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MEDIA RELEASE

Employers rate graduates who studied on campus higher than those who studied online

Higher education graduates who studied entirely online are rated lower by their work supervisors than other graduates – particularly when it comes to their teamwork skills.

These are among the findings of Australia’s annual Employer Satisfaction Survey (ESS) – the only national survey that links the experiences of graduates to the views of their direct supervisors.

Overall satisfaction with graduates remained high, at 84.2%, but varied according to mode of study, level of study, field of study, and graduate profile.

As well as preferring graduates who did at least some of their study on-campus, supervisors also gave higher ratings to younger graduates (30 and under) and international graduates.

Dr Angela Baker of the Social Research Centre, which conducts the ESS for the Australian Government Department of Education, said: “As online study becomes a core part of Australia’s higher education system, employers are telling us that collaborative skills are an area that could be improved for some online graduates.

“Our survey shows employers rate collaborative skills six percentage points lower for graduates who studied entirely online compared with those who had some face-to-face learning. This isn’t about the quality of students, it’s about their learning experience.

“Institutions need to look closely at how teamwork, communication and problem-solving are developed in online courses, so graduates enter the workforce confident and ready to collaborate in real-world settings.”

Asked to comment on how graduates could be better prepared for their current job, many supervisors cited employability and enterprise skills, technical and professional skills and domain-specific skills. Suggestions from supervisors included:

- “Integrate communication, teamwork, and leadership training into coursework.”
- “Additional focus on the ‘soft’ skills.”
- “Need for better analysis skills and writing skills.”

Supervisors also reinforced the need for improving industry-specific knowledge and skills within degrees, including through internships and placements. However, work experience requirements should be balanced with the appropriate supports. In a related study, the Graduate Outcomes Survey, one graduate noted, “Placement hours are excessive, and it is difficult to manage the loss of income whilst on placement.”

Despite seeing scope for improvement, supervisors have been rating graduates' job preparedness highly since the survey started in 2016. Overall 94.9% of supervisors reported that the qualification had prepared their graduate 'well' or 'very well' for the job.

"Overall, the findings show Australia's education system is doing a strong job of preparing graduates for the workplace," Dr Baker said. "Employers continue to express confidence in graduates' readiness for the workplace, even as study modes and learning environments evolve."

About the 2025 Employer Satisfaction Survey (ESS)

The ESS is the only national survey in Australia that links the views of direct supervisors with graduates' experiences, giving the most accurate picture of graduate employer satisfaction.

It is one of the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) surveys. Graduates who completed the Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) provided their direct supervisor's contact details to be included in the sample population for the ESS. A total of 2,399 supervisors completed the survey, representing supervisors of graduates from 132 higher education institutions.

Key findings

- 84.2% of supervisors were satisfied overall with their graduate employees.
- 94.9% of supervisors said the qualification had prepared the graduate well for the job.
- However, supervisors expressed greater satisfaction with graduates who studied on-campus, or a combination of on-campus and externally, than with graduates who undertook all study off-campus. The difference was most stark when it came to Collaborative Skills. On-campus and multi-mode graduates rated 6.3 percentage points higher for Collaborative Skills than graduates who had studied externally (at 90.8% versus 84.5% respectively).
- Supervisors expressed greater overall satisfaction with graduates aged 30 and under (85.1%) than those older (83.3%). The difference in ratings was greatest for Collaborative Skills (91.8% versus 85.6%).
- International graduates of Australian institutions had higher ratings than their domestic peers across all five skill areas, most notably for Collaborative Skills (95.0% versus 86.4%) and Employability Skills (90.7% versus 84.7%).
- Supervisor satisfaction was highest overall with graduates from the fields of Agriculture and environmental studies (90.0%), Engineering and related technologies (87.1%), and Education (86.6%). It appeared lowest for Creative arts graduates (79.7%).

Media contact and further information

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The full 2025 ESS report and additional materials are available on the QILT website:
[https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/employer-satisfaction-survey-\(ess\)](https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/employer-satisfaction-survey-(ess))

About the Social Research Centre

The Social Research Centre is a leading Australian provider of social research and evaluation services, with deep expertise in education research. We work with government, education providers and institutions to deliver high quality research that informs education policy, improves learning experiences, and supports better outcomes for students and educators.