

Social networks and employment in study-work transitions for Asia-born New Zealand trained business graduates

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Abstract

This longitudinal study was commissioned by the Asia New Zealand Foundation. The Asia-born New Zealand-educated business graduates involved in our on-going study identified the importance of social networks in gaining access to the labour market in New Zealand and in Asia. The awareness of the relationship between social networks and employment outcomes became apparent during the second year of our longitudinal study and was explored in greater depth at year three of the study. The importance of social networks for employment outcomes, and the circuitous nature of the pathways to employment and residence, was not expected by graduates hoping to stay on in New Zealand after graduation.

This paper reports from the findings at years two and three. These findings are related to the relationship of social networks and employment outcomes for Asia-born New Zealand trained business graduates. It describes the circuitous pathways that students take to obtain work relevant to their degree, and where immigration outcomes are desired relevant to meet immigration requirements. Perceived barriers to limiting employment opportunities for Asia-born New Zealand trained business graduates include lack of work experience; economic recession; employer and wider community attitudes; and changes in immigration and government policies. This paper explores briefly policy and practice implications for government and business agencies looking to achieve successful outcomes, in terms of the recruitment of Asia-born New Zealand trained business graduates, to bolster New Zealand's declining labour market.

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Introduction

In August 2008, the Asia New Zealand Foundation commissioned International Student Ministries of New Zealand to begin a three-year longitudinal tracking study of Asia-born New Zealand-trained business graduates. This three-year study (2008-2011) has examined the role that Asia-born New Zealand-trained business graduates play in the development of New Zealand-Asia business relationships. It has also looked at how their experiences immediately prior to graduation and post graduation relate to that development. In this paper we discuss findings spanning the three years of data collection and which are related to employment outcomes and the factors that contribute to positive outcomes for Asia-born New Zealand trained business graduates. Data was collected in three phases at approximately one year intervals. A total of 41 participants remained in the study at the third and final phase of data collection. This figure was down from the 221 participants at phase I of the data collection and 76 at phase II. An on-line survey and in-depth interviews were used in the data collection. Graduates were interviewed or surveyed up to three times during the three years of this study.

In addition, at phase II and phase III researchers consulted a number of stakeholders (referred to as OC – observer comment) who were able to provide additional information from an observer viewpoint which was related to our research questions and the experiences of the graduates in our study. All of this yielded rich qualitative data on Asia-born New Zealand trained business graduates, their experiences while studying and since graduating from New Zealand business programmes, their perceptions of New Zealand and New Zealanders, and their hopes for the future. It also yielded good indications of how these graduates could become involved in business relationships that may have an Asia-New Zealand dimension.

This paper focuses on an extract from our findings from all three phases of our study, and concerns the relationship between social networks and employment outcomes in a context of circuitous study-to-work pathways and work-to-residence pathways for those wishing to stay in New Zealand.

The context of the study

Our study occurred during a period marked by the ongoing effects of the 2008 global financial crisis in New Zealand. These effects have included continued economic uncertainty, and increased levels of unemployment;ⁱ in particular, youth unemployment. According to the Department of Labour (2011), youth unemployment rates in 2011 are 7.9 percentage points higher than five years previously (17.5 percent compared with 6.6 percent for the general population).ⁱⁱ Relative to the general population of New Zealand, the Asian people in New Zealand are youthful and highly skilled. However, they experience high levels of underemployment and higher levels of unemployment than European New Zealanders.ⁱⁱⁱ In 2009, the labour force participation rate for Asian people in New Zealand was 66 percent, lower than that for European people (70 percent) and Maori people (67 percent), but higher than that for Pacific peoples (62 percent).^{iv} The Department of Labour notes that the seniority of the European population masks their relatively high level of labour market participation. Equal age-specific levels of participation for Asian people would be 77 percent (75 percent for Maori and Pacific people).^v

Economic uncertainty and increased unemployment during the period since 2008 has also been the experience of many countries in Asia.^{vi} In particular, those Asian countries with highly internationalised economies and close economic ties to the U.S.^{vii} Mok (2010) suggests that many governments in the Asia region have prioritised education spending in response to economic uncertainty, inflationary pressures, and high levels of unemployment.^{viii} Despite (or perhaps, because of) economic uncertainty in New Zealand, there was a 6.3 percent increase in tertiary education enrolments for domestic students aged 18 to 24 years between 2006 and 2009.^{ix} We also note a strong upward trend in international student enrolments in New Zealand between 2008 and 2009.^x Preliminary indications are that despite continuing economic pressures in the Asia-Pacific region, this upward trend will continue, albeit at a more gradual rate. A recent Ministry of Education report notes a 3 percent increase in total international student enrolments between 2009 and 2010.^{xi} In 2010, approximately 68 percent of these students were from Asia: the majority (22 percent) from the People's Republic of China, followed by South Korea (16 percent), India (12 percent), Japan (10 percent), and South East Asia (9 percent).^{xii}

The graduates in our study were transitioning from study to work in a context generally un conducive to easily gaining employment in a chosen area. Over the three years of our study we encountered an attrition of research participants. This may have been as a consequence of their transitioning. Figure 1 shows the number of participants relative to the two methods of data collection used at each phase of the study. Our interview participants showed a lesser degree of attrition than our online survey panels and this may in part be attributable to the higher level of social relationships that developed with researchers via the interviews.

METHODOLOGY

Throughout the overall study, our primary methods of data collection were online surveys and in-depth interviews. Eligible participants at the start of the study included all Asian-born students in their final year of study at New Zealand business schools or in their first year post-graduation. Phase one participants were recruited from late 2008 through to early 2009 through participating business schools (by referral and through posters in Chinese and English publicising the study); through ISM NZ staff and student clubs and networks; and through peer referral. All were invited to participate in both the survey and interview panels, and five chose to participate in both. The initial online survey went live in March 2009. One hundred and thirty one students and new graduates completed the first survey, exceeding our target number of 120. This number increased by another 40 subsequent to initial data collection for the first report. Interviews for phase I were conducted with a total of 40 people from October 2008 through to May 2009 (this number subsequently increased to 50). An in-depth account of phase one research methods and findings is available in our first report.

After phase one of the study was completed contact was maintained with participants through newsletters updating them on the study's progress and preliminary findings. All phase one participants were provided with an online link to report I. In late 2009, all phase one participants were invited to participate in phase two of the study. Some attrition was expected in both panels as graduates were moving from study to work and in some cases adjusting to living in new places or to their country of origin. The number of interview panel participants dropped from 50 to 31 and the number of participants in the survey panel from 171 to 45 despite an increase in participation incentives. Despite this attrition, phase two participants provided us with information-rich qualitative data. This informed our second report.

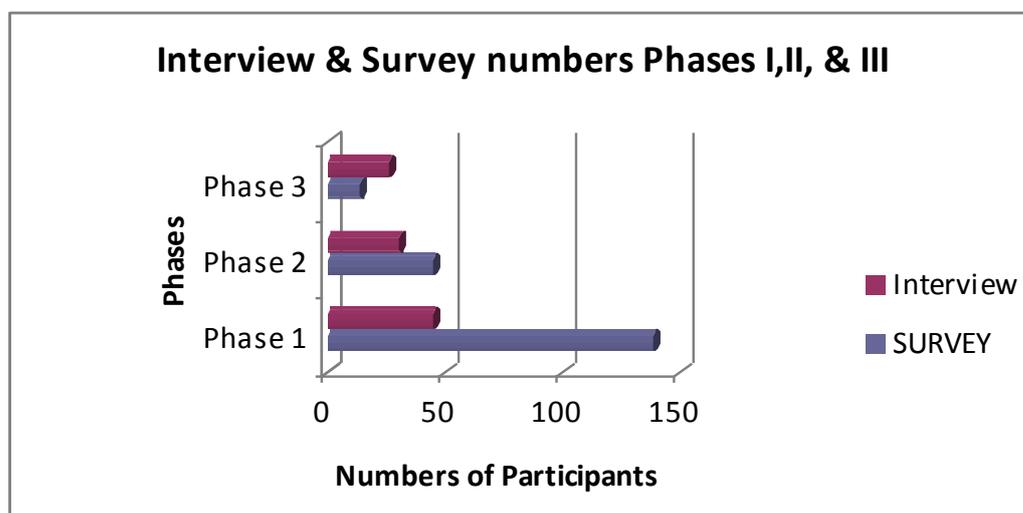
In the lead up to phase three data collection, we took steps to reduce further participant attrition. These included increasing incentives for research participants, seeking further referrals for both interview and survey participants; and simplifying the survey in response to phase one and two participant suggestions. Results were mixed. Despite our efforts, the survey panel dropped to 14; however, responses again provided us with in-depth information-rich data.

Our interview panel also experienced some attrition and interview-based data collection was difficult in the aftermath of the Christchurch and Japan earthquakes. Many interviews had to be rescheduled following these events. After considerable delay, we conducted a total of 27 phase three interviews. Fourteen were with participants who had remained in the interview panel since phase one of the study.

Eleven interviewees were new to the project. One had been interviewed during phase one only, and another had been part of the phase two interview panel. Our phase three report (published November 7th 2011 www.asianz.org.nz) was largely informed by the 27 phase three interviews, with supplementary data included from participants' survey responses where these added to, complicated, or contradicted interview findings.

Over the three years of our study we encountered an attrition of research participants which may have been as a result that they were in a context of transition. Figure I shows the numbers relative to the two methods of data collection we used namely an online survey and in-depth interviews each taken at intervals of a year over the three year period. Our interview panels showed a lesser degree of attrition than our online survey panels and this may be attributable to the higher level of social relationships that developed with researchers via the interview panel.

Figure 1



During phase one and two data collection and in discussions following the release of our first two research reports, our research team received a number of suggestions as to additional avenues of enquiry likely to provide information or insights pertinent to our project. As a result interviews were conducted with 10 (non-graduate) stakeholders in policy, education, and business, and a variety of others were consulted in relation to issues raised in our phase one and two reports. Where appropriate, comments from these interviews were included throughout report III and identified as 'observer comments' to distinguish them from participant responses.

The phase three survey and interviews were designed and carried out similarly to those described in reports I & II. Specifically, they re-examined graduates' current occupation, the nature of their current work (if employed), its relevance to their business qualification, their general perspectives on life post graduation, and whether (and in what ways) graduates' earlier expectations were being realised, modified or put on hold. In addition, interview and survey questions asked participants to comment on their ongoing connections with New Zealand and New Zealanders, perspectives on their business qualification and career-pathways, and insights into their likely contribution to New Zealand–Asia business relationships. The survey was simple and short, combining five-point Likert scale responses with open comment

boxes. As in phases one and two, the interviews were semi-structured, with many eliciting substantial interviewee comment as interviewees talked freely about their experiences and views.

As with reports I & II, report III focused on information-rich, primarily qualitative data relating to participants' perspectives and experiences. Observer comments were included where they added to or provided an additional perspective on overall findings. This paper is an extract from all three reports but mostly from reports II & III and it examines the place of social networks play in assisting employment outcomes for Asia-born New Zealand trained business graduates transitioning from study to work.

In this paper we begin with a brief examination of the context in which the participants in our study were graduating. We then outline six post-graduation pathways plus a further pathway category of post graduate study. Next we consider the factors participants perceived as assisting or hindering their efforts to gain employment in relation to phase two findings, and discuss participants' reflections on their business and personal connections and experiences including the significance of social networks assisting in finding employment or not. We conclude the paper with a summary of the understanding we have gained from participants in our study as to the place social networks can play in successful transition from study to work.

The graduates in our study came from a variety of Asian countries with the dominant group being from China. Figures 2 & 3 reflect the backgrounds of those participating in our study.

Figure 2

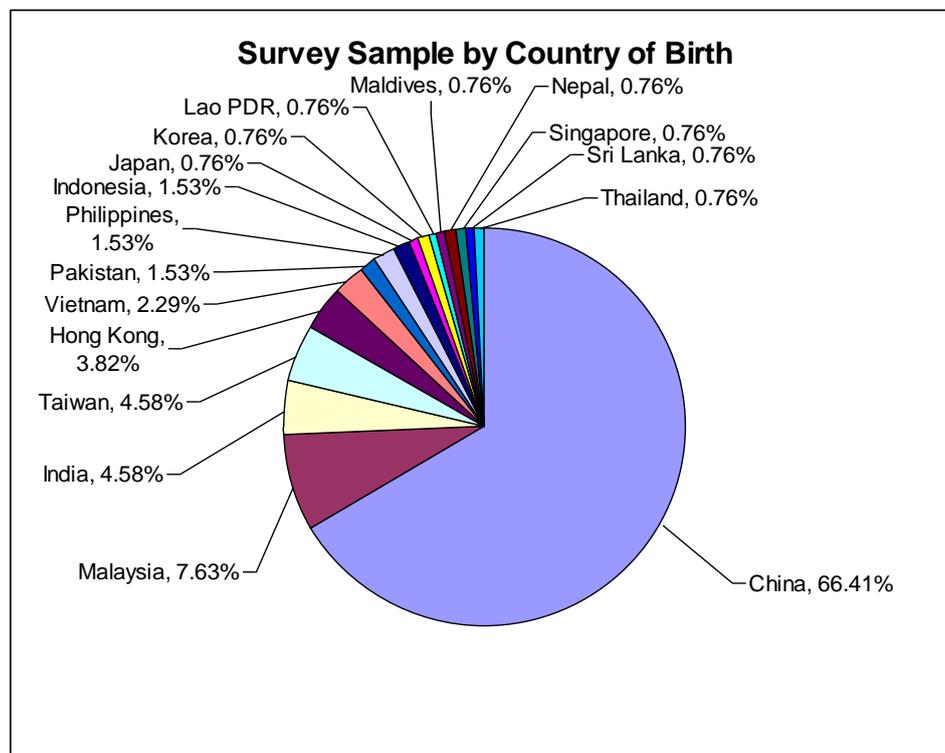
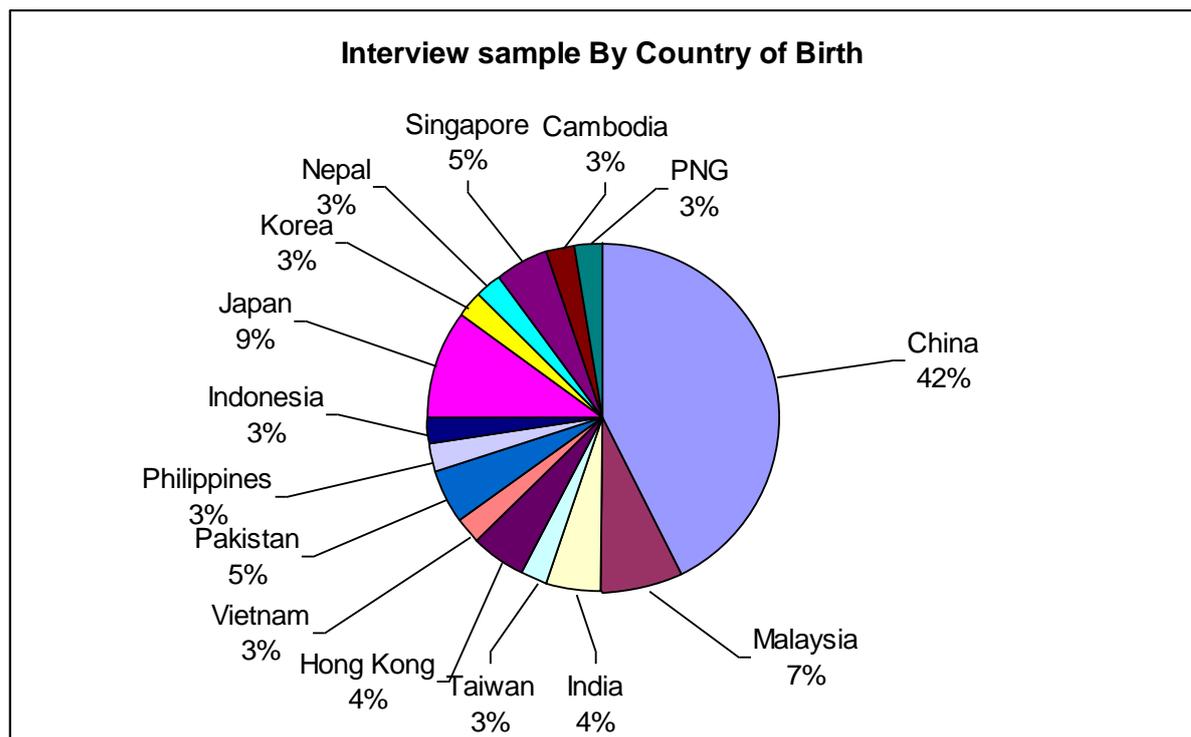


Figure 3

Findings from the study

Work experiences and social connections dominated graduate understandings of what assisted employment outcomes. At phase II of the study, and again at phase III, participants viewed the efficacy of career guidance and job search support as variable. Participants' personal attributes also seemed to shape their employment outcomes. When asked to offer employment-related advice to future students and graduates, phase III participants highlighted the importance of finding work experience, developing social connections, and honing their ability to relate well to people.

Over the three years of the study, we noted that the experiences of graduates were varied. Some graduates returned home directly after graduation, but most^{xiii} preferred to stay on in New Zealand and avail themselves of the opportunity afforded by the graduate work search permit,^{xiv} and look for career related work and work experience, and in many cases permanent residence. The graduates in our study had a variety of experiences in obtaining work. In fact their pathways were also many and varied, and often circuitous. Over the three years of the study we identified seven post graduation pathways for our graduates. Often the experience of the graduate over the three years of this study was of progressing from one pathway to another.

Seven Post graduation pathways

By the time we had reached the third year of the study our remaining phase III participants identified with seven occupational situations. These were:

- New Zealand-based degree-related employment;
- overseas-based degree-related employment;
- New Zealand-based part-time or temporary employment;
- overseas-based part-time or temporary employment;
- unemployment, searching for New Zealand-based employment;

- unemployment, searching for overseas-based employment; and
- post-graduate study.

Graduate Pathways to work are circuitous

Graduates throughout our study revealed the circuitous nature of pathways to find work, especially for new graduates with limited work experience and job finding. For many, their journey to degree related employment either in New Zealand or overseas involved transitions through several of these pathways. The experience of John (all research participants are given pseudonyms), a graduate from India, illustrates this well. When John was first interviewed at the start of our study he had high expectations and ambitions which involved getting a good well paid business job in New Zealand that would provide him with work experience and an opportunity to obtain permanent residence in New Zealand. A year later, in the second interview, John revealed his struggles to find work. The confidence expressed in the first interview had been replaced by a more subdued view tempered by the experiences of being unemployed, seeking help from others and the realisation that his lack of work experience made finding work difficult. By this second interview, John was working in a temporary job for a not-for-profit service provider. His route to this job had been through placement in voluntary work experience by the local migrant centre. The initial 120 hours of work experience had grown into part time employment with the organisation he had been placed with. This was in part due to his performance and in part due to an opportunity that arose. He had prospects of this job becoming full time and as being appropriate for immigration purposes. By interview three, John was in another city, working full time for a commercial company and had just received an ongoing work permit that would allow him a longer stay in New Zealand. He had had to leave the previous position as it became apparent that Immigration New Zealand would not grant an ongoing work permit for the job. Fortunately for John, he was able to obtain another job and was approved by immigration for a work permit beyond the initial open work permit he had received after graduation.

For the graduates in our study, such circuitous stories were common, although the paths each graduate took varied.

Lacks in responsiveness and relevance of careers advice

In report two, we identified the importance of job-search support or career guidance to successful employment outcomes. During phase III, Lerk Ling, an ‘additional’ (new) interviewee, commented that career services at her university had been unhelpful and that she felt they had failed to support her. Phase II and III participants alike commented on the brevity of careers advice appointments at their respective educational institutions, a sense of careers advisers having little interest in them as people with unique employment interests/needs, a lack of information about looking for work, and an apparent preference for providing services to only the best graduates. Three interviewees (Wen Bing and Paula at phase II, and Rachel at phase III) echoed the view that the focus of educational institutions was mainly on “high level jobs/big companies that did not match with new graduates”. Our study suggests that while careers guidance can be helpful in assisting graduates to find jobs, this is not the case in every place or for all students.

A stakeholder, OC5, echoed the above comments and observed that there were areas requiring improvement in many educational institution’s career services. Primarily he

felt that careers service providers often had limited connection with employers and limited responsiveness to graduates' prospective work environments. He commented that attempts to help graduates identify their relevant 'soft skills' were rare, and training was lacking in how students should obtain, prepare for and present oneself well in interviews. This observer noted that advisers rarely devoted sufficient time to ensuring that clients received significant assistance during their job search, providing advice rather than practical job search support. He did note that a significant proportion of job seekers benefit from support and practical help throughout the job seeking process, and international graduates are no exception.

Another stakeholder observer, OC1, offered a comment on the need to help Asian graduates merge with the kiwi workforce, advocating for targeted training and mentoring to help graduates become integrated into new work environments. This observer suggested the use of programmes, which used role play and workplace language and equipped international graduates to engage socially with New Zealanders in a variety of 'kiwi' settings. On the basis of his own experience, he observed that some Asian graduates are uncomfortable in New Zealand workplace settings if they do not understand the behaviours operating in that workplace. This observer's view was that if career guidance services are to help Asian migrants, they need to focus not only on job search assistance but also on facilitating successful workplace integration.

Immigration Related Effects

A further complexity for graduates choosing to remain in New Zealand and search for work was negotiating the complexities associated with immigration requirements in their path to work. Graduates involved in our study, reported a mixed experience of immigration, including some challenges relating to and progressing immigration outcomes. Many graduates revealed a lack of understanding of study-to-work-to-residence pathways, indicating a need for education for prospective residency applicants, and for further development and refinement in immigration service policies and processes.

Thi Diep's story is a typical example. Thi Diep brought to her interview an INZ letter, the tone of which she felt was decidedly pointed, negative and indicative of her work visa being declined. The interviewer encouraged her to ignore the perceived tone and respond warmly and positively to the direct requests for information, providing full answers and using her research skills to provide supporting evidence of income levels, qualifications and the nature of the job. A few weeks after the interview Thi Diep called to inform that her visa had been granted and thanked our researcher for encouraging her and helping her to understand the INZ perspective. Having had a successful outcome, Thi Diep now felt less negative about her initial interactions with INZ, however her initial feelings could have been assuaged by better quality communication from INZ, and a better understanding on her part of the immigration process, particularly as it related to obtaining and representing her job.

Reflections on New Zealand Business Qualifications

At all phases of our study participants' perception of New Zealand business qualifications was high. However, by phase III there was a perceptible shift alluding to a perceived lack of practical experience and competency development in degree programmes likely to facilitate the graduates' smooth transition to employment. Not

one graduate commented that they had obtained a job due to their qualification alone. However, the view most expressed was that work experience coupled with a business qualification formed a good foundation for finding employment.

Business Connections

By phase III, many participants who in earlier phases had expressed a strong interest in business careers, revealed a strong desire to contribute to New Zealand-Asia business connections. Some participants revealed a strong entrepreneurial interest and for some participants, this had translated into successful entrepreneurial ventures or plans for future ventures. The accounts of successful graduate entrepreneurs in our third report highlighted the unique social capital of some Asia-born graduates, and their potential role in fostering significant New Zealand-Asia business relationships. Frequently in the stories behind Asia New Zealand business relationships and entrepreneurial activity there is an interpersonal connection forged during the study years that ultimately leads to assisting in the development of business. One such story is that of Zadili who co founded a company to distribute New Zealand made kayaks in the South East Asian region. Zadili described to us a sense of “chemistry” as the basis of this business relationship. This had come from a shared interest in sport and he commented that “sporting is a way to build relationships, to cross cultures for business.” And that is exactly what happened for him and his partners. They had forged a good personal friendship with one of the principals in the kayak manufacturing company due to their involvement in the sport. Upon returning to South East Asia, Zadili and his partners saw an opportunity and brokered a deal around distribution rights. Their friendship with the manufacturers, and the associated trust that went with it, was key to the deal becoming a reality. In our third report, a range of emerging business relationships were identified, most of which involved elements of Asia-New Zealand relationships and often friendships as well.

Interpersonal Connections

Phase III graduates continued to express a strong desire to continue interpersonal relationships established during their study years, and to maintain links with New Zealand and New Zealanders. In some cases, this desire remained despite a lack of employment success in New Zealand. It appeared that friendships and connections formed during study years were unlikely to be tarnished by what happens to the individual graduates in terms of employment. Such relationships once forged would remain and might be found to be beneficial in the future. Interpersonal connections stood out for many in the finding of employment, and story after story of graduates featured examples of this. Graduates identified social connections that included family members, lecturers and social contacts consisting of friends and acquaintances. Some graduates worried that their time spent in New Zealand was not productive in terms of developing and maintaining social connections helpful to finding jobs in Asia. Joy, a PRC graduate who desired to stay on and work in New Zealand, felt her time was running out as she had only secured part time service industry work. Then out of the blue, her home-stay father asked if she could come into his company’s work as they had an emergency in their accounts department. Joy, out of deference to her home-stay father, went into the male dominated workplace, which ordinarily she would never have considered. Within a short time, and due to her hard work and skills, the company asked her to remain with them permanently. Without the connection to her home-stay father she felt the job she was now doing and loved would not have come her way.

A number of factors that assist in finding employment emerged from the experiences of the graduates in our sample. The individual journeys to employment were varied but a common thread in all of the information obtained was the importance of social connections, forged earlier during their study days, in helping to obtain employment.

Graduate identified employment-assisting factors

In report two, we identified four key factors as assisting graduates in finding work:

- Volunteer or other work experience;
- Social connections;
- Personal attributes (including meaningful qualifications, experience, communication skills, English-language proficiency, confidence, and effort); and
- Relevant job search support or career guidance.

During phase III, we sought to explore these factors further in the light of participants' accounts, as they seemed significant in terms of the critical path to employment and to assisting in answering our overall study question: the place of Asia-born New Zealand-trained business graduates in the Asia- New Zealand business relationship. Logically without work, graduates would not be able to participate in such a relationship, and without the graduates experiencing work it would be difficult to obtain information about the nature of such a relationship. The question of finding work became an important area of interest to our overall study^{xv}. The graduates we interviewed and surveyed over the three years, offered up a wealth of information about finding jobs. Some of this information may have been sourced from advice they followed and were able to see the value of, and some may have been based on their own experiences of success and in some cases realisation of factors contributing to lack of success. The following is a synthesis of responses from the graduates to our questions related to what helped them find employment, what they perceived to be barriers to employment, and what advice they would give to new students. What emerged is presented as advice offered to future students and graduates searching for work, by graduates who were involved in both phases II and III of our study:^{xvi}

Advice offered:

1. Try to gain work experience - qualifications are not enough.
 - Internships are advantageous because they allow you to experience the reality of the job and environment, helping you to decide whether or not you want to be a part of it.
 - Gain paid employment if you can while studying, even if you do not need the money. Work experience looks good on your CV and increases your chances of success in competition with other applicants. Also, many New Zealand employers value young people who are willing to engage in work, even if that work seems 'menial' or unrelated to their course of study or qualifications.
2. Engage with life in New Zealand – volunteer; take part in student clubs, societies, and community groups.
 - Involve yourself in part-time work, volunteering and community education courses that provide opportunities to interact and connect with locals.
 - Be involved in student association activities, as they can help build confidence and experience in speaking with people in diverse contexts and situations

where good performance is vital. Be involved in competitions (business, debating, sports and cultural) so that you can gain experience in working with others, organising others, teamwork, project management, etc.

3. Try to understand the job market.

- If you are a newcomer to New Zealand, gather as much information as possible about the job market here as soon as you arrive (or even before your arrival). If you plan to stay, pay close attention to the New Zealand job market including immigration 'skill shortage' areas. If you plan to return 'home' or move elsewhere, examine the job market situation in the country/ies you plan to move to. If uncertain about where you will work, pay attention to shifting developments in whichever countries you are interested in.
- Know the employment needs related to your qualification field in New Zealand and/or wherever you are interested in working.

4. Network – understand the significance of contacts at all stages of your career:

- Initiate and maintain contacts while still studying with the industry or professional networks in which you plan to work. If you have worked before and have returned to study make sure that you continue to network with former colleagues and employers.
- Join professional associations related to your field of study and attend events hosted by these associations so that you can meet and network with people.
- Contact and visit companies relevant to your intended career. Visit exhibitions, shows and conferences to gain knowledge of your field and to network.
- Maintain contact with friends and make new friends, as these connections can be useful in your job search.

5. Use your distinctiveness as an international graduate to your advantage – in New Zealand and Asia it is your language and cross-cultural skills as well as your international awareness and experience which set you apart.

- Bi-lingualism or multi-lingualism is an advantage when looking for jobs. It sets one applicant apart from another.
- Awareness and appreciation of differences between cultures and ways of life, and experience in transitioning from one to another can be used to demonstrate flexibility and relational skills suitable for building business relationships.

6. Identify and develop soft skills:

- Identify and hone presentation, communication and research skills. Understand how these relatively generic skills can transfer into new situations. Be prepared to show that you are willing to take on challenges and to engage in activity that may involve risk-taking.
- In applying for project management roles, you will need to show that you are becoming well-organised; and that you have excellent presentation, communication, interpersonal and team leadership skills. You may need to begin in a lower level position, and work towards managerial roles over time.

7. Learn to be flexible:

- New Zealand and multinational employers value flexibility and the ability to engage readily in a wide range of tasks.
- It is useful to be able to demonstrate that you have wider interests and skills.
- Be motivated by what you want to do and not by what you must do - follow your instincts.
- Develop a good work/life balance as this will help you both to develop in your career, and as a person.
- Understand that the ‘ideal job’ may be difficult to find, especially as a new graduate. In order to work towards your dreams you may need to take job opportunities that are different to those you had anticipated. Any employment offers a chance to ‘prove yourself’ and is likely to lead to other job opportunities. Sometimes, unanticipated employment pathways prove to be surprisingly satisfactory.

Work experience, social networks and networking are key elements in gaining access to labour markets. In addition, knowing how to present one-self to relate to those markets is an important dimension in increasing chances of a successful outcome.

Discussion

The importance of relationships

In phases II and III alike, participants highlighted the role of relationships and relationship networks on labour market outcomes. While top graduates with highly regarded degree-level or postgraduate qualifications were generally successful in finding employment, many graduates found employment through serendipitous connections, family connections and/or work that was initially part-time or unpaid (voluntary). This finding reiterates the Longitudinal Immigration Survey: “Getting a job through friends or relatives was the most common way for Business ... category migrants to find work”.^{xvii} Notably, although our findings are suggestive, the relationship between social networks and employment outcomes has not yet been fully explored in New Zealand migrant research. The relationship between social networks and employment outcomes has, however, been explored in a variety of contexts^{xviii} and whilst the nature of such a relationship here is as yet unclear, there is little doubt that such a relationship exists, particularly in view of the comments from our research participants.

If the aim of a student is to obtain a job upon graduation it does seem important that they build social connections and networks whilst studying, particularly if they don’t enjoy high levels of social capital that would enable the job search to be easy. For graduates moving across borders, building social networks in the country they intend to work in seems entirely reasonable. However, for many of our Asia-born New Zealand-trained business graduates, opportunities to build social networks in New Zealand (and for that matter elsewhere) are not readily apparent and certainly very little assistance is given for this. If New Zealand is to retain such graduates for work within New Zealand, then facilitating social connections into the wider context of New Zealand society and business does seem important. If New Zealand is to build on Asia related connections for engagement in trade with Asia, then recognition of what Asia-born New Zealand trained business graduates can bring to the supply of needed

Asia-related skills ^{xix} will be important for the future. Making and keeping connections with such graduates is of paramount importance.

There is a unique opportunity to make connections with Asia-born students while they are studying in New Zealand. Such connections facilitate the on-going development of Asia-New Zealand relationships.^{xx} For the students themselves, such connections have additional importance for when they graduate, as these connections may assist them in finding employment. The building of relationships with New Zealanders also enables them to gain experience of relating in New Zealand contexts, including work contexts. Prospective New Zealand employers are concerned to ensure potential employees will relate well in the work context before offering employment. Although, it can be argued that prospective New Zealand employers need to be more open to Asia-born potential employees, due to labour force needs.^{xxi}

The importance of work experience

The graduates in our study felt keenly the need for work experience when job hunting. They proffered several ways in which this could be obtained. Ideally the Asia-born student could gain work experience through part time work during their study years.. This assisted acculturation to New Zealand workplaces, and frequently helped with social engagement. Volunteering was another way to gain work experience and a number like John, whom we referred to earlier, gained access to a job opportunity through voluntary work experience. One area our graduates felt keenly was the lack of practical work experience associated with their courses. There was a common expression of how much more effective their qualifications would be if practical experience related to their learning, internships etc were offered directly as an option, or even as part of their training.

The importance of having knowledge of the process

Graduates participating in our study had high expectations of what a business qualification would do for their employment and immigration prospects. However most were new to finding jobs and handling immigration requirements. The forward pathways were more circuitous than anticipated indicating the need for forward instruction and planning. Students entering a course need to be aware of the outcomes from the beginning and of the forward processes involved, if they are to realize their expectations on entry. Knowledge of the factors that will help in obtaining employment and making the right early connections are important. Of equal importance is being aware of the regulatory environment that the graduate enters, especially in relation to immigration matters. Graduates in our study experienced a lot of difficult learning, due to being underprepared for what lay ahead.

Conclusion

Ideally by the time a student gets to graduation, they should be well informed about the processes for obtaining employment and an appropriate immigration status if it is required. They should be prepared for entry to the work place by being familiar with the type of work place they will enter. They should also be well connected in the community in which they wish to work and settle. All of these aspects contribute well to good employment outcomes. Education institutions and government agencies interested in the outcomes for Asia-born graduates should note these concepts and ensure that effective processes are in place to achieve ideals associated with international education, migration and labour force requirements.

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- ^{xii} Ibid.
- ^{xiii} 10% of our sample had already obtained permanent residence, 47% indicated they planned to apply and 31% indicated maybe they would if job opportunities worked out. 12% indicated definite plans to leave New Zealand.
- ^{xiv} For information on graduates and immigration policy and effects see Wilkinson, A., Merwood, P., Masgoret, A.M. 2010 *Life after study international students settlement experiences in New Zealand*. DoL
- ^{xv} McGrath, T., Anderson, V., Ching, C. P., Doi, A., and Stock, P. (2009). *Tracking study of Asian business graduates: Report 1*. Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation. Available from: <http://www.asianz.org.nz/our-work/knowledge-research/research-reports/business-research> (accessed 26 May 2011).
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- ^{xvi} Advice similar to this is readily available on University and careers websites eg www.business.auckland.ac.nz/uoa/home/for/current-students/career-centre1/make-yourself-more-employable
- ^{xvii} IMSED Fast Facts. *EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR PERMANENT MIGRANTS*
- ^{xviii} For example see Calvó-Armengol, A. and M.O. Jackson (2004), "The effects of social networks on employment and inequality," *American Economic Review* 94, 426-454.
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