



Key Findings

Focus On: Graduate Skills

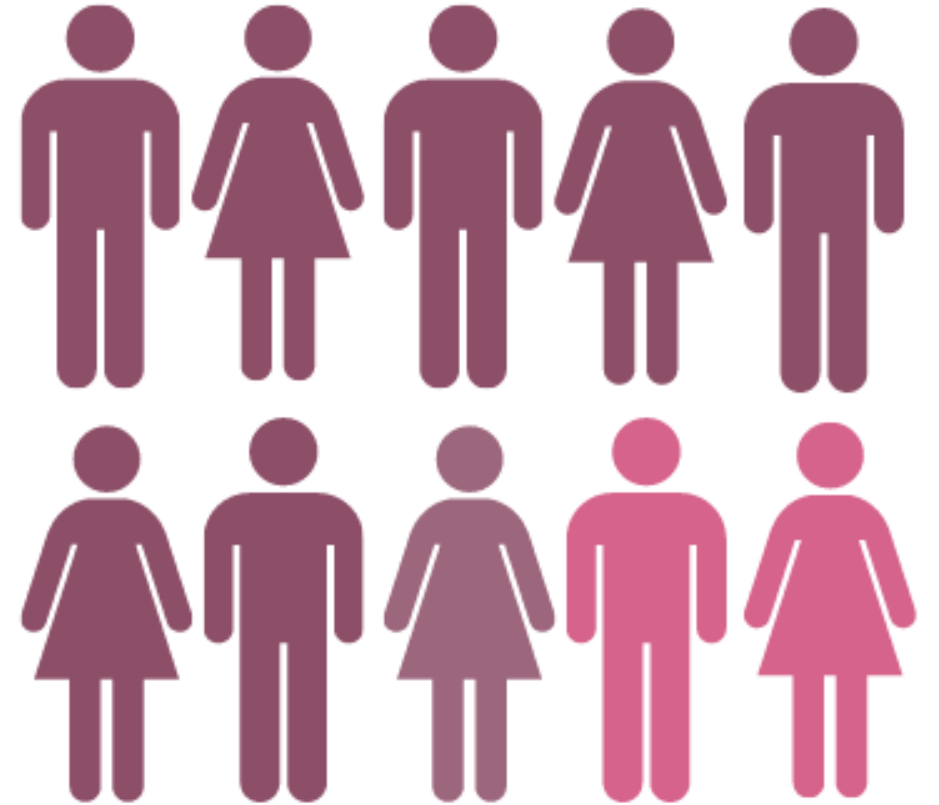
Employers' and Graduates' views of graduate skills

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Graduates: Characteristics

247 respondents:

- All participants graduated from a Scottish HEI (survey respondents were primarily in Glasgow and Aberdeen)
- 81% graduated in the last two years (2017-2019)
- 70% were working full time, 11% studying, 9% working part time
- Graduates from 17 broad course categories

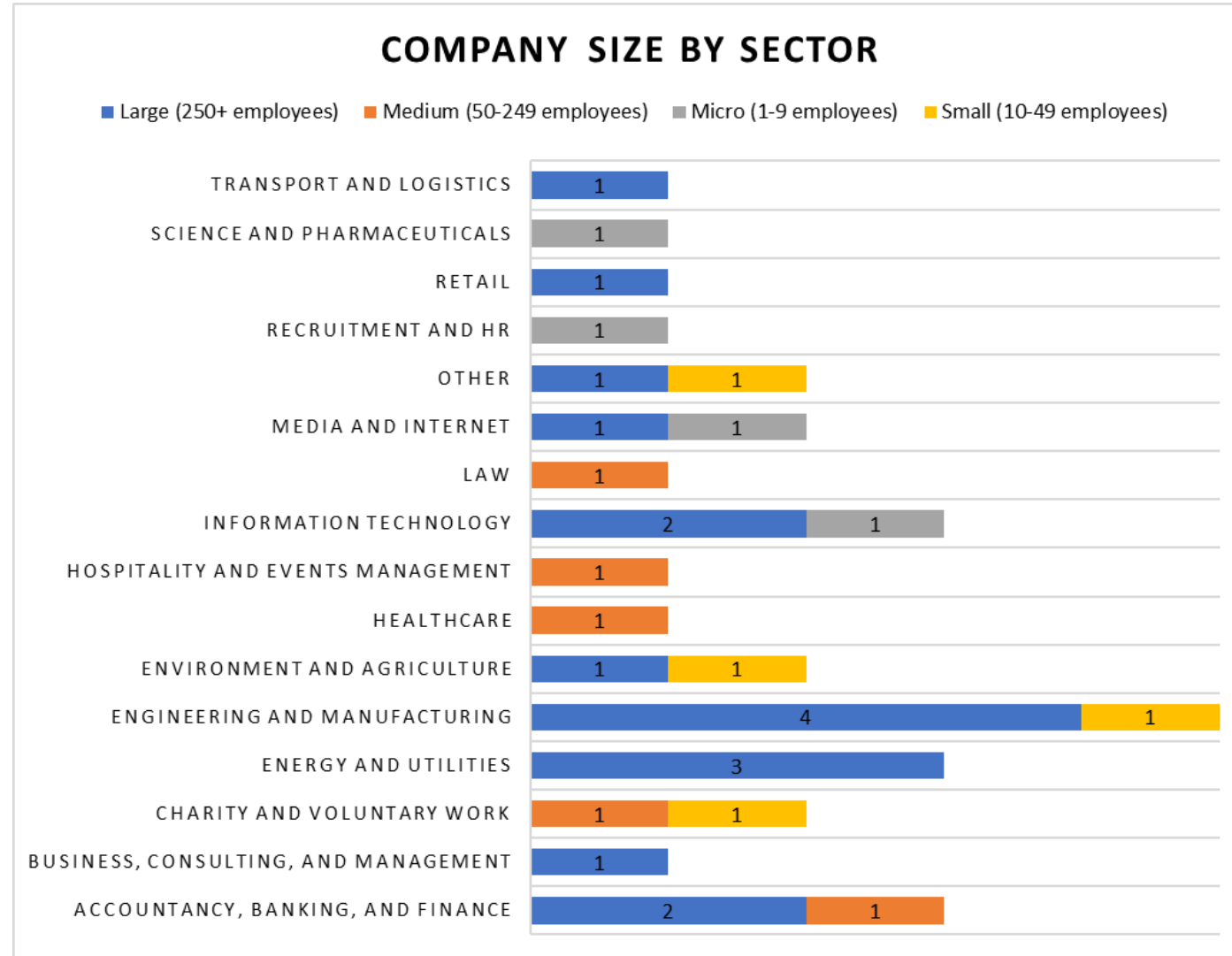


77% felt that their HEI had given them the opportunity to gain a broad range of skills which allowed them to feel prepared for the workplace.

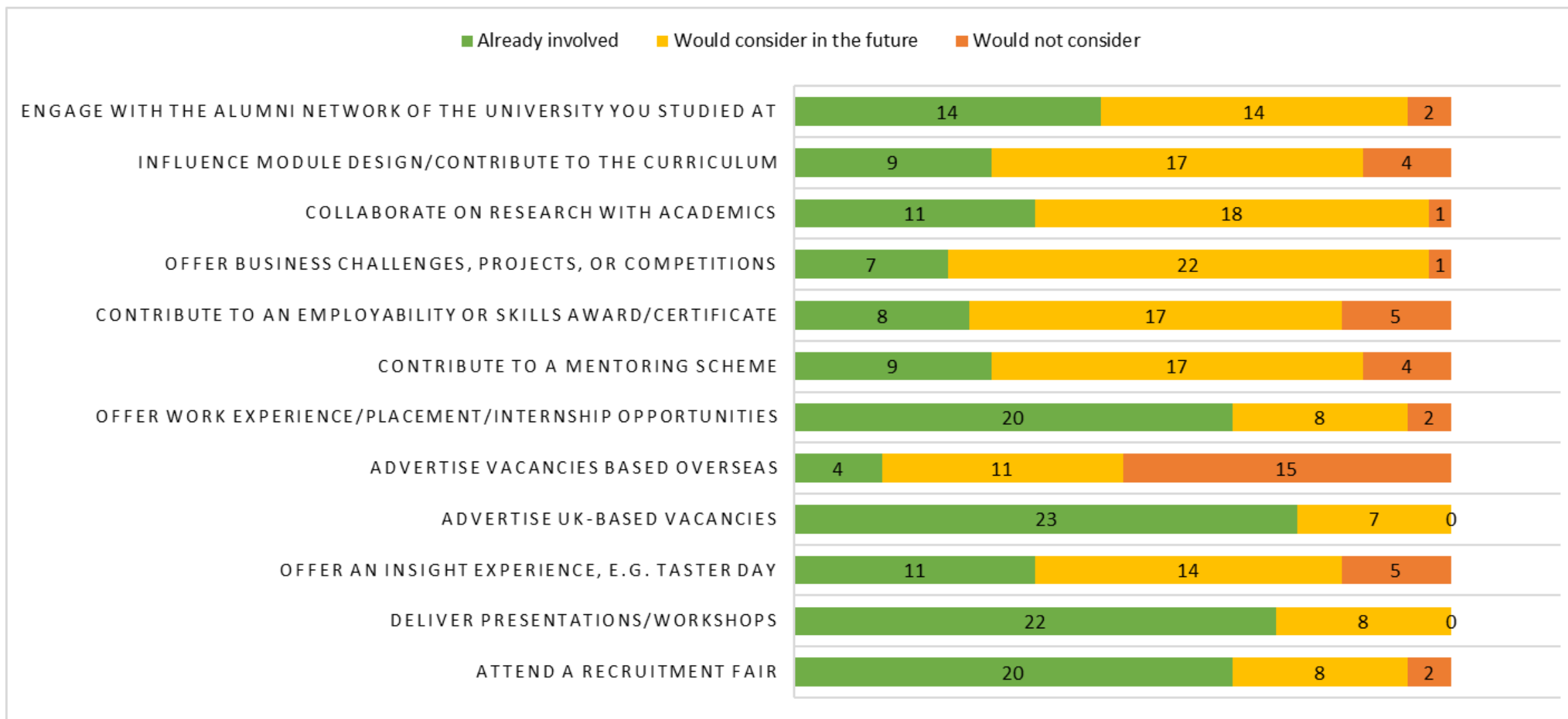
Employers: Characteristics

30 respondents:

- 17 Large employers, 13 SMEs
- 14 recruit 1-9 graduates per year (four recruit none)
 - Six recruit 50+ graduates per year (all Large)
 - Three recruit 25 – 49 (all Large)
 - Three recruit 10 – 24 (all Large)



Employers: Engagement at Scottish HEIs



Graduates: Key themes – what HEIs do well

Prepared me for the workplace (43)

incl. degree as a basic requirement, gaining industry-relevant knowledge and access to practical examples

Allowed me to develop relevant skills (36)

incl. “broad range of skills”, transferable and meta skills

Equipped me with academic knowledge (13)

incl. developing research skills, preparation for further study

Gave me access to HEI specific opportunities (8)

incl. appreciation of unique access to specialist staff, resources, facilities, on-campus services, and opportunities

Graduates: Quotes on good practice at Scottish HEIs

Graduates said:

“Whilst theory was important, the emphasis was on real world application which I continue to use to this day in my career”
(Computer Science, 2017)

“We were encouraged to get as much industry experience as we could and our lecturers would put us in touch with their industry contacts. We were put in group classes for some modules with students studying different degrees”
(Business, 2015)

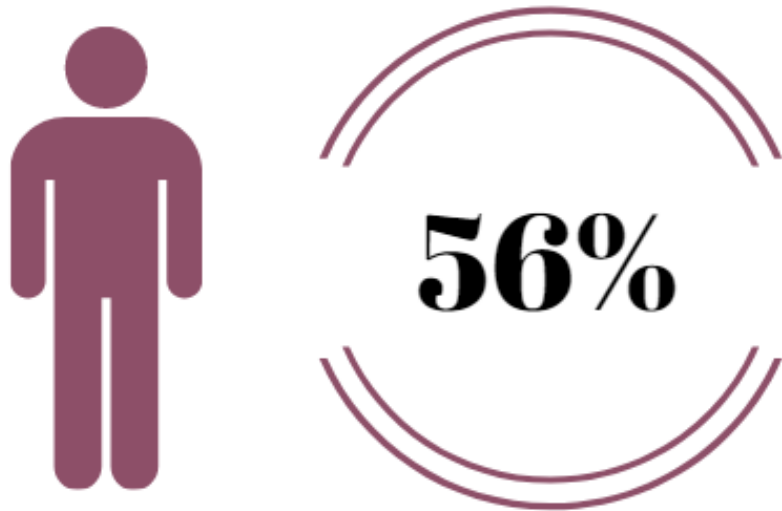
“Lecturers actively working in their respective fields, both in academia and industry, meant the module content was generally on the cutting edge and relevant to the modern world and industry”
(Engineering, 2018)

Employers: Key themes – what HEIs do well

- **Delivering a high standard** of education/knowledge/learning skills
- Shaping graduates who are **generally well prepared for the workplace**
- Preparing graduates **to use soft skills**
- Teaching basic **commercial understanding**
- **Careers Services experiencing success** in preparing graduates for the recruitment process, one commenting “I think a lot of the classes the careers service run help massively with interview skills/CV writing”

22/30 employers agreed that graduates from Scottish HEIs are adequately prepared for their workplace.

Graduates: Key figures



... felt there were no barriers to themselves or others in relation to accessing skills development opportunities.

Of those who expressed concern about some form of barrier:

- **13%** felt the **cost/timing** of skills development activities affected access
- **9%** were affected by the **necessity to work** to support their studies

81% felt that being at **university** had **enabled them to develop appropriate digital skills in some way.**

66% feel that they are well **equipped to live and work in a global society as a direct result of attending university.**

Employers: Key figures

All employer respondents felt that **Scottish HEIs adequately prepare graduates for the workplace.**

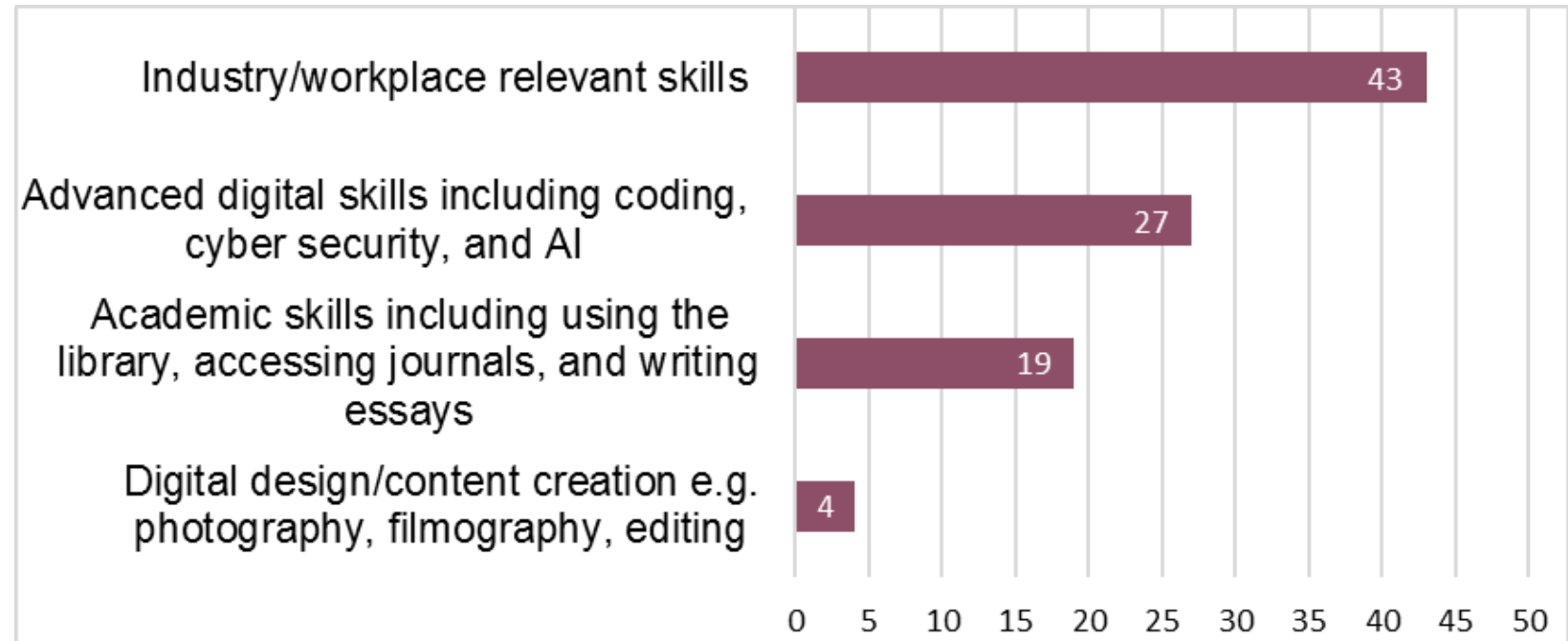
24/30 rated graduate preparedness as Excellent or Good.

- **25 employers** agreed that having a degree was important
- **Six companies exclusively recruit graduates** (for the specialist skills graduates bring to the role – specifically scientists, managers, consultants, and software developers)
- **19** recognise a degree as Very Important or Important

Graduates: Digital

125 graduate responses were categorised as **the ability to successfully use/interact with the digital world (e.g. computers, internet) including social media**

Additionally:



- Under **Advanced** graduates articulated these specifically as advanced skills, however there is correlation with the industry/workplace relevant category)

Employers: Digital

Employers largely agreed that Scottish HEIs offer a range of support to facilitate students' acquisition of appropriate digital skills, including:

- Equipping students with digital work-ready skills
- Preparing students to find, analyse, and use credible digital data sources
- Equipping students with skills to collaborate with others in a digital learning environment

Graduates: Accessing opportunities



Graduates primarily chose to access skills development opportunities for the following reasons:

- **Value/usefulness** to employability (68)
- **Enjoyment/interest** (30)
- **To meet new people** (17)
- **Course requirement** (8)
- **Ease of availability** (8)
- **Could fit** these activities in (7)
- **To help others/contribute** to the community (7)

Of the 102 students who chose not to access opportunities, 73 offered insights into the access challenges they faced: Access, e.g. distance, cost, lack of relevant opportunities (20) and other commitments, e.g. family, work (14) ranked highest followed by actively choosing not to get involved (12)

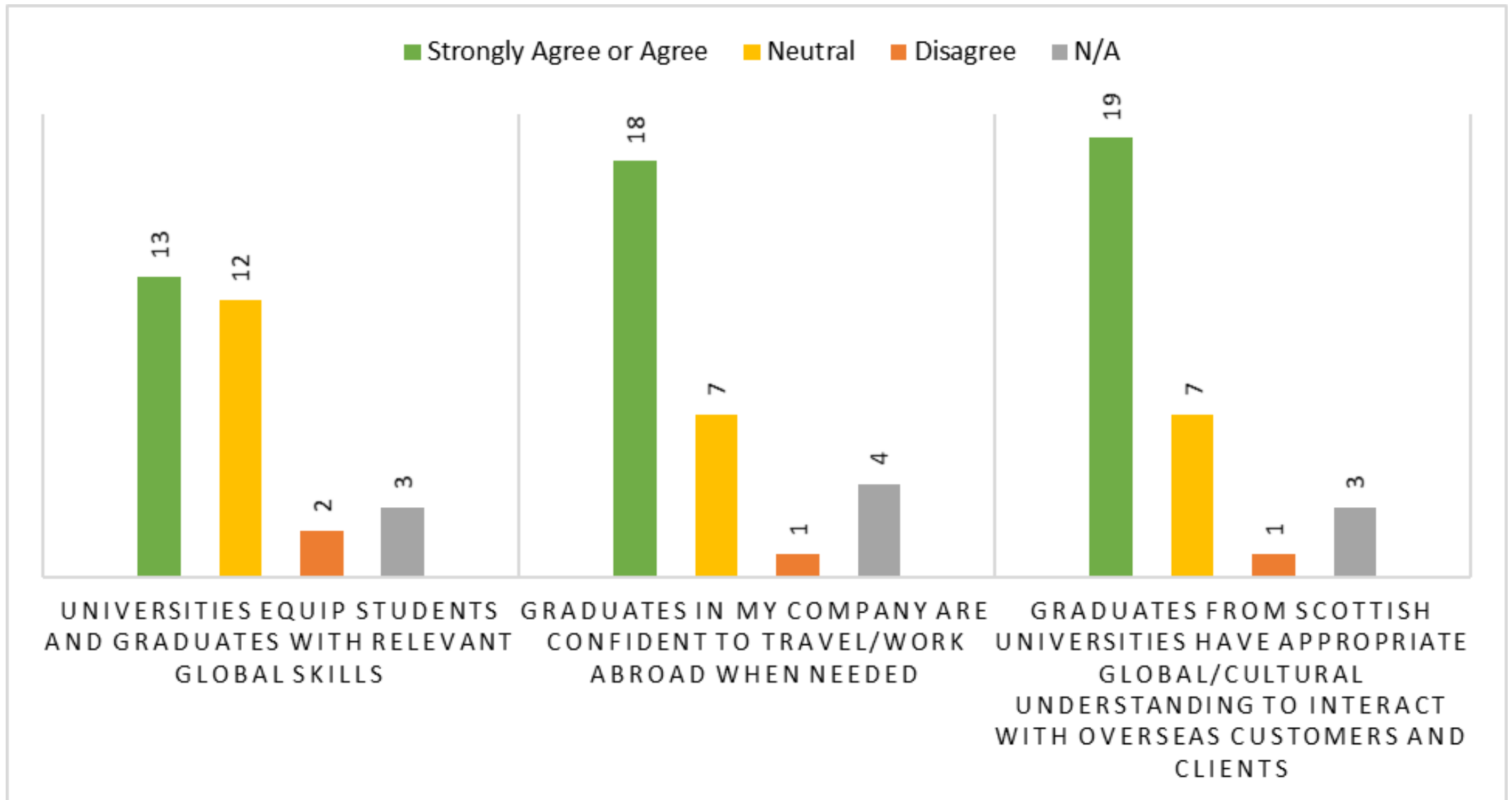
Graduates: Global skills

66% feel that they are well equipped to live and work in a global society as a direct result of attending university. Not all graduates attributed their preparedness to their time at university:

- **82%** are confident to travel and/or work abroad
- **90%** have appropriate global/cultural understanding to interact with individuals from other countries

The two main reasons for selecting 'no' or 'unsure' are that respondents already had these skills before university, e.g. from previous work or study, or that at the time of completing the survey they had not had the opportunity to test these skills so felt unable to comment.

Employers: Global skills

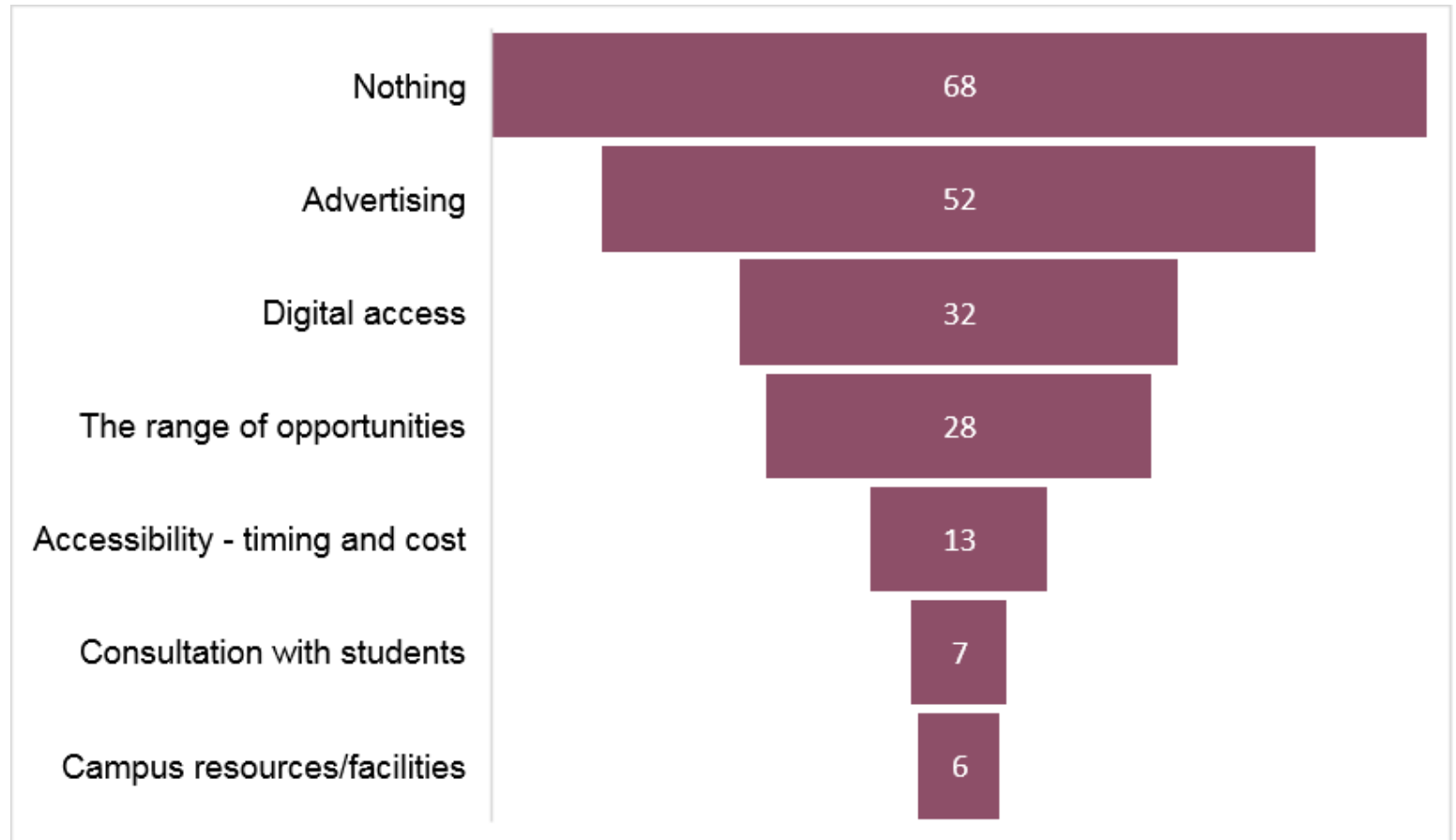




Recommendations

Graduates: Areas for improvement

Graduates were asked what their university could do to make development opportunities easier to access. Of those who gave suggestions, responses included improving:



Graduates: Improvements to digital development opportunities



Graduates were less satisfied with provision of:

- Opportunities to be recognised for their digital skills (e.g. a certificate or award)
- Opportunities to innovate using digital skills
- Teaching on appropriate/professional use of digital communication

Employers: Recommendations

Employers were asked what kinds of employer engagement and/or skills development opportunities for students they would like to see included or improved in Scottish HEIs. Suggestions included:

- More **practical, work-based opportunities** to improve commercial understanding **(9)**
- A more collaborative approach and **closer links with industry (5)**
- Increased **networking** opportunities **(4)**
- **Promotion** of specific types of opportunity, e.g. SMEs, volunteering **(4)**
- Improved **employability**/soft skills learning **(3)**
- Improved **attendance** at events on campus **(1)**

Employers: Skills graduates lack

16 employers identified skills that graduates frequently lack, including:

- “Employability skills”
- “Practical experience to blend with their theoretical learning”
- Skills related to the recruitment process, i.e. “detailed applications without errors” and “confidence” at interview

For engineering and IT companies, these included subject specific knowledge and skills related to processes/systems and the challenges of recruiting graduates with the correct technical skills for these ever changing industries was referenced.

Employers: Skills graduates lack continued

Commercial understanding/research

- “Commercial awareness; 'real world' savvy”
- "Company research. Perhaps more recognition of how important their extra-curricular interests and responsibilities are for an employer”

Business acumen

- "Exercising professional judgement - the ability to analyse information and justify your approach with clarity and confidence”
- “Making an impact - to make a positive lasting impression with colleagues and clients, you must be able to communicate passionately and professionally [...] able to convey your point in an influential way”
- “Adaptability and managing up”
- “Basic project management and business case construction”

Employers: Skills graduates lack continued



Soft skills

- “General soft skills, verbal communication skills including telephone skills”
- “Analytical skills and effective communication”
- “Capturing data and summarising concise reports”
- “Critical thinking, problem solving, and analytical skills. Communication skills can be varied particularly the quality of written communication.”

Employers: Priority skills for future graduate recruitment

27/30 identified specific skills and attributes:

analytical skills/critical thinking; teamwork; problem solving; communication; customer care; management/leadership; managing up; innovation; risk management; digital (data, analytics, coding, media) and emotional intelligence.

Additionally, respondents selected wider qualities and behaviours including professionalism, work ethic, career motivation, 'general work skills', and specialist skills relevant to their sector, which they noted would be taught on the job.