

Great expectations:
Redesigning the
employee experience
for the workforce
of the future

Insights from the
Accenture Strategy 2016
UK University Graduate
Employment Study

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High performance. Delivered.

For the second year in a row, the results of the Accenture Strategy UK University Graduate Employment Study highlight a significant difference between the expectations of new university graduates and the experiences of recent graduates who have been in the workplace for a year or two. Failure to deliver an employee experience that meets the expectations of entry-level talent represents a challenge to organizations that wish to attract and retain the best and the brightest.

Our findings show that 2016 university graduates are entering the workforce with confidence and great expectations about their careers as well as how they have been prepared. They're ready, willing and able. They expect to find meaningful, relevant work and are hopeful about working within an organizational culture that is both challenging and enjoyable.

But our data also points to some bad news: reality is not matching those expectations. Many recent graduates, those who entered the workforce in 2014 or 2015, feel underemployed. That number has increased since last year. Almost half (49 percent) of those who did find jobs have already left or intend to leave within the next two years. Just one in four wants to work for a large corporation—not a good sign for the UK's largest employers.

Add this all up and the answer is: Employers are missing the opportunity to convert workforce passion and energy into purpose and long-term engagement. Business success over the next decade depends on attracting and retaining the best and the brightest of the workforce of the future.

Are you ready?

Passionate, practical and prepared

This year's graduates have great expectations for their careers, and are entering the workforce feeling prepared and committed. They want to work on things that matter to them. Asked why they chose their area of study, 62 percent of new graduates said it's because they are passionate about it.

But beyond passion, practicality is also driving this generation of university graduates. Nearly three in five (59 percent) have been encouraged to pursue STEM subjects—with more profitable careers and job opportunities cited as the key drivers. And four in five graduates (79 percent) considered the availability of jobs before deciding their degree course.

New graduates also enter the workforce with the conviction that their university adequately prepared them for the workplace. Seventy-five percent of new graduates say their education prepared them well, and 73 percent of recent graduates still say this after one or two years in the workforce.

In contrast to oft-cited platitudes about the job-hopping millennial generation, we find that the initial willingness of graduates to commit to an employer is high: 61 percent of 2016 graduates expect to stay with their first employer at least three years. They're also willing to work hard: 60 percent of new graduates would find it acceptable to take work home in the evenings or weekends.

Over three quarters of this year's graduates (78 percent) are even willing to move to another city or location, and 67 percent are willing to work on an interim, apprenticeship basis, at least for a time, post-graduation.

Bottom line:

This year's graduates are ready for you. Are you ready for them?



Graduates feel
passionate and ready:
75 percent
agree their education
prepared them well for
their job and career

What do graduates want in return?

Of particular concern to large companies: Many of this year's graduates do not want to work for you. Only one in four want to work for a large corporation. Why? Perhaps they feel they will be lost in the maze of a large corporation that is perceived as not being attentive to an employee's individual needs and expectations.

By contrast, 40 percent of 2016 graduates look to work for a small start-up or a medium-sized business, where the employee experience is likely to be more personalized.

What can larger companies do? In return for their passion and commitment, university graduates are looking for interesting but also relevant work: 87 percent expect to be employed in their field of study. They are looking for equal commitment from their employers: Six in ten new graduates expect to be employed full time. They are looking at the benefits that full-time employment brings, such as job security (51 percent), and earning enough money (39 percent).

When it comes to further education and training, 98 percent of this year's graduates expect to pursue additional training to further their career. Some formal training is important and expected, but more important to them is the more personalized approach that only on-the-job training, coaching and mentoring can deliver. Sixty-eight percent expect on-the-job training and experience in their first job, while just 51 percent expect formal training.

New graduates also expect an engaging, even fun, culture. Two-thirds of new graduates (64 percent) would trade a higher salary for a positive social atmosphere, and more than half also want their employer to provide travel and volunteer opportunities.

Only 1 in 4 graduates wants to work for a large company

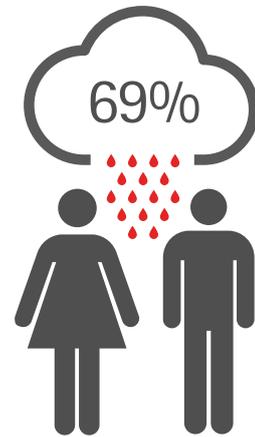


Are you delivering on new graduates' great expectations?

It may come as no surprise that the reality of the workplace right now is not living up to the expectations of this year's university graduates. In fact, if the slogan of the 2016 graduates is "great expectations," the slogan of 2014 and 2015 graduates is "great uncertainty".

The proportion of recent graduates who feel underemployed, meaning they are in a job that doesn't require their university degree, increased to 69 percent this year, up nine percentage points year-on-year. Even 58 percent of graduates that are employed full-time in their field of study feel underemployed.

These findings paint a concerning picture: Employers are failing to harness the passion and commitment of university graduates in a way that attracts and retains top talent in support of the strategic goals of the organization.



Nearly 7 in 10 recent graduates consider themselves underemployed

Great expectations

of 2016 UK graduates

88% expect to find a job in their field of study

79% considered availability of jobs before deciding degree course

69% completed an internship or apprenticeship

75% feel prepared for their job

87% expect their first employer to provide formal training

vs.

Great uncertainty

by 2014/15 UK graduates

46% work full time in their chosen field

34% accepted the first job offer given the current economy

34% did not convert internship or apprenticeship into a job

69% consider themselves underemployed

69% received training from their first employer

How to engage entry-level talent

How can organizations build on these insights as a means of attracting and retaining high performers among entry-level employees? Here are a few important actions to take:

Hyper-personalize your talent strategy

In a world where consumers can purchase everything customized, employees do not accept a one-size-fits-all approach to development and advancement from their employer. Tailor and implement a comprehensive talent strategy centered on a personalized and individualized approach.



Bridge the divide

The vast majority of graduates feel the skills they learned at university are underutilized. Organizations need to bridge the divide between university education and the workplace. They also need to redesign their entry-level jobs to make them more engaging.



Give students early experience of your organization

Providing opportunities for graduates to experience your organization's environment first-hand is an effective method for talent attraction, because today's graduates value early exposure to their potential employers through internships, apprenticeships and on-campus programs. Work in collaboration with HR to convert those internships into employment of the best performers.



Provide a small-team feel

Give your people the sense that they are part of a small team, not an impersonal conglomerate, through personal attention to entry-level workers and by creating a sense of ownership and empowerment.



Re-imagine the learning experience

Employers still need to provide relevant formal training, especially in the early stages of a career. Beyond that, however, there needs to be ample room for informal and experiential learning. Skills development must be hyper-personalized, as well—rotating employees to different assignments in a team-oriented environment, supported with coaching and conversations geared towards development.



Connect passion and purpose

Display corporate social responsibility and connect employees' work interests to the purpose of the organization. Provide volunteering opportunities both as a means of helping the community and giving employees varied, meaningful work experiences that can create cohesion and commitment.



Offer meaningful, challenging employee experiences to attract and retain top talent

A degree of uncertainty is likely to characterize the UK business environment for some time. From a talent perspective, however, this spells opportunity for savvy enterprises to focus on the end-to-end employee experience. Now is an opportune time to build your workforce of the future by putting the employee at the center: Understand the employee's needs, desires and pain points, and then design the interactions and services that create a great experience.

Use internships to attract high performers. Focus more on individualized coaching and development than on formal training classes. Give your people the sense that they are part of a small team and not an impersonal conglomerate.

As new and recent graduates look for more certainty and stability, organizations that rethink their entry-level positions with a hyper-personalized approach to talent attraction and retention are more likely to flourish. Organizations can tap into the passion and knowledge that university graduates bring, providing employee experiences that will make today's graduates want to stay and grow with them.

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About the research

Accenture Strategy conducted an online survey in the United Kingdom of 1,016 students graduating from university in 2016, and 1,016 university graduates who entered the workforce in 2014 or 2015. The survey was conducted in April, 2016. Note: Data has been rounded to the nearest whole number.