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Employment outcomes for Australian-educated graduates in China

China is the largest source country of international students for Australia. In 2011, there were almost 160,000 enrolments by students from China, almost 30% of all international student enrolments in that year. In 2012, AEI China undertook a survey of 495 Australian-educated graduates, who were living in China to investigate their employment outcomes after graduation. Most respondents (87%) reported having an Australian higher education qualification. This research also included a survey of 72 local employers, known to employ internationally-educated graduates, to investigate their perceptions of Australian-educated graduates. The employers surveyed were from a range of industries, employing graduates in a variety of roles, the most common role (46%) being sales and marketing.

Australian-educated graduates in China	
Status	Proportion (n=497)
Working (or accepted job offer)	82%
Studying and not working	4%
Not working but seeking employment	12%
Not working or studying	2%

At the time of the survey it was found that 82% of the Australian-educated graduates surveyed were working and 12% were unemployed and actively-seeking employment. This compares well to a reported unemployment rate of 22% for all graduates in China in 2011¹. Of those graduates who were working at the time of the survey, the majority (88%) indicated they were working in a job related to the major field of education of their highest Australian qualification. The top 3 reasons indicated by respondents who were not working in a job related to their field of study were:

- chose not to work in that field;
- lack of sufficient work experience in the field; or
- lack of jobs in the field.

Satisfaction with employment outcomes

The majority of employed Australian-educated graduates (77%) were satisfied with their job. Of those working, 69 per cent of respondents said that their position met the expectations that they had upon graduating. Most of the graduate respondents (77%) perceived that employers in China valued an Australian qualification. More than half of the graduates (62%) reported that skills they had developed during their course of study had helped them to get a job related to their field of study and 69% reported that work experience in Australia had helped them.

Networking

Many of the respondents (57%) kept in contact with Australian students they had studied with at least once a year, 36% kept in contact with other Australians in the wider community and 38% kept in contact with other international students they had studied with at least once a year.

Employer perspectives on Australian-educated graduates

Chinese employer respondents indicated that the main reasons they would choose an Australian-educated graduate over a locally-educated graduate were an international perspective (82%) and an ability to communicate with overseas clients (55%). The most common reason for employers preferring a locally-educated graduate was that internationally-educated graduates sometimes had unrealistic salary expectations. Overall, 93 per cent of Chinese employer respondents would recommend recruiting Australian-educated graduates. Their satisfaction with various aspects of Australian-educated graduates are shown in the table below.

All but one of the Chinese employers surveyed were satisfied with the Australian-educated graduates they had employed. The one employer not satisfied indicated it was because Australian-educated graduates moved on too quickly. When asked for their perceptions of an Australian education, 67% of employer respondents indicated that Australia should place more emphasis on providing practical work experience and 69% supported linking education with business to provide internships, apprenticeships or traineeships for students.

Employers' satisfaction with Australian-educated graduates' skills	
Skill type	Employer satisfaction (n=72)
English language competency	89%
Local language competency	80%
Effective oral and written communication skills	86%
Ability to work independently	82%
Ability to work as part of a team	85%
Relevant work experience	57%
An international perspective	67%

The majority of Chinese employer respondents (87%) were facing or expecting to face skill shortages in the near future. Of those, 43 per cent anticipated a skill shortage in commerce, finances and professional services and 24 per cent anticipated a skill shortage in the engineering and science areas. Many (68%) of the Chinese employer respondents expected to see an increase in the number of international graduate employment opportunities in their organisation in the future.

¹ <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20121025111620913>