

# POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY 2013 - SUMMARY

## 1. Introduction

The UWI offers a variety of postgraduate programmes that lead to Graduate Diplomas, Masters and Doctoral Degrees. Graduate studies can be undertaken either in the form of programmes emphasising taught courses geared towards further training in a chosen career path or exposure to a chosen subject (M.A./M.Sc.), or research orientated programmes (M.Phil/Ph.D), which involves the creation of new knowledge.

The Postgraduate Student Experience Survey (PG-SES) collects feedback from both taught and research postgraduates on their academic and non-academic experiences aimed at influencing or informing decisions about the improvement of the postgraduate programme.

**The 2013 round of the PG-SES was conducted across the four (4) campuses of the University of the West Indies (UWI).**

## 2. Purpose of the brief

This brief provides selected data for taught and research postgraduates focussing on academic experiences. As such, the teaching and learning experiences, research experiences, motivations and career plans of postgraduates, and professional development opportunities are considered.

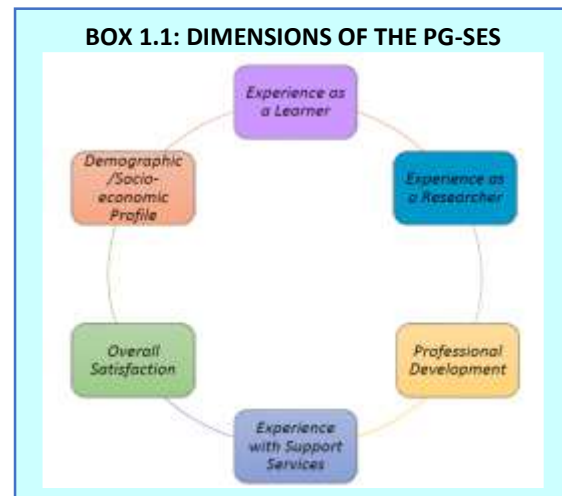
## 3. Survey Objectives

The objectives of the survey were to:

- identify key educational products and services influencing student satisfaction/dissatisfaction; and
- provide recommendations that could inform actions, policies and procedures to improve levels of postgraduate student satisfaction.

## 4. Questionnaire design

Respondents were asked to rate positive specific statements on academic and non-academic experiences using a 5-point Likert scale in six (6) dimensions (see Box 1.1).



## 5. Methodology

The PG-SES was administered via the online survey tool, *Survey Monkey*. For the 2013 survey, a stratified sample was used whereby the population surveyed was stratified by Campus, Faculty and programme type (taught/research). Of the population surveyed 514 postgraduates returned completed questionnaires.

***Given the small number of responses, the findings may be biased and thus, not representative of the views of all postgraduate students and as such, caution should be exercised when reviewing the results. The results should be applied to those who responded, not all participants.***

Despite the limitations and caveats, it is important to recognise survey analysis generally provide extensive information that is useful as an indicator of opinions/experiences.

For this paper, the following ratings were used:

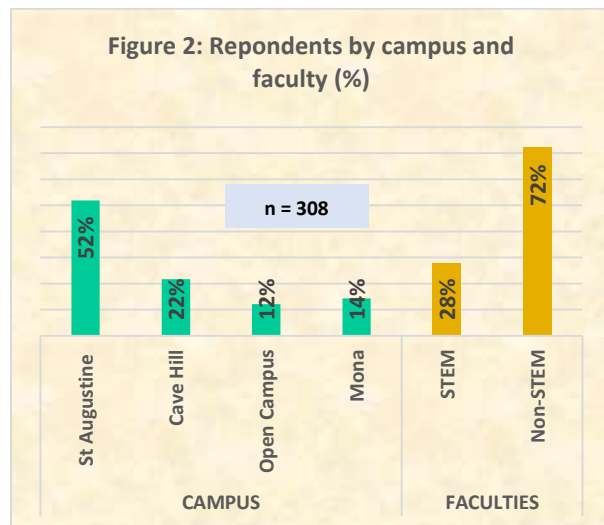
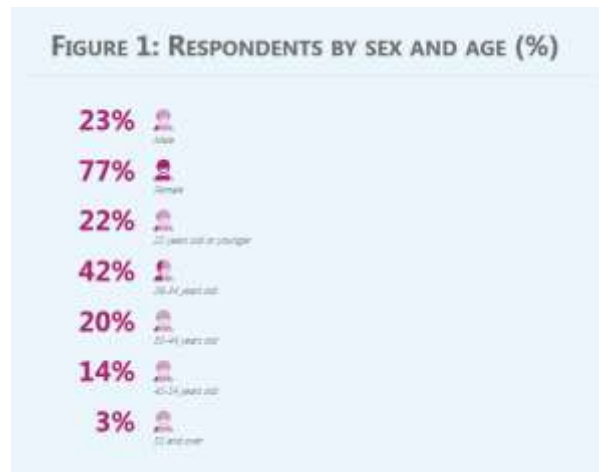
- 70% and over – *Above Average*
- 41%-69% - *Average*
- 0-40% - *Below Average*

## Journey of taught postgraduates

### Demographic Profile

Females were the majority as were persons aged 26 to 34 years among taught respondents (see Figure 1).

The majority of taught postgraduates surveyed were located at the St Augustine campus and the majority were registered in the non-STEM Faculties (see Figure 2).

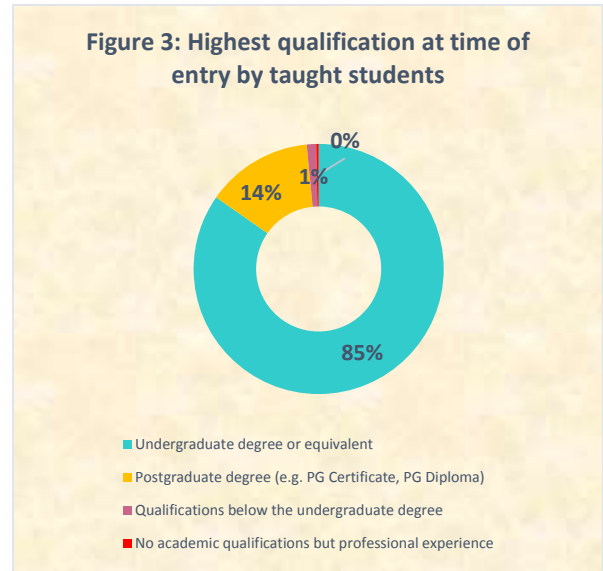


Note: Non-STEM (Humanities and Education, Law, and Social Sciences), STEM (Engineering, Science and Technology, Medical Sciences and Agriculture and Food Production).

When asked 'are you employed', 74% said they were and 52% worked between 31 and 40 hours, while 32% worked 40 hours or more a week. About 15% worked 30 hours or less per week

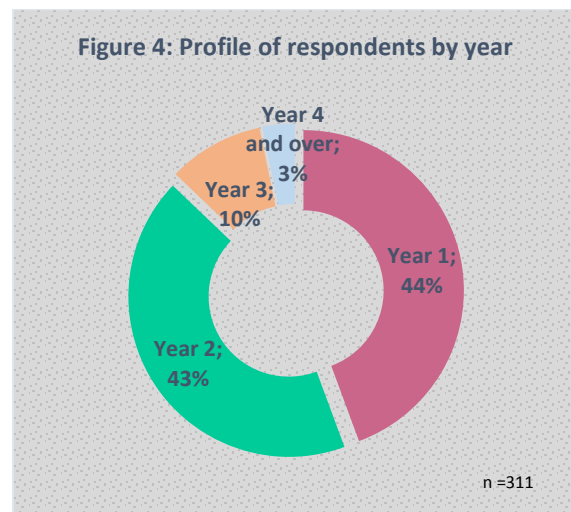
### Results – the highest qualification of taught postgraduates

Most postgraduates (85%) indicated they held a baccalaureate degree or equivalent, while 14% had a postgraduate certificate or diploma (see Figure 3).



### Results – year of study

Respondents were largely found to be in the Year 1 and Year 2 of their programme of study. Figure 4 shows that the number of postgraduate students enrolled in the programmes declined significantly by Year 3. Masters programmes are generally one year full-time and two years part-time.



### Results- motivations

Motivations to enrol in a postgraduate programme were dominated by a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic factors namely, employment-related reasons. Although improvement in knowledge was seen as the essential motivating factor to pursue postgraduate studies, “motivations reflect the nature of qualification, current employment and career goals” (HEA PTES 2013.16). Respondents were likely to enrol in postgraduates programmes to advance their knowledge, and as a preparation for a professional career, but least likely to pursue studies to change career path (see Figure 5).

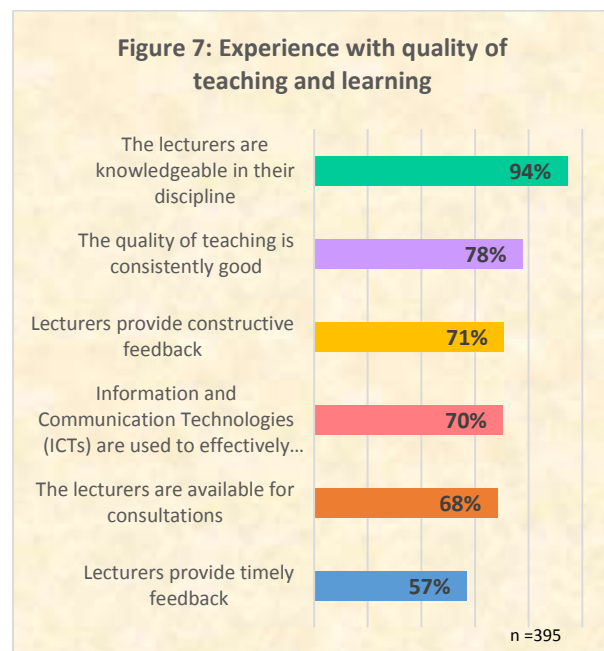
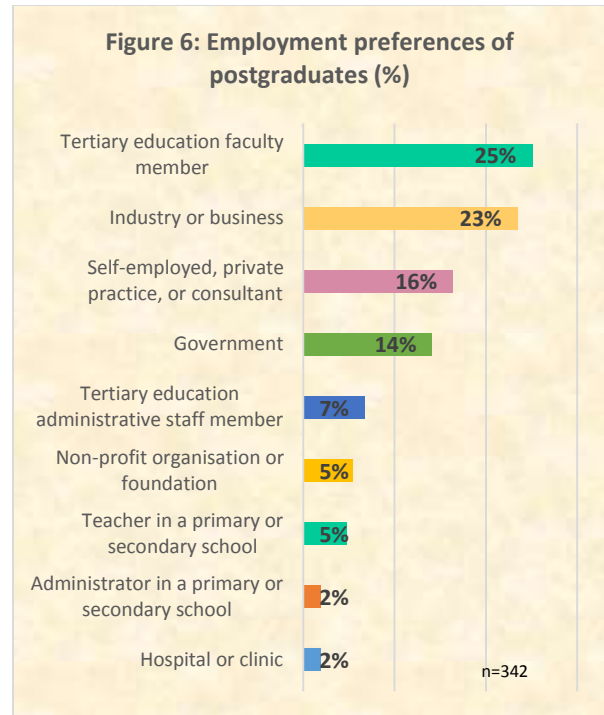


### Results- career plans

A quarter of the respondents indicated a preference for being a member of faculty at a tertiary education institution which closely followed by interest in working in industry or business (see Figure 6).

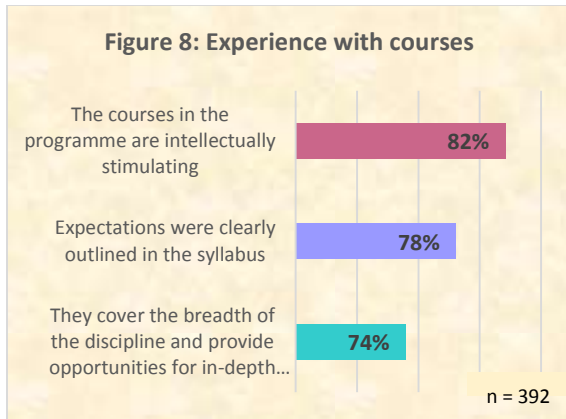
### Results- quality of teaching

Respondents generally scored the quality of the teaching and learning environment as *above average-average*, though there is concern with lecturers providing timely feedback (see Figure 7).



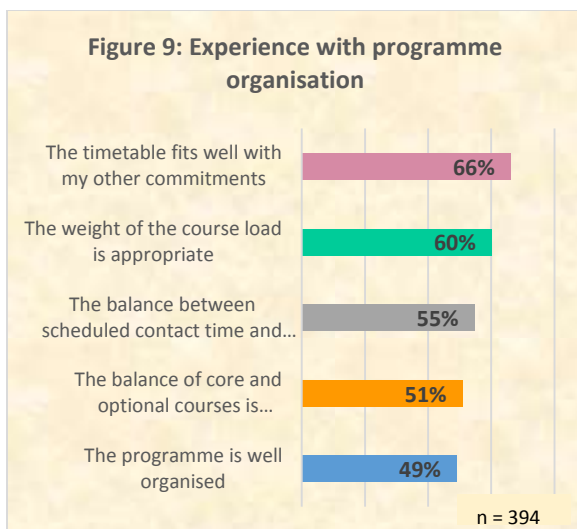
### Results- course quality

Generally, respondents rated their course experience as *above average* (see Figure 8).



### Results – programme organisation

Programme organisation was generally assessed as *average* by respondents. The item the timetable fitted well with their other commitments was rated as *above average* (see Figure 9).



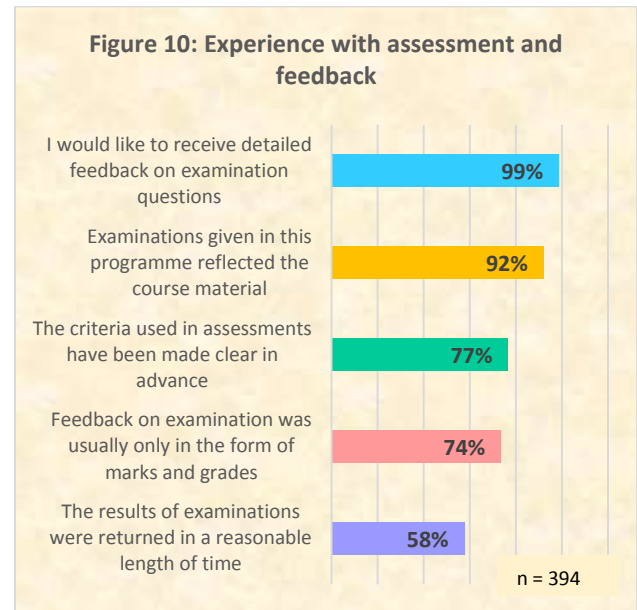
### Results – assessment and feedback

Results for most items in this dimension was *above average*, although the timely return of examinations was a concern and rated as *average* (see Figure 10).

### Results- Supervision

The majority of respondents who had reached the point of preparing research papers/projects were inclined towards agreeing that the supervision dimension was *above average-average*.

Approximately 57% of respondents indicated they met with their supervisors one-to-four times a month, 14% more than four times per month and 30% once or less. Overall, 57% of respondents said they were very satisfied/satisfied with the guidance received from supervisors (see Table 1).



**Table 1: Experience with supervision**

My supervisor/s has/have the skills and subject knowledge to adequately guide my research	83%
My supervisor/s provide (s) constructive feedback on my progress	63%
My supervisor/s meet(s) with me on a regular basis	44%

### Results- professional development

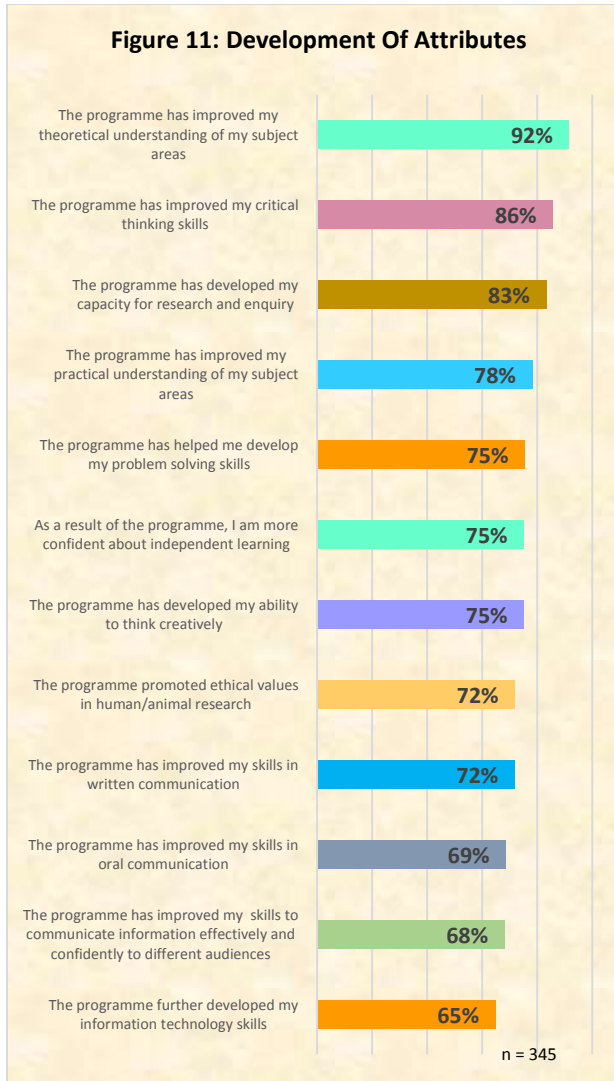
An estimated 69% of taught respondents indicated that their programme improved their future employment prospects and 67% felt better prepared for the future. A further 71% reported that they are encouraged to reflect on professional development needs.

Conversely, between 53% and 72% definitely/mostly disagreed that their programme provided them with professional opportunities such as encouragement to publish

their work, writing grant proposals or receiving career advice.

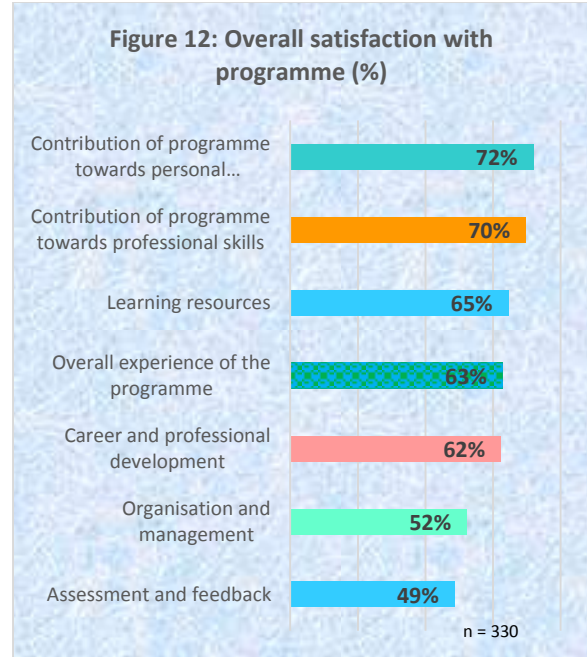
### Results- Attributes

With the exception of information technology skills and communication skills which was rated as *average*, respondents generally assessed the development of the key graduate attributes as *above average* (see Figure 11).



### Results- Overall Satisfaction

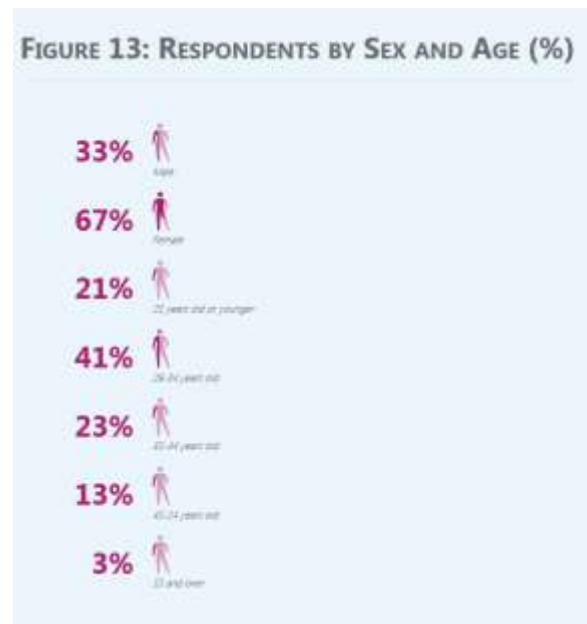
Postgraduates were asked about their overall experience of the taught programme. For the eight aspects identified in the Figure 12, they rated them as *above average-average*.



## Journey of research postgraduates

### Demographic Profile

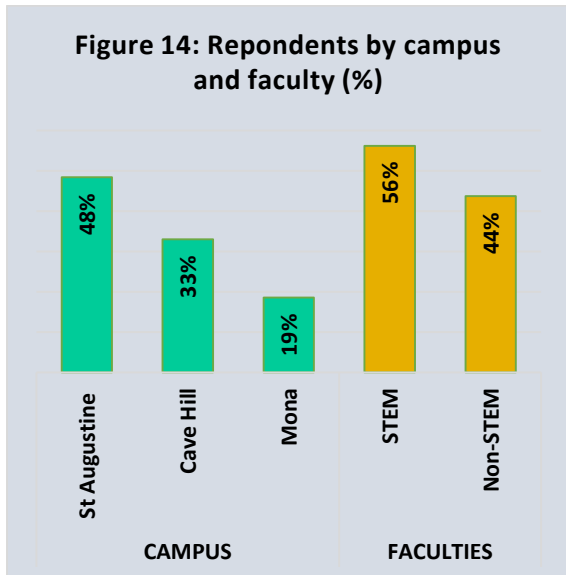
Females were the majority as were those 26 to 34 years among research postgraduates (see Figure 13).



The majority of research postgraduates surveyed were located at the St Augustine campus and the



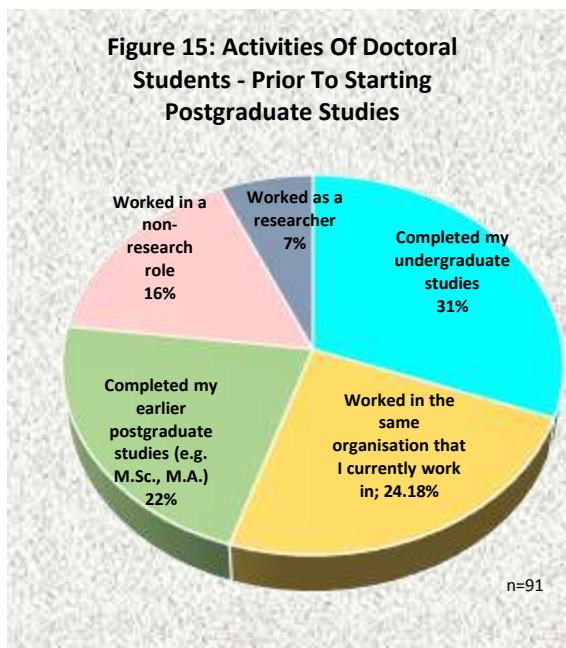
majority were registered in the STEM Faculties (see Figure 14).



Note: Non-STEM (Humanities and Education, Law, and Social Sciences), STEM (Engineering, Science and Technology, Medical Sciences and Agriculture and Food Production).

#### Results- activity pre-postgraduate studies

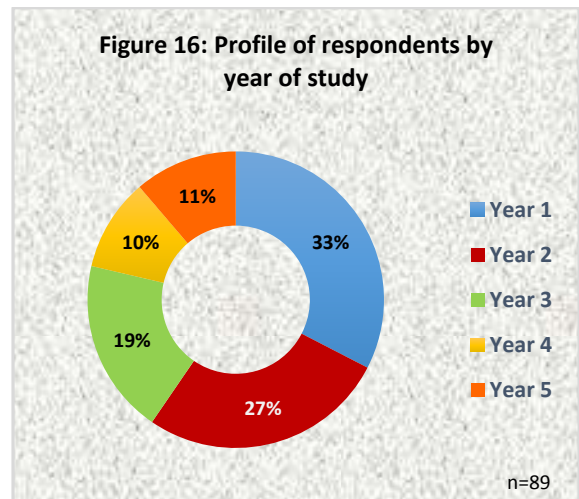
The majority of postgraduates (53%) indicated they completed some type of prior study, while 24% worked in the same organisation in which they are currently employed and 16% worked in a non –research role (see Figure 15).



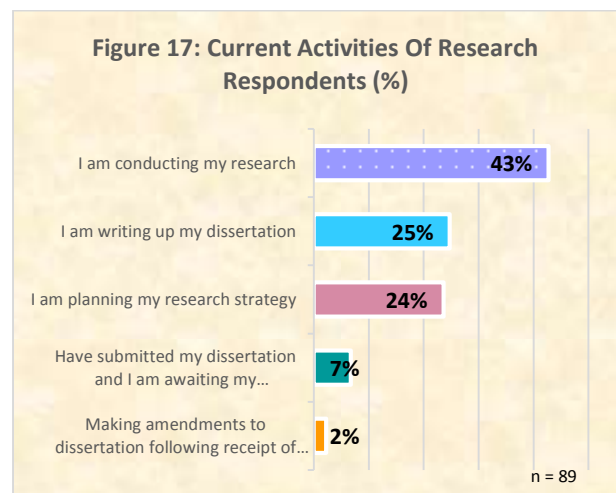
Of those responding to the question ‘are you employed’, 59% said they were employed. An estimated 45% worked 20 hours or less per week while 41% worked between 21 to 40 hours. A further 14% worked 40 or more hours a week.

#### Results – year of study and current activity

Postgraduates were largely found to be in the Year 1 and Year 2 of their programme while a small percentage were registered in Year 4 and Year 5 (see Figure 16).

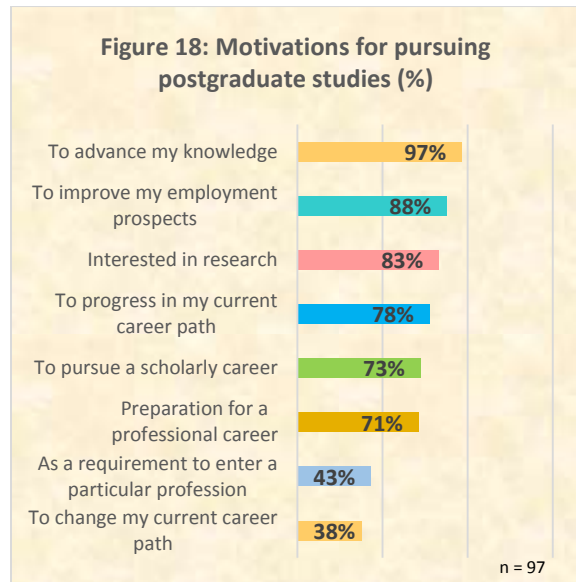


Respondents were asked to identify their current activity at the time of the survey. Less than 25% were at the planning stage or writing-up their thesis, while 43% were conducting research see Figure 17).



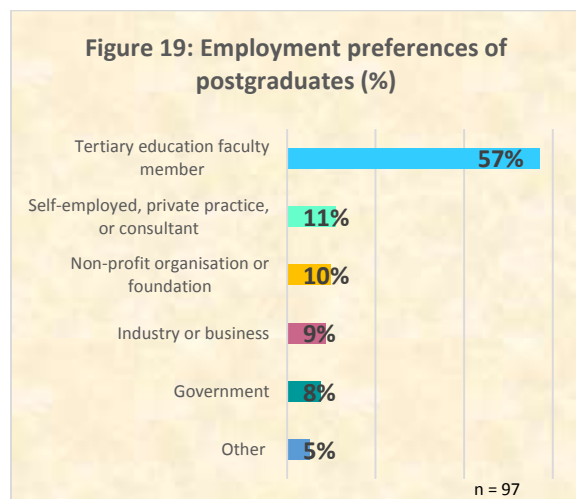
### Results- motivations

Motivations to enrol in a postgraduate programme were dominated by a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Respondents were likely to enrol in postgraduates programmes to advance their knowledge, to improve their employment prospects and because of their interest in research, but least likely to pursue studies to change career path (see Figure 18).



### Results- career plans

An estimated 57% favoured employment as a tertiary education faculty member and just over 21% of research postgraduates saw themselves as either self-employed or working in the non-profit sector (see Figure 18).



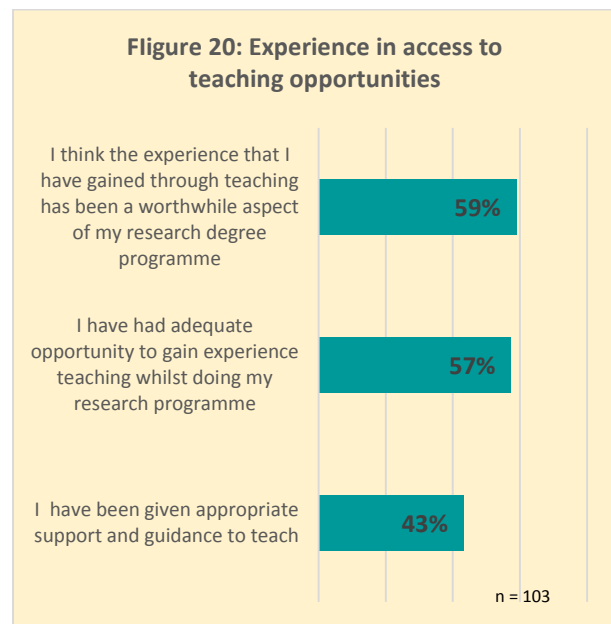
### Results- professional development

An estimated 60% of research respondents indicated that their programme improved their future employment prospects and 55% felt better prepared for the future. A further 60% reported that they are encouraged to reflect on professional development needs.

When the findings of the survey are reviewed for the extent of professional opportunities received, 68% of respondents reported that they were encouraged to publish their work. Between 56% and 62% of respondents reported that advice were not provided on writing grant proposals, career options within academic, career options outside of academia or information on post-doctoral fellowships.

### Results – teaching opportunities

Research postgraduates have tutorial and/or laboratory demonstration or other teaching-based opportunities. Figure 20 shows average ratings for the related items.



### Results – research opportunities

The majority of respondents felt they were inadequate opportunities for training and opportunities to participate in learning fora. However, 63% of respondents were of the view

that their departments provided a good seminar series.

Postgraduates were also asked to indicate their participation in research activities. These items were scored as average- *below average* (see Figure 21).



### Results- Supervision

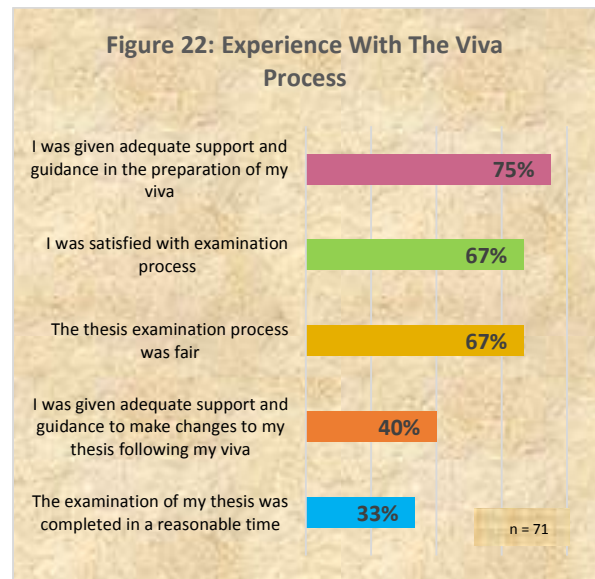
The majority of respondents who had reached the point of their thesis were inclined towards agreeing that the supervision dimension was *above average-average* (see Table 2).

My supervisor/s has/have the skills and subject knowledge to adequately guide my research	87%
My supervisor/s provide (s) constructive feedback on my progress	70%
My supervisor/s meet(s) with me on a regular basis	69%

Approximately 55% of respondents indicated they met with their supervisors one-to-four times a month, 28% more than four times per month and 17% once or less. Overall, 72% of respondents said they were very satisfied/satisfied with the guidance received from supervisors.

### Results- Thesis Experience

Doctoral students were asked if they had their viva at the time of the survey. The majority (97% cent) did not have the viva. For those who did, they rated as *above average* the support and guidance received, while the examination process and their satisfaction with the *viva* process was *average*. Support and guidance post-*viva* was rated as *average* and timely examination of the thesis was *below average* (see Figure 22).



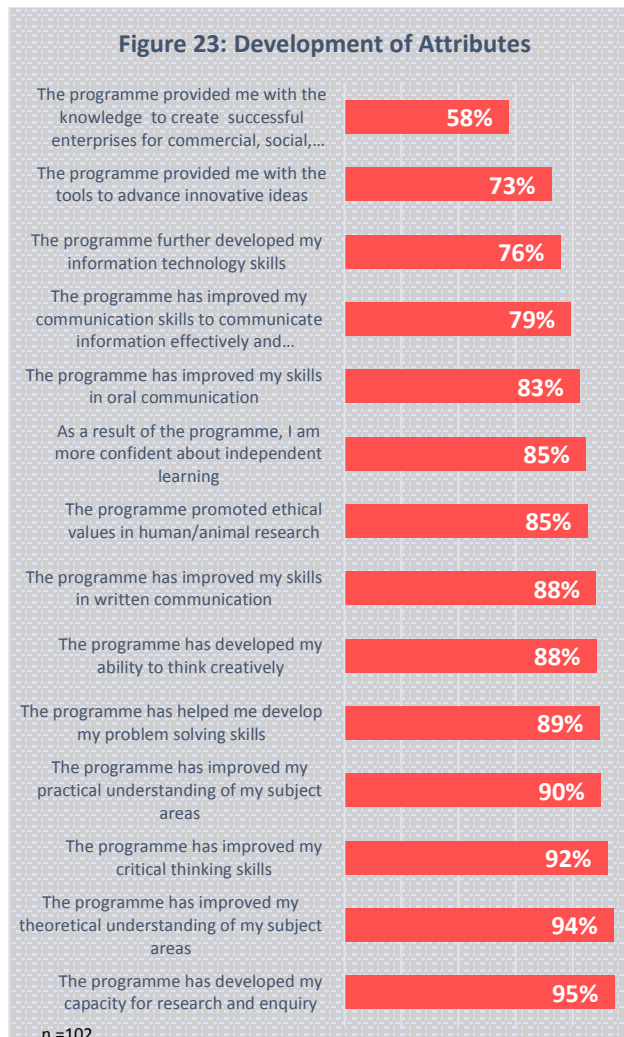
### Results- Attributes

Respondents opined that their research programme was *above average* in the development of the key graduate attributes with the exception of one, the knowledge to create successful enterprises, which scored *below average* (see Figure 23).

### Results- Overall experience

Postgraduates were asked about their overall experience of the research programme. For the eight aspects identified in the Figure 24, respondents rated the items as *average*.





## Policy Experience

Institution-wide surveys “seek to collect data” that provide management with “a descriptive overview of student opinion, designed to encourage action for improvement” and, “which can be reported as part of appropriate accountability procedures” (Harvey 2003.7). Student surveys which provide information on students’ perceptions of a range of services and experiences are underpinned by the assumption that students’ experience of higher education is closely associated with satisfaction levels (Arambewela and Maringe 2012) or service performance is related to student satisfaction (Arambewela and Maringe 2012.13). As such, this is in-keeping with the importance of understanding students’ needs, expectations and motivation so as to develop/enhance the match between students’ wants and institutional service delivery.

A **key suggestion** based on the findings of this survey is the establishment of a Working Group to review and develop appropriate programmes for postgraduates in the areas of teaching and learning, faster processing of the thesis examination process and professional development.

Based upon the findings inferred from survey data, to improve the academic environment, the following recommendations are made:

- **Improve the quality of the teaching/learning environment** by: training lecturers and facilitators; offering more research methodology courses at the undergraduate level, better preparing postgraduate students for the research they would need to conduct; provide timely and quality feedback on assessments
- **Restructure the programmes and enhance the course experience** by: capping the number of courses; increasing course diversity; aligning courses to research areas; making the

courses more practically oriented and applicable to the real world

- **Improve the quality of supervision** by: supervisor training; supervisors should be more accessible through regularly scheduled meetings with students; supervisors should be more helpful, being versed in both content and methodology; and the thesis examination process should be speedier
- **Enhance professional development opportunities** through: greater inter-departmental/cross-fertilisation of research and more reading and/or taught courses where applicable; publication and grant proposal training workshops or webinars; increase opportunities for student engagement in faculty research; encouraging joint publications between faculty and postgraduate students; increasing funding/grants/bursaries for research resources; developing a sustainability plan for research, which includes creating a stream of material resources used for ongoing study.

Further, consideration should be given to enhancement schemes to address some of the challenges faced by postgraduates. Further, the UWI needs to be cognisant of the motivations and career aspirations of postgraduates and thus, provide relevant tools and support systems to them. Among some of the recommendations are:

- Postgraduates should be exposed to publication and grant proposal training workshops or webinars coordinated by the PGAs and the Office of Research
- Increase opportunities for student engagement in faculty research (inter and cross- department); encourage joint publications and joint grant proposals between faculty and postgraduate students;

- More opportunities for postgraduates to present their research at conferences both locally and internationally. Implement annual postgraduate symposia drawing audience from within the academy and outside of it;
- Teaching opportunities should be expanded for doctoral students and they should be required to participate in selected teaching workshops offered by Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).

#### Sources

Arambewela, Rodney, and Felix Maringe. "Mind the gap: Staff and postgraduate perceptions of student experience in higher education." *Higher education review* 44, no. 2 (2012): 63-84.

Harvey, Lee. "Student feedback [1]." *Quality in higher education* 9, no. 1 (2003): 3-20.

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