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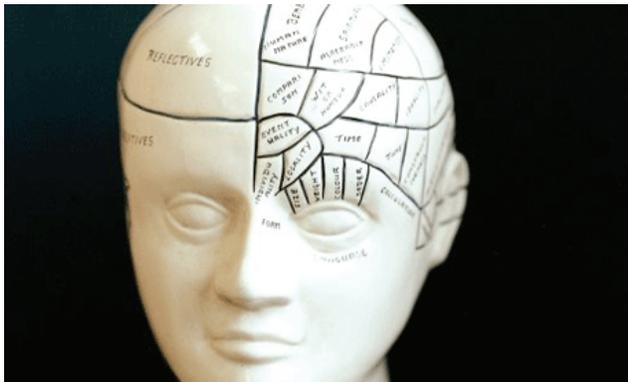
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What makes psychology and geography grads the most employable?

We asked our experts why they thought geography and psychology graduates were found to be least likely to be unemployed

Alison White

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Psychology students gain skills which can be applied in a wide range of careers, according to the experts. Picture: Guardian

A study of the [graduate class of 2009](#) found 8.9 per cent were out of work in January 2010 - the highest unemployment level for 17 years. The poll, by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit charity, discovered graduates with [degrees in IT](#) had the bleakest prospects with an unemployment rate of 16.3% among their number - media studies graduates also fared badly with 14.6% unemployed six months after graduation.

By contrast, geography and psychology graduates had a better than average chance of getting work - some 7.4% and 8.3% were out of a job respectively. We asked our experts why they thought graduates of these subjects were found to be least likely to be unemployed.

Dr Alison Green is the psychology programme director at the Open University (OU) and chair of the Psychology Programme Committee, the body that oversees all psychology qualifications offered by the OU

Psychology graduates gain an impressive range of skills that make them highly employable: A key factor behind this success story is that psychology graduates acquire diverse knowledge and an impressive range of skills that make them highly employable across an enviable range of professions that offer real prospects. Psychology programmes deliver skills employers value, such as numerical skills, the

ability to understand and work with statistics, effective communication and the ability to work productively in teams - and this gives students a real edge when competing with graduates from other disciplines. Our Open University psychology graduates, for example, move into careers in advertising, career counselling, education, the health professions, human resources, management and social services, and of course they also have the option to progress a career in a professional area of psychology, such as forensic psychology. It's the combination of skills and the nature of the discipline itself that not only underpins the recent growth in numbers of students studying psychology at university (and let's not forget that psychology is the fourth most popular A-level subject too) but also assures its continuing relevance in the global marketplace.

Derek Mowbray is director of the Management Advisory Service and visiting professor in psychology at Northumbria University

Studying psychology helps prepare graduates for many different types of work: Careers for psychology graduates are going to be on the broader canvas than for other, more vocationally trained, graduates, as psychology is an education that prepares people to acquire skills that can be applied to an infinite range of activities. Apart from careers in psychology, psychology is applied to anything that involves people. Psychology graduates will know the significance of being flexible and adaptable and will have the level of confidence to try anything.

Anne Wilson is head of careers at Student Careers & Skills, University of Warwick

Psychology students often gain extra work experience and further study - which enhances their employability: Psychology graduates, when compared to graduates overall, fare slightly better than average in the graduate employment stakes. While graduates from this discipline have many options open to them, it's also true that these students know that if they want to apply their psychology theory in the workplace for a range of careers (clinical, education, neuropsychology, forensic, health, sport and so on) they understand a period of further study and work experience - up to 12 months - is necessary. Typically these students will have been gaining some relevant experience while at university, some through compulsory sandwich placements. Students will continue to build on this when they leave. These experiences would certainly enhance their employability.

It is important to remember that the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reports on graduate destinations a mere six months after graduation which is an insufficiently long enough period of time for many students to have secured a graduate-level position.

James Uffindell is MD and founder of the Bright Network, a careers network for students, graduates and young professionals

Geography and psychology graduates are attracted to industries with increasing numbers of vacancies: We work with high flying geography and psychology graduates who are anecdotally and statistically more interested in the areas of highest employment demand. Accountancy, banking and general management, the three areas projected to benefit from the largest increase in vacancies this year, are all favoured by geography and psychology graduates. Out of the graduates that have joined Bright Network this year, on average 28.7% are interested in a career in accounting and finance, (geographers have a 26% interest level, so about average), however just 14% of IT graduates (the most unemployed group) are interested in this sector. This is a shame as banks and finance institutions are keen to acquire their skills.

Demand is strong for graduates from leading universities and geography and psychology are far more likely to be studied at these institutions (often labelled the old universities) than the former polytechnics where media studies graduates, who seem to have higher unemployment rates, appear more prevalent.

Nick Keeley is director of the Careers Service at Newcastle University

Studying geography arms graduates with a mix of skills employers want to see:

Geography students generally do well in terms of their relatively low unemployment rates. You could attribute this to the fact that the degree helps develop a whole range of employability skills including numeracy, teamwork through regular field trips, analytical skills in the lab and a certain technical savviness through using various specialist computing applications. Also, the subject area in itself cultivates a world view and a certain cultural sensitivity. These all potentially help a geographer to stand out in the labour market.

Michael Gray graduated in 2009 with a 2:1 in BA Geography from the University of Leeds. After a period of travel Michael has undergone various work placements in the media industry with the goal of finding work as a TV researcher

Research should look at what unemployed graduates are doing: Does the research account for work placements? I myself am technically part of the 7.4%, but that's because I'm choosing to put my energy into working for free in the media industry. I also believe geography encourages travel, and a lot of my friends (including myself) have been abroad for a stretch of time in the last year, or are away at the moment working or travelling, learning languages and teaching languages. Although the research is interesting, I think it'd more interesting to look at the graduates from each degree that aren't being productive for whatever reason. If they're on the dole, what are they doing about it? How many people are actually unemployed? I think it's fine to be part of the 7.4% statistic, as long as you're doing something about it.

Joseph Richardson graduated with a 2:1 in BA Geography. He is currently temping in a call centre and wants to pursue a careers as a copywriter or freelance writer

Geography students don't have a set career path like other subjects with higher unemployment statistics: If you're not sure what to do, you can't go wrong with geography; that was certainly the case for me. Geography doesn't have a set career path like the disciplines showing the highest levels of unemployment. If you graduate with an IT degree you are going to work with computers and will perhaps be more inclined to accept being unemployed until the right position comes along; whereas a geographer will possibly accept a more varied range of role. Most of those who graduated with me are in work, the majority not in roles directly linked to geography, but employed nonetheless. With geography the more rigid career paths such as town planning and teaching require further studies, be it a PGCE or a master's. Perhaps more geography graduates are in further study and therefore not showing up as unemployed. As a geography graduate I naturally take some solace in knowing my degree is faring better than most but with so few of my friends in graduate-level jobs directly linking to the degree it's hard to be too impressed.

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