



# Stakeholder views on graduate employability

Perspectives on the value of relevant work  
experience and academic achievement

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# Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Method
3. Results
4. Discussion
5. Takeaway message:  
Advice on graduate  
employability





# Employability

## The concept of employability (Hillage & Pollard, 1998)

- ◀ **Gain initial** employment
- ◀ **Maintain** and **obtain** new employment
- ◀ **Quality** of employment

## Why important in university context?

- ◀ For  $\frac{3}{4}$  of students, improving job prospects is a **key reason for attending university** (Sodexo, 2016)
- ◀ Recruiters' **frustration** with skills and capabilities of current graduates



# Perceived Employability

## Why perceived employability?

- ◀ **Gap** between what higher education institutions think boosts employability and what organisations want
- e.g. recruiters value part-time work more than students think (Kinash, Crance, Judd, & Knight, 2018)

## Why work experience relevance and academic achievement?

- ◀ Findings of **previous dissertation**
- ◀ **Little research** although many universities suggest that relevant work experience can compensate for lower degree class



# Perceived Employability

## Past research at a glance

- ◀ CVs with low work experience and high academic achievement least likely hired (Cole, Rubin, Field, & Giles, 2007)
- ◀ Relevant work experience matters more than relevant degree to recruiters (Knouse, 1994)

## Hypotheses

- ◀ Relevant work experience increases employability ratings
- ◀ Higher degree classifications increase employability ratings
- ◀ Academics and students place more importance on degree classification
- ◀ Recruiters place more importance on work experience



# Method

## Questionnaire sent to

- ◀ students
- ◀ academics (social sciences)
- ◀ recruiters/employers

## 132 Participants

- ◀ 53 students
  - ◀ age  $m = 21$ ,  $SD = 1.32$
  - ◀ 7 female, 45 male, 1 other
- ◀ 29 recruiters
  - ◀ age  $m = 33$ ,  $SD = 11.06$
  - ◀ 18 female, 10 male, 1 other
- ◀ 50 academics
  - ◀ age  $m = 41$ ,  $SD = 9.95$
  - ◀ 26 female, 24 male



# Method

## 2 job descriptions:

- ◀ HR Assistant
- ◀ Business Management Graduate

## CV excerpts varied on...

- ◀ degree classification
  - ◀ 1st, 2.1, or 2.2
- ◀ work experience relevance
  - ◀ Relevant or non-relevant

### **JOB DESCRIPTION: HR Assistant**

#### **The role**

- Perform daily recruitment administration tasks
- Prepare reports on and manage employee data
- Answer incoming HR queries via email and phone
- Assist employee induction process

#### **The ideal candidate**

- Organised and good attention to detail
- Able to work both independently and as part of a team
- Efficient and enthusiastic

### **Candidate details**

#### *Education*

MA Business Management and Psychology: 1st class predicted  
University of Aberdeen, 2015-2019

#### *Work Experience*

Office Assistant, CS Corporate Solutions

May - September 2018 (5 months)

Assisted general administrative and office duties, including answering queries, supporting reporting



# Method

## Quantitative items

- ◀ "Please rate this candidate's level of **employability** for the position"
- ◀ "How likely do you think that this person would be **hired** for this role?"
- ◀ 7-point Likert scale

## Qualitative items

- ◀ "In your opinion, how important is it that a graduate has **relevant work experience**? Why?"
- ◀ "In your opinion, how important is it that a graduate has **performed well academically**? Why?"



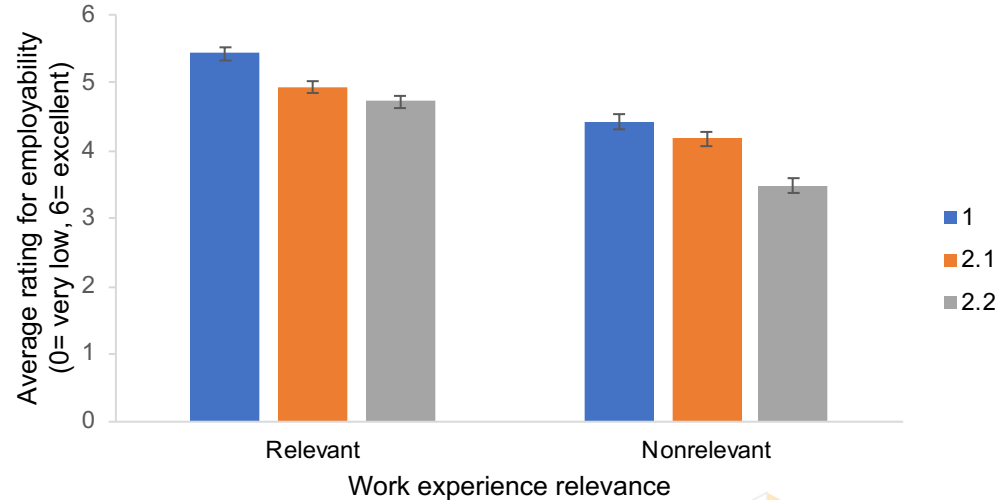
# Results

For ratings of both employability and likelihood of being hired

- ◀ Main effect of **relevance**
- ◀ Main effect of **degree classification**
- ◀ Interaction between degree classification and relevance

→ You can set yourself apart from others with a high degree classification and relevant work experience, but if you have relevant work experience, you'll be fine

Interaction between degree classification and work experience relevance



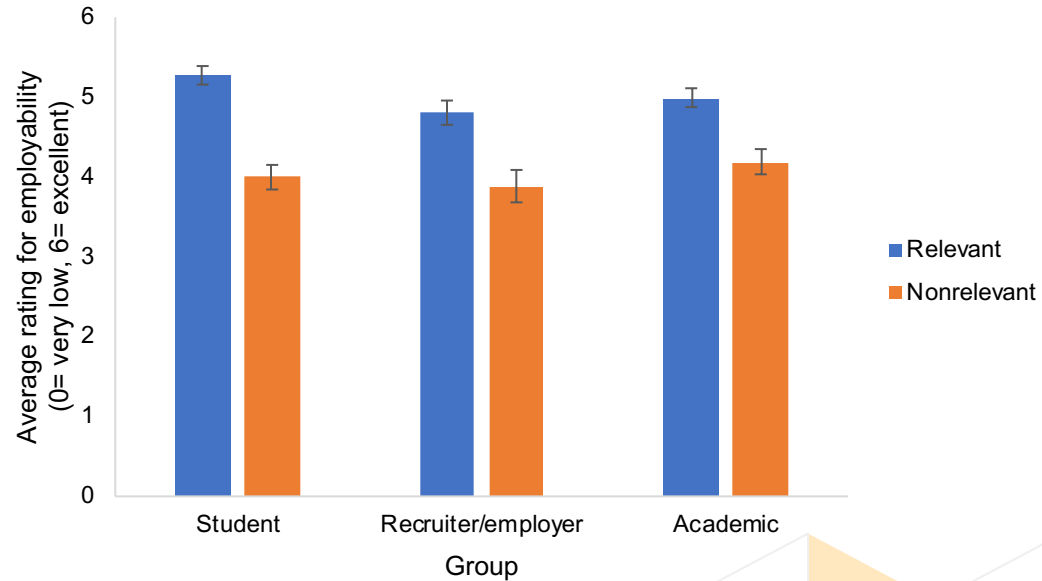
# Results

## For ratings of employability

- Interaction between group and relevance

→ Students seem to place more emphasis on relevance than recruiters and academics

Interaction between group and relevance



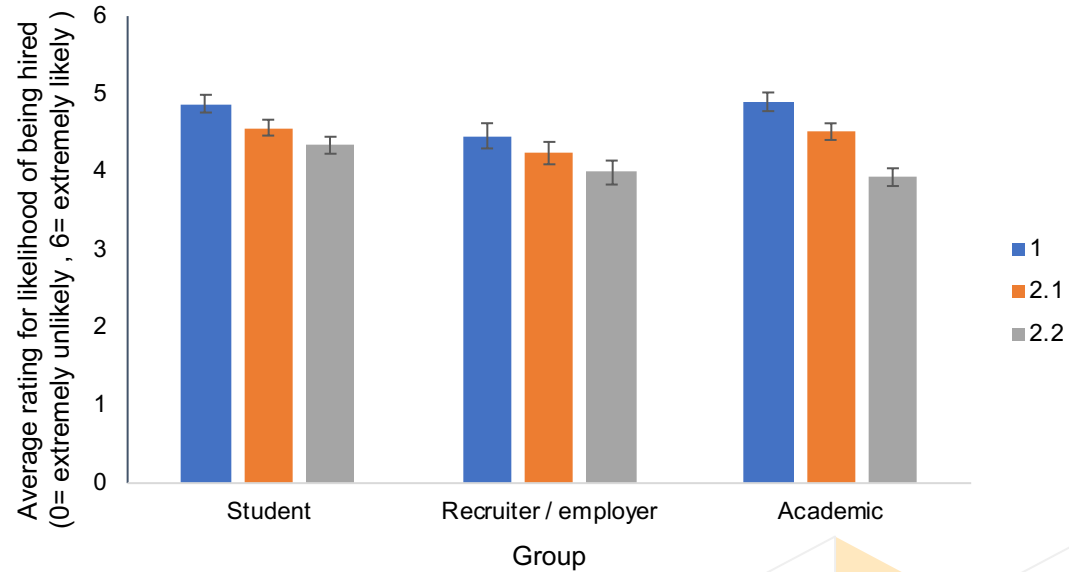
# Results

## For ratings of likelihood of being hired

- Interaction between group and degree classification

→ Employers seem to put less emphasis on degree classification than students and academics

Interaction between group and degree classification





## Preliminary themes in qualitative data

**All types of work experience matter**

**You can set yourself apart from others with relevant work experience**

**Recruiters are looking for well-rounded individuals**

**What matters is passion, motivation and the ability to demonstrate them**

**Everything depends on the type of role you apply for and how willing they are to train you**



# Discussion

## Implications

- ◀ Both degree classification and relevant work experience affect employability
- ◀ But recruiters care less about degree classification than you think

## Further analysis on...

- ◀ Why different interactions for different measures?
- ◀ Are the results different for different job descriptions?
- ◀ How about other disciplines?

## Limitations:

- ◀ CV excerpts and job descriptions not representative and difficult to make judgments on?
- E.g. Fritzsche & Brannick (2002): inferences based on simplified CVs are not generalisable to inferences based on actual resumes

# Takeaways

- 1) It's alright to focus on work experience while studying
- 2) It's all about the way you sell and present yourself
- 3) Your personality and capabilities are important





**Thank you!**



## References

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