Student Focus Group Report 2022

Recruitment, Reneges and Retaining Interest (Keep Warm Strategies)

Student Focus Groups 2022

The aim of the focus groups was to gain direct insights from current university students and recent graduates on their experiences of the internship and graduate recruitment process. These insights help guide recommendations for future hiring practices and keep warm strategies.

27 students **12 ♀** **15 ♂**

** No participants who were a part of this study identified as non-binary*

From 13 universities

- UTS – Sydney, NSW
- UNSW – Sydney, NSW
- The University of Newcastle – Newcastle, NSW
- University of Melbourne – Melbourne, VIC
- Monash University – Melbourne, VIC
- RMIT University – Melbourne, VIC
- Deakin University – Geelong, VIC
- Australian National University – Canberra, ACT
- Curtin University – Perth, WA
- The University of Western Australia – Perth, WA
- Queensland University of Technology – Brisbane, QLD
- University of Queensland – Brisbane, QLD
- Bond University – Gold Coast, QLD

Studying undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in:

- Information Technology
- Business & Commerce
- Accounting
- Strategic Communications
- Law
- Actuarial Studies
- Economics
- Finance
- Engineering – Civil, Chemical
- Marketing
- Science – Environmental, Biology
- International Relations
- Networking
- Cyber Security
- Public Health
- Data Science
- Social Work

Explain what transferrable skills you are looking for – anecdotally students who identify as female or non-binary are quick to self-eliminate rather than put themselves out there for the role

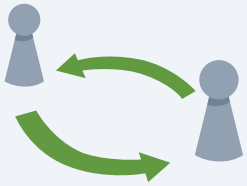
Be clear in job adverts

Example:

Join us as a Business Development Manager! ✗

Do you have a Business and Commerce Degree? Our program could be just what you are looking for! ✓

Rotations are important to grad wellbeing and longevity of employment.



If you have a D&I policy, be clear and advise what support is given

"I interviewed for a role 2 weeks ago and assume I have been rejected as I have not heard back"

Make sure to communicate what is going to happen at each stage of the recruitment process, as well as approximate wait times so candidates are less like to apply for other roles. Continue to keep in touch after they've signed their contact!

19% of students changed degree type due to challenges with remote learning

15% of students delayed their grad date so they could complete harder to learn subjects face to face

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In May 2022, the GradConnection team undertook 9 focus groups which consisted of 27 students & recent graduates (12 females and 15 males*) from the following universities:

1. UTS – Sydney, NSW
2. UNSW – Sydney, NSW
3. The University of Newcastle – Newcastle, NSW
4. University of Melbourne – Melbourne, VIC
5. Monash University – Melbourne, VIC
6. RMIT University – Melbourne, VIC
7. Deakin University – Geelong, VIC
8. Australian National University – Canberra, ACT
9. Curtin University – Perth, WA
10. The University of Western Australia – Perth, WA
11. Queensland University of Technology – Brisbane, QLD
12. University of Queensland – Brisbane, QLD
13. Bond University – Gold Coast, QLD

The students were undertaking/had undertaken a number of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees including:

- Information Technology
- Business & Commerce
- Accounting
- Strategic Communications
- Law
- Actuarial Studies
- Economics
- Finance
- Engineering – Civil, Chemical
- Marketing
- Science – Environmental, Biology
- International Relations
- Networking
- Cyber Security
- Public Health
- Data Science
- Social Work

** No participants who were a part of this study identified as non-binary*

KEY THEMES OF FOCUS GROUPS - Recruitment, Reneges and Retaining Interest (Keep Warm Strategies)

The Recruitment Process

The students we spoke to are applying for fewer roles – if this is the case for most students, **how do you convince them to apply for yours?**

- *"As a Chemical Engineering graduate, I would be hesitant to apply for a generalist graduate program at a bank, as I'm not sure how that's relevant to my degree".* Explain how the various degrees you're open to are relevant for your programs and your industry.
- **Be clear in job adverts** - *"Join us as a Business Development Manager!"* Most students would not have much of an idea what this job name means. Keep it simple – *"Graduating with a Business and Commerce degree? Our program could be just what you are looking for!"*
- **Be concise** and give actual information in ad content, for example, what they will be working on, what the job involves day to day, will they have a mentor/buddy etc. Is there training involved?

Key recommendations:

- **Use plain English in job advert titles**
- **Be clear & thorough with duties and responsibilities**
- **Explain how their degree is relevant to the role (if not obvious)**
- **Be specific with your role locations**
- **Consider short-term placements or job shadowing experiences for 1st year students**

- Explain what **transferrable skills** you are looking for as students lack understanding of this. Particularly for students who identify as female or non-binary, anecdotally they will self-eliminate rather than apply for the role. Mention any casual work experience, student society memberships or volunteer work you will accept.
- Many students feel that they are at a distinct disadvantage if they have not completed an internship, when applying for grad roles. Address that having completed an internship isn't mandatory.
- They also feel the process is too long and is exacerbated by the lack of contact post application. One grad stated they *"interviewed for a role 2 weeks ago and assume I have been rejected as I have not heard back"*
- Students need to understand the WHY so explain the reasoning behind the recruitment process, particularly psych testing. **The more forthcoming you are with information, the more time students will dedicate to completing the testing for your organisation.**
- Increase the time to complete psych & video testing to approximately a week each. Be mindful that students need to organise their availability due to study & work commitments, so give them extra time to fit your testing requirements in, particularly if they are scheduled mid-semester.
- Students feel there are right/wrong answers to psych testing and go into it thinking they are exam-like. Let's change that thinking and educate them when they are invited to testing so as to ease fears/concerns.
- A great recruitment process, with clear communication, is a great first step in the process of securing talent. This is as much an opportunity for you to get to know them as it is for them to get to know you and your organisation.
- Students have limited knowledge of when grad and intern roles open and close throughout the year. Therefore, having a brand presence in the market year-round is key to engagement. This can be done via expressions of interest, or multiple intakes throughout the year.

- Give specific locations as to where your roles are based, and if you accept applications from interstate, include if there is assistance, including relocation support/payment for a move available to them.

- **Rotations are so important to grad wellbeing and longevity of employment.** This is their first full time role, so an understanding of working life is gained through rotations. With rotations, grads also feel more invested in their role, and that it is a well thought out programme.

- If you have a **D&I policy**, be clear and show HOW you support people and what is done. Do not be flippant with these details.

- Year on year there is a disconnect between what is happening in the market vs what students believe is happening. For example, students may think that there are less opportunities than there are, or employers only considering students with relevant experience. This relates back to explanations of transferrable skills, previously mentioned.

- Interestingly, 22% of respondents from out student survey said that they would look for roles in their first year, so to ensure that you're not missing out on these candidates and maintaining engagement. **EOI forms** are a great way to build your talent pipeline for when these students are eligible for internship and graduate programs.

- Due to the above stat, also consider short-term placements or job shadowing experiences for 1st year students. This gives them an understanding of your organisation and where a career with you can take them, and to help you **build your pipeline** for when these students are eligible to apply for your internship and/or graduate programs.

- If you do not have internship program, consider developing one, as this is a key way to pipeline into your grad program.

Reneges

Students want employers to communicate what is going to happen at each stage and the approximate wait times to hear back – this will make them less likely to apply for other roles.

- Students will continue to look for roles if communication is not clear, so **make it hard for them to renege** with clear updates and timelines.
- Make it known that you are willing to negotiate if you are. Often it will come down to something the other role is offering that you are not. Allow them to honestly tell you this information without backlash.
- Allow them to ask questions and actively encourage them to do so. Many students will actively accept any offer they receive, in case a more suitable role is not offered to them, which can see students starting in roles with limited interest. **Be clear about the role** itself and if there is flexibility.
- ***"I want as many options as possible to know what's the best opportunity for me."***

Keep Warm

Communicate, communicate, communicate! Grads feel that their position is tenuous, **even with a signed contract.**

- Once a month is appropriate for staying in touch with your new hires pre start date, but **initiate this the week after signing a contract**. Let them know you will be in contact over the months until the start date.
- Relationship build with your new employees - this can include:
  - Offering a part time role within your organisation prior to them starting their FT journey with you
  - Setting them up with a buddy or mentor PRIOR to the role starting
  - Connecting them with ex-grads from within your organisation
  - Connecting them with their fellow grads – having an event on site is appealing to all who we spoke to. They can get to know each other and form their own relationships prior to start date
  - Offering up (non-confidential) training, or letting them know what systems etc they will be working with so they can familiarise themselves.
  - Let them know what the onboarding week(s) will entail – get them excited!
  - Advise what projects (if known) they will be working on when they start and ask for interest around them.

Key recommendations:

- **Communication post offer is KEY**
- **As grads often receive multiple offers, make it known if you are willing to negotiate the terms and conditions of your offer**
- **Relationship build with your new employees (assign grad buddies, mentors, networking and more!)**

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