

Grad employers value work experience over degree

By [Anna Coughlan](#), News Editor (2016/17)

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Recent research has shown that York is in the top four cities in the UK for graduates to begin their career in.

Based on average salary, cost of living and average rental prices in 30 UK cities, the city sits behind Belfast, Leeds and Cardiff with an average salary of £31 768 and average rent of £748.

The research was conducted by graduate recruitment specialists Pareto, the UK's leading sales recruitment and training specialists.

Head of Candidate Experience Suzie Berry said "The affordability of the capital cities of Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh shows that graduates needn't head to London in search of graduate employment.

"Despite the lures of the south east, the prospect of more affordable living and cheaper rent can outweigh a higher wage packet."

Average salaries have proven to be high in York when compared to the cost of living and rental prices. The cost of living overall therefore is considerably cheaper for a graduate to stay in York than it is to move to live in the likes of London.

London is unsurprisingly the most expensive city to live in as a graduate. Although the average salary nears £50 000, rent on an average two bed flat is triple the amount compared to York, and even double that of both Brighton and Oxford which are the second and third most expensive areas in which to live.

In the top ten most affordable cities, Milton Keynes at number eight was the only south eastern location, the rest included the Scottish capital Edinburgh and other northern cities such as Liverpool.

Berry commented that "London will always draw graduates due to its size and wealth of opportunity - it is the basis for many employers and average and starting salaries are more attractive. But many companies have headquarters and offices throughout the UK, where getting on the career ladder can be easier as well as more affordable, so it pays for graduates to keep their options open."

Pareto's research also showed that 'getting on the career ladder' is becoming increasingly dependent on work experience.

Even as a graduate, relevant work experience is beginning to overtake the level of degree, course or institution in importance.

In fact, 77 per cent of graduate recruiters considered work experience to be one of the most important factors on a graduate CV.

A meagre two in five took the level of the degree into account and only 7 per cent took the standard of the university into consideration.

As a result, 47 per cent of recruiters admitted to skipping straight to the work experience section of a student application.

In spite of this, Berry was keen to highlight that “While the emphasis placed on work experience clearly outweighs that of any other aspect of a graduate job application, the opportunity to develop skills that translate to the workplace through education, training and other extra-curricular endeavours should not be dismissed.”

Being able to show a demonstrable skill set was the only attribute more sought after than work experience. This refers to a candidate’s ability to show evidence of communication, problem solving and leadership. As such recruiters were happy to compromise on examples of the development of these skill sets though travelling, sports clubs and societies. However with only 27 per cent of individual’s hiring looking at the education section of an application first, the superiority of work experience cannot be ignored.

Research conducted by High Fliers in December 2015 investigated the details of graduate vacancies, starting salaries and undergraduate work experience programmes with the country’s 100 leading employers. It found that the increase in graduate recruitment was smaller than expected despite the general trend of an increase in vacancies for university leavers since 2012.

The same was reported for paid internships, holiday work experience and course placements in 2016. Between the 100 top employers of graduates, 14 000 work experience places were offered amounting to only one place for every 30 students in the UK.

Berry acknowledged that “when work placements and opportunities are at such a premium, there has to be an allowance that some candidates have lesser access to the experience employers are seeking”.



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