

# **The Labour Market Experience of Recent UWI First-degree Graduates in Caribbean Economies**

**An Analysis of Empirical Data from Two Graduate Tracer Surveys Conducted in  
2011 and 2016**

**FEBRUARY 5, 2018**  
**UNIVERSITY OFFICE OF PLANNING**

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper analyses the experience of UWI first-degree graduates in the labour market across the region. The tracer survey was done on two cohorts, 2009 and 2014 graduates. The surveys were conducted in early 2011 and 2016, respectively.

Among the insights the tracer survey seeks to provide are: employment rates of UWI first-degree graduates, the incidence of underemployment, employment by sector, median Income levels (nominal and real), gender differentials in graduate income and, the main areas of employment. In addition, feedback is sought from graduates on how the seven key attributes of a UWI graduate have prepared them for the labour market. The results from the survey point to some interesting observations.

### The Aggregate Level – All UWI Graduates

- **Majority of UWI graduates found employment one year after graduation** - Overall employment rates for UWI graduates for 2011 and 2016 reveal that the majority of graduates, just over 80%, found employment at least one year after graduation. There was a marginal decline in employment rates over the period moving from 83.5% in 2011 to 80.5% in 2016.
- **Employment rates varied across Faculty** - At the faculty level there were some notable variations in employment rates. In 2016 there were above average rates (over 80.5%) for Education (94.9%), Medical Sciences (83.6), Engineering (82.7%) and Social Sciences (80.5%) while below average employment rates were observed for Food and Agriculture (70%), Science and Technology (73.8%) and Humanities (80.2%).
- **Notable levels of underemployment were observed** - 19.1% of employed graduates in 2016 were underemployed i.e. in low-level jobs that require a minimum of secondary level education. The corresponding figure for 2011 was 14.7%. This level of under-employment revealed a "waste" of investment in higher education skills
- **Underemployment was concentrated in specific Faculties** - Notable levels of underemployment (level 2 jobs) were observed for graduates from Social Sciences (27.2% in 2011 and 28.3% in 2016), Humanities (17.7% in 2011 and 2016), Sciences and Technology (15.9% in 2016), Food and Agriculture (29% in 2011).

### Results disaggregated by Country/Country Grouping

- **Employment rates varied across the region** - The Employment rate in the OECS was higher than the MDC's with 88.1% in 2016. The employment rates for the corresponding period were 82.2% for Barbados, 81.6% for Trinidad and Tobago and 78.9% for Jamaica.
- **Underemployment rates varied across the region** - The Barbadian economy showed a high prevalence of underemployment with 27.3% of employed graduates being in unskilled jobs in 2016, followed by Jamaica (19.8%), Trinidad and Tobago (15.9%) and OECS (11.9%).

**The absorption of UWI graduates in private sector of the region is still low despite showing improvement over the period** – For Jamaica, graduates employed in the private sector increased from 37.5% in 2011 to 43.7% in 2016, for Trinidad and Tobago from 27.3% to 29.7%, for Barbados from 49.1% to 55.9% and for the OECS from 25.6% to 33.6%

- **Heavy reliance on Public Sector employing graduates in Trinidad and Tobago** - In 2016, 63.4% of graduates were employed in the Public Sector
- **Real incomes of Graduates declined over the observed period** – Over the observed period the real median income of graduates declined in Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica and Barbados by 33.2%, 13.4% and 15.3%, respectively.
- **Major areas of employment** - In terms of area of economic activity, Education employed more graduates than any other area in all countries of the region. These are graduates mainly in the teaching profession. Other major areas of employment were Health & Social Services and Finance.
- **Gender inequality of incomes was observed** - In 2016, nominal median salaries were 32% higher for males in Trinidad and Tobago, 9% higher in Jamaica and 10.9% higher in Barbados. In the OECS, no differences were observed.
- **Low levels of self-employment** - Very small number of graduates were self-employed – less than 3 percent of graduates were in self-employment suggesting a lack of entrepreneurial initiative.

*Graduates' Perception of How UWI Prepared Them for the Job market.*

- **Development of key attributes needs attention** - In terms of development of key attributes, low ratings indicating these are problematic areas that needs to be addressed were given to:
  - 'Innovative and Entrepreneurial Skills' with 23.9% saying strong/very strong and a score of 2.43;
  - 'Information Technology skills' with 42% saying strong/very strong and a score of 3.27 and;
  - 'Globally aware and well-rounded in regional identity' with 43.7% saying strong/very strong and a score of 3.29.

The paper ends with some recommendations on how the UWI can make further contribution to revitalization of Caribbean development through the creation of more advanced human capital.