on a continuum that consists of three themes: **CULL VS INFORM**, **GRADES VS QUALIFICATION**, and **SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE VS WORKPLACE SKILLS**. Each of the themes is represented as a range with employers' comments placed along it to illustrate the breadth of approaches. The sub-themes provide context (e.g., reasons why/links to assessment) for each end of the scale.

CULL VS INFORM

The first part of the continuum refers to the function that academic results play in the selection process – at one end, grades can be seen as a way to ‘cull’ the number of applications, while at the other end of the spectrum, they are seen as helpful in informing the recruiter about the candidate’s background.



VOLUME OF APPLICATIONS

WE LOOK FOR WELL-ROUNDED STUDENTS SO IT IS NOT ALL ABOUT GRADES BUT WE LOOK AT ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS FIRST WHEN SCREENING PEOPLE; IT HAS TO BE DONE WITH 3000 APPLICATIONS

PR, E, VBS

IF EXPECTING HIGH NUMBER OF GRADS APPLYING FOR A JOB, THEN LIKELY TO ASK FOR A TRANSCRIPT; MORE TO KNOW WHAT THEY STUDIED RATHER THAN MARKS THEMSELVES; TO UNDERSTAND THE MAKEUP OF THEIR COURSE; LOOKING UP SOMEONE'S ACADEMIC HISTORY – MORE THAN LOOKING AT THE GRADES; LOOKING AT WHETHER THEY IMPROVE, CHANGE, HOW THEY PROGRESS IN TERMS OF THEIR STUDY

PB, L, VBS

SKILLS SHORTAGE

LEAST IMPORTANT AT THE ORGANISATION – MOSTLY BECAUSE IT'S EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO GET GRADS IN THE FIELD (HIGHLY SPECIALISED)

PR, E, NVBS

GRADE AVERAGE

WE USE IT AS A FILTER TO SHORTLIST PEOPLE. IT IS ASSUMED THAT THEY HAVE AN OK ACADEMIC RECORD. THAT DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN STRAIGHT A+ BUT IT PROBABLY MEANS B TO B+ AVERAGE; WITHOUT THAT WE DON'T SHORT LIST THEM

PR, M, NVBS

INTEREST AREAS

CANDIDATES ASKED TO PROVIDE THEIR TRANSCRIPTS – MORE TO SEE WHAT THEY'VE DONE DURING THEIR DEGREE – TYPICALLY AFTER THE INITIAL INTERVIEW IF THE CANDIDATE IS CONSIDERED POTENTIAL HIRE; RECOGNISING STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IN TERMS OF RELEVANCE OF THE COURSES STUDIED TO THE WORK THAT THE POSITION WILL INCLUDE

PR, M, VBS

ASSESSMENT LINK

WE FILTER BASED ON ACHIEVEMENT. WE'VE FOUND A REASONABLE CORRELATION BETWEEN GRADES AND RESULTS IN OUR OWN GRADING TESTS

PR, S, NVBS

ACADEMIC HISTORY

WE'RE NOT LOOKING FOR ROCKET SCIENTISTS, NOT WORRIED IF THE AVERAGE IS NOT THE HIGHEST; WE LOOK AT THE TRANSCRIPT TO SEE IF THEY'VE MADE EFFORT IF THEY'VE SHOWN ANY INTEREST IN ANY PART OF THE CURRICULUM

PR, M, NVBS

GRADES VS QUALIFICATION

The second part of the continuum refers to the distinction in focus that is put on grades themselves as compared to obtaining a qualification as a whole— at one end, employers were quite explicit about their expectations for the candidates to have high grades, at times specifying the grade average that is used as a cut-off point, and expressed strong attitude towards failure. At the other end of the continuum, employers focused more on the qualification as a whole, commenting on their trust in the accreditation system, qualification being a basic requirement to enter the graduate job market, and requirement differences dependant on the type of role (e.g., more specialised roles).

GRADES



QUALIFICATION



ATTITUDE TO HIGH GRADES

VERY GOOD GRADES TEND TO MEAN THAT THE GRADUATE APPLIED THEMSELVES THROUGHOUT AND HAS AN AFFINITY FOR LEARNING

PR, M, NVBS

TRUST IN ACCREDITATION

TRUSTING IN THE ACCREDITATION SYSTEM, THAT THE PERSON HAS THE ABILITIES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO OBTAIN A DEGREE

PB, M, VBS

SPECIFIC GRADE AVERAGE REQUIREMENT

GENERALLY WE WOULDN'T CONSIDER MUCH LESS THAN A B OR B+ AVERAGE

PR, E, VBS

NO SPECIFIC GRADE AVERAGE REQUIREMENT – BUT SCREENING TENDS TO FOCUS AROUND 'B' TO 'A' RANGE

PB, L, NVBS

BASIC REQUIREMENT

THEY'VE GOT TO HAVE A DEGREE AND IT STILL IS IMPORTANT – IT'S A BASIC REQUIREMENT TO HAVE ONE TO WORK IN THE SECTOR

PB, L, NVBS

FAILURE

THERE IS A CERTAIN EXPECTATION THAT THERE WILL BE NO FAILURES – NO 'D' OR 'E'

PR, E, VBS

OVERALL, IT ISN'T A DETERMINING FACTOR AND A COUPLE OF BAD GRADES WON'T PUT YOU OUT OF THE RUNNING. HOWEVER WE RECRUIT THE 'BEST OF THE BEST' AND ACADEMICS SHOULD BE REFLECTING THAT TOO

PR, L, NVBS

ROLE-DEPENDANT

FOR SOME ROLES YOU NEED ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE TO PERFORM IN THE ROLE – LOTS OF BCOM STUDENTS – E.G., ACCOUNTING/FINANCE SKILLS

PB, L, VBS

SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE VS WORKPLACE SKILLS

The third part of the continuum refers to the distinction between academic achievement reflecting one's mastery of the subject knowledge (and the candidate's ability to carry out the work successfully), and the wider set of workplace skills and the candidate's fit with the team. Several employers commented on the not-so-clear relationship between one's academic performance and workplace skills.

SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE



WORKPLACE SKILLS



SKILLS SPECIFIC TO THE JOB

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IS IMPORTANT IN SHOWING AN UNDERSTANDING OF A PARTICULAR DISCIPLINE AND A DEDICATION TO STUDY TO ACHIEVE THIS

PR, E, NVBS

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT GRADUATES ARE ACADEMICALLY SOUND IN ORDER TO CARRY OUT THE WORK IN THE AREA SUCCESSFULLY

PR, M, VBS

THE DEGREE IS IMPORTANT IN THE FIRST INSTANCE TO BE EVEN LOOKED AT FOR AN INTERVIEW AND THEN IT BECOMES LESS IMPORTANT AT INTERVIEW COMPARED TO WORK ETHIC AND COMMUNICATION AS THIS IS WHAT GIVES THE "POINT OF DIFFERENCE" - ABILITY TO FIT WITH THE COMPANY CULTURE, AND THEIR ABILITY TO SUCCESSFULLY FULFILL THE ROLE WITHIN THE TEAM AND BUSINESS

PB, M, VBS

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE VS WORKPLACE SKILLS

NOT LOOKING FOR AN A-AVERAGE STUDENT – PREFER CANDIDATES WHO MAY HAVE NOT DONE SO WELL ACADEMICALLY BUT WERE ABLE TO HOLD A JOB AND WORK THROUGH A PROBLEM

PB, L, VBS

HIGHLY INTELLIGENT ACADEMIA DOESN'T ALWAYS EQUATE TO HARD-WORKING – OR PRACTICAL APPLICATION SKILLS

PR, M, NVBS

VARIED EXPECTATIONS IN THE ORGANISATION

THE EXPECTATIONS DIFFER ACROSS THE ORGANISATION – SOME MANAGERS MIGHT PLACE HIGHER IMPORTANCE ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

PB, L, NVBS

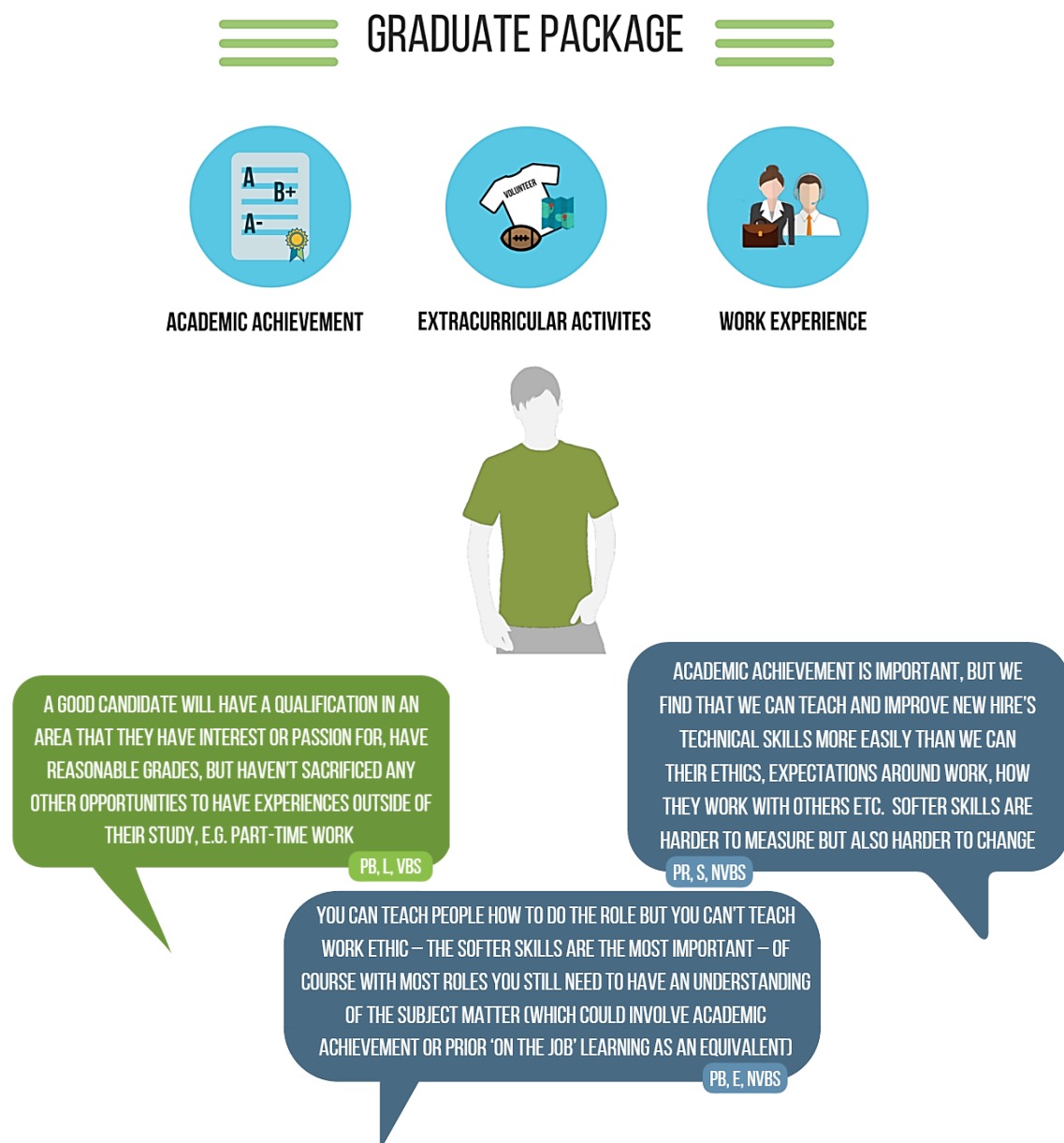
CULTURAL & TEAM FIT

OF COURSE WE WANT GRADUATES WHO HAVE BEEN TRAINED IN THE BASICS OF THEIR FIELD TO A LEVEL OF NATIONAL STANDARDS. BUT IT'S BEYOND EDUCATION ATTRIBUTES WE'RE LOOKING FOR - COMPANY AND WORKPLACE FIT - PRESENTABILITY TO OUR CLIENTS, ABILITY TO EXPRESS CONCEPTUAL THINKING IN A COLLEGIAL AND NON-ADVERSARIAL MANNER, ABILITY TO ENGAGE OUR TEAM WITH NEW IDEAS ETC

PR, S, NVBS

7. THE GRADUATE PACKAGE

The qualitative data collected in this supplementary project shed more light on the role of work ethic and academic achievement in graduate recruitment and selection. The findings presented in this report highlight its complexity both for the recruiters and graduate candidates. Many employers who contributed their comments often stressed that academic achievement does not stand on its own and forms only ‘part of the story’, regardless of how it was ranked in the survey. The role of activities that students engage in beyond their study such as extracurricular activities and part-time work were also clearly highlighted as the building elements and crucial evidence of work ethic. Taking the whole data set into account, a summative illustration of the findings can be expressed under the term **GRADUATE PACKAGE**. The concept that brings to the foreground the mutual influences between one’s academic performance, personal-communal life, and experiences in the workplace.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Thank you for taking the time to help us increase our understanding of the skills and attributes you and your organisation look for in students and graduates. The information gathered will be kept **anonymous** and reported only in accumulated form (i.e. you or your organisation will not be identifiable). You will receive a copy of the results on completion of this project.

SURVEY FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS

In your survey response, you indicated **Work ethic** as one of the important skills and attributes your organisation looks for in students and graduates.

1) What, in your opinion, contributes to strong work ethic?

2) What sort of evidence would you expect students/graduates to present in order to demonstrate strong work ethic in the recruitment and selection process?

In your survey response you also indicated **Academic achievement** as one of the important skills and attributes.

3) What role does Academic achievement play in the student/graduate recruitment and selection in your organisation?

Thank you!