



BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT SURVEY

2025



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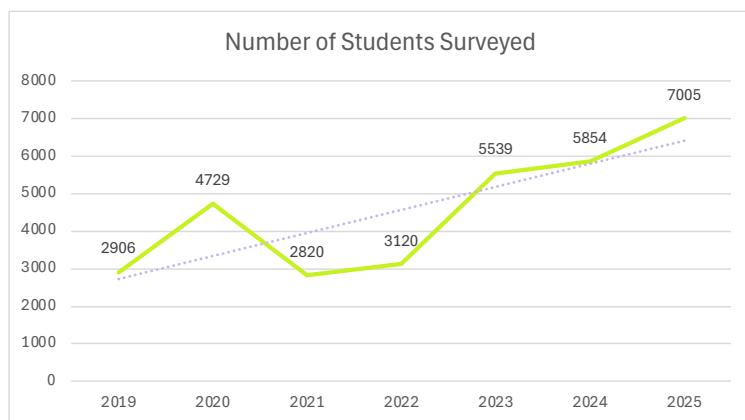
A survey to determine the view of tertiary level students from South African institutions on barriers to their employment – a year-on-year comparison from 2019 to 2025.

This survey explores how graduates view their own employability and equips prospective employers with valuable insights into graduate mindsets, expectations and self-perception as they transition into the job market. Originally launched in 2019, the survey has now been conducted annually for seven years.

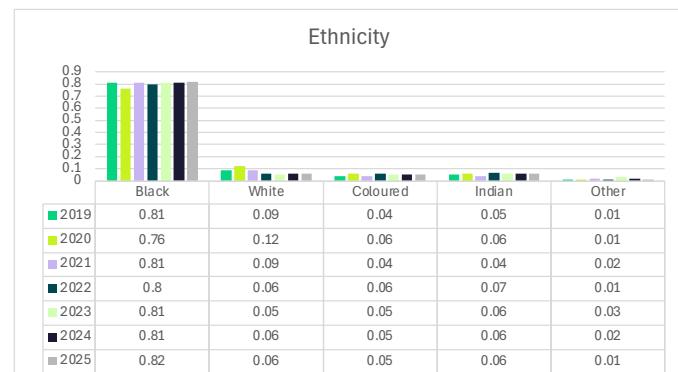
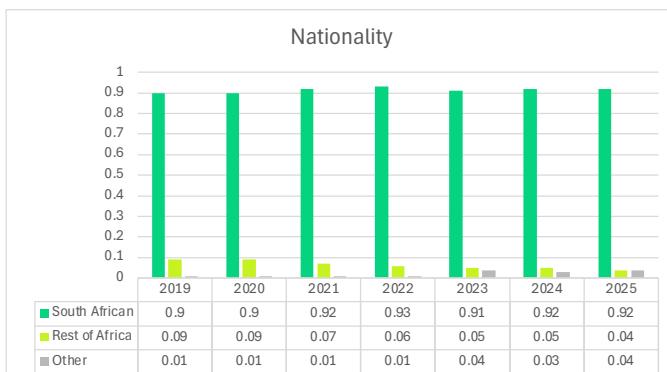
The report explores several elements:

- How students finance their tertiary education.
- Students' work readiness and preparedness to enter the professional world.
- Which institutions or programmes students have engaged with to develop workplace skills.
- Students' confidence levels regarding their employability prospects immediately following graduation.
- The obstacles and barriers – both experienced and anticipated – that students face when pursuing graduate employment opportunities.

A web-based survey was used, which was completed by students upon registration for entry into the GradStar Awards.

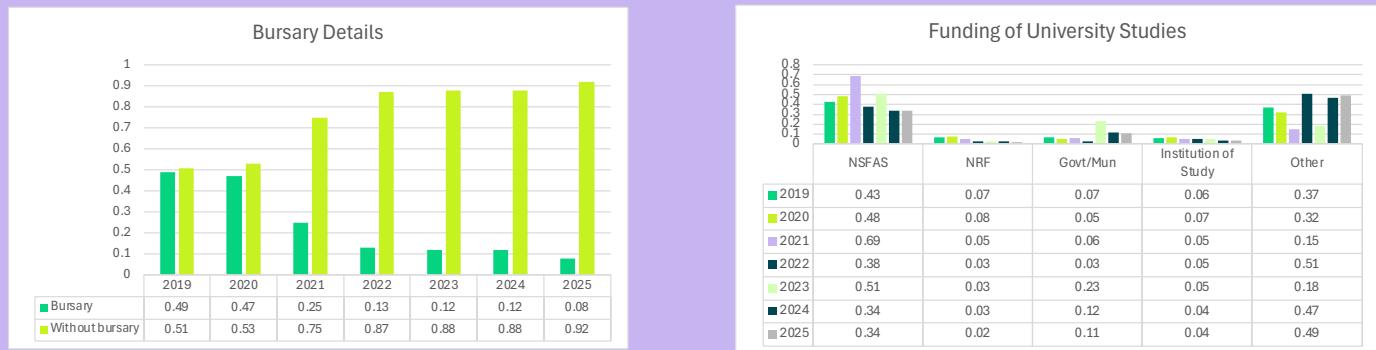


DEMOGRAPHICS

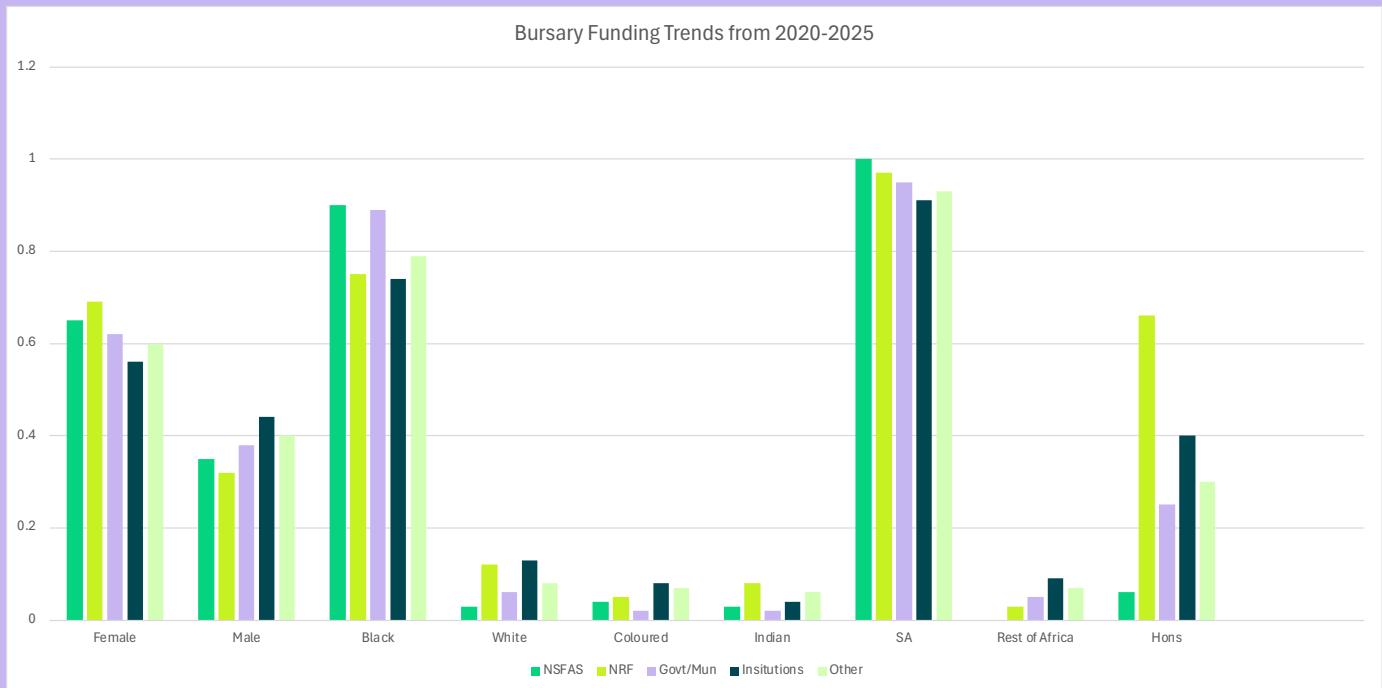


Five questions were asked of each graduate, and the results from each question from 2019 to 2025 are detailed below:

QUESTION 1: HOW ARE YOUR UNIVERSITY STUDIES PRIMARILY FUNDED?



Data from the past seven years shows that allocations from funding sources to the students surveyed has been relatively stable across demographics:

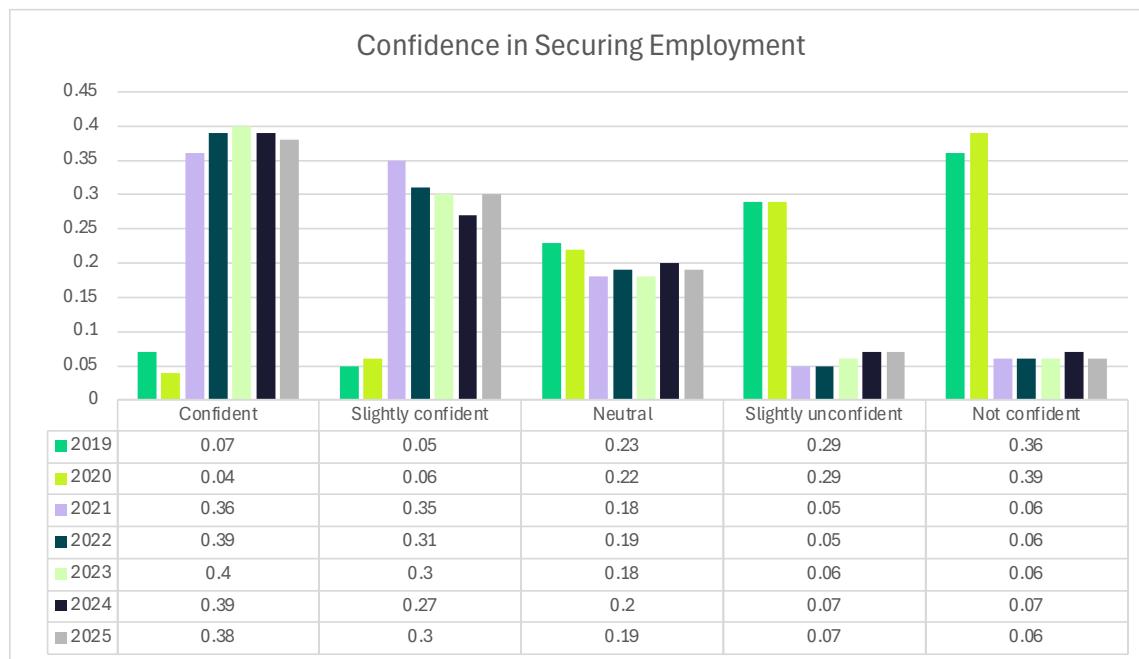


45% NSFAS has funded 45% of all bursaries over the past seven years.

58% Black females are the recipients of 58% of all bursaries awarded over the 7-year period.

10% Government has averaged 10% of bursary funding over the past six years.

QUESTION 2:
**HOW CONFIDENT DO YOU FEEL ABOUT SECURING GRADUATE-LEVEL EMPLOYMENT
 WITHIN 3 MONTHS OF COMPLETING YOUR DEGREE?**



45%

Black females show the highest level of confidence in securing employment, at **45%**.

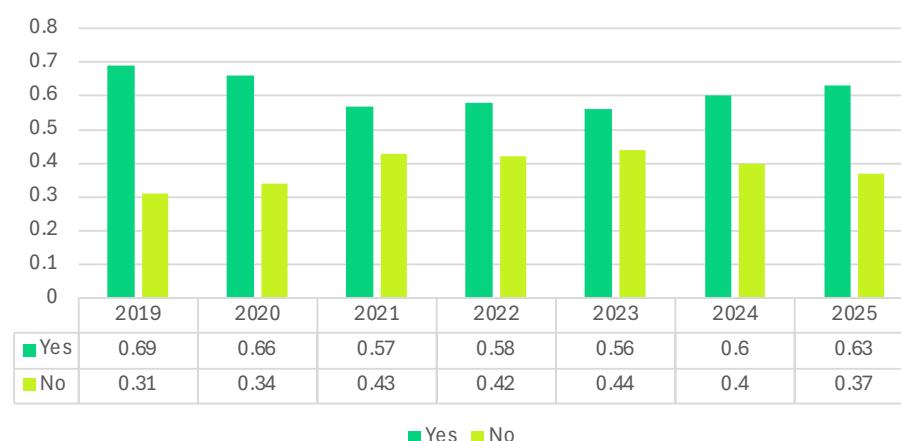
26%

An average of **26%** of students display confidence in securing employment.

QUESTION 3:

HAVE YOU ALREADY STARTED TO ENGAGE IN ANY WORK-READINESS ACTIVITIES?

Engaged in Work-Readiness Activities



61%

Over the 7-year period, an average of **61%** of students are engaging in work-readiness activities before their studies are completed.

46%

Black females show the highest level of engagement in work-readiness activities, at **46%**.

QUESTION 4:
IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO THE PREVIOUS QUESTION, PLEASE INDICATE WHO THESE OPPORTUNITIES WERE OFFERED BY?

The majority of employment opportunities continue to be sourced by students through the career services offered by their institutions.

Employers offer the second highest opportunities, either through the workplace or on-campus activities.

29% University careers services were utilised by an average of 29% of students to identify career opportunities.

22% Employer-led activities and initiatives connected an average of 22% of students with career opportunities.

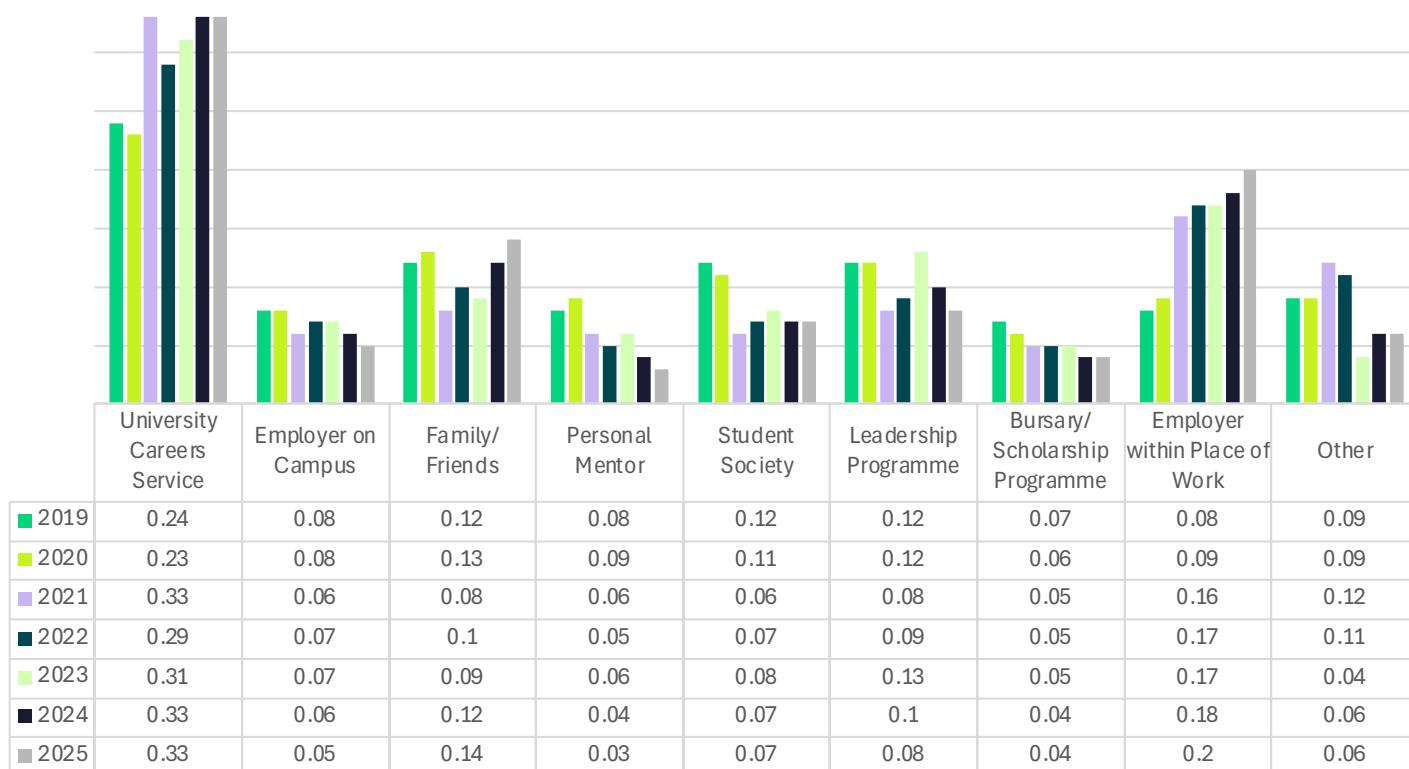
17% Personal networks and relationships accounted for 17% of workplace opportunities secured by students.

10% Leadership programmes facilitated workplace opportunity sourcing for an average of 10% of students.

8% Student societies served as a pathway to workplace opportunities for 8% of students.

45% Black female students demonstrated the highest success rate in securing workplace opportunities at 45%.

Source of Employment Opportunities



QUESTION 5:
WHAT BARRIERS HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED WHEN LOOKING TO SECURE GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT?

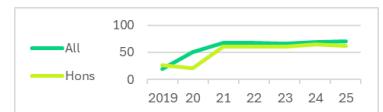
Since the survey was first commissioned in 2019, two barriers have consistently been raised by students as challenges experienced when looking to secure graduate employment:

Lack of access to graduate programmes - 59%, and the high unemployment rate in South Africa - 47%.

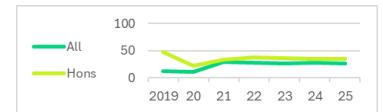
BARRIER/CHALLENGE

Experience is required for employment. However, students lack the required work/practical experience. There are not enough graduate programmes to provide for practical experience.

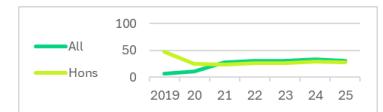
% OF STUDENTS



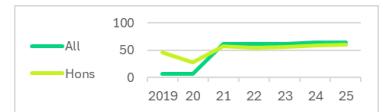
There are not enough graduate programmes and work opportunities in specific fields. Also, some fields of study are new and not recognised in the workplace yet.



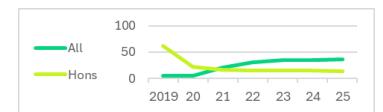
Lack of knowledge and guidance of how to compile a professional Curriculum Vitae, and not enough guidance as to where to start looking for employment.



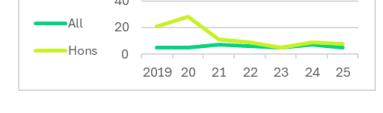
High unemployment rate in South Africa and high number of graduates in specific fields.



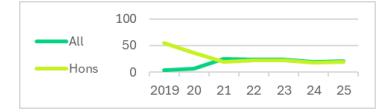
Lack of finances to pay for resources like internet, data, printing of CVs, travelling to interviews, further studies or skills acquisition.



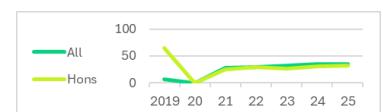
Being an international student is a challenge – immigration process, non-inclusion in graduate programs, not considered for employment due to nationality, and limited opportunities in country of citizenship.



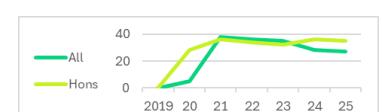
Do not know how to prepare for an interview or what to expect. Struggle with assessments and/or psychometric test. Not always able to get to the assessment or have resources (computer and internet) available to complete them.



Gap between theory and practical application in the workplace. Also, lack of skills outside the field of study, such as ability to stand out, financial skills, computer skills, psychological skills, time management, working as a team.



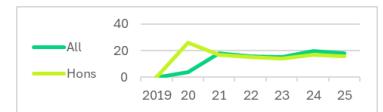
Lack of mentorship and connections, or guidance and support from family and/or friends.



Not enough advertising of graduate programmes and work opportunities.



Geographic location – finding opportunities in areas of residence is difficult as there are less opportunities in rural areas and small towns. Relocating is unaffordable and sometimes not practical. There are also limited resources in rural areas such as internet, computers, and ability to print a CV.



DISCUSSION

Students have navigated an unprecedented series of challenges over the past seven years. The 2019 student strikes in South Africa, largely driven by the "#FeesMustFall" movement, severely disrupted education through class cancellations, delayed academic calendars and pervasive uncertainty, while spotlighting persistent issues around affordable access to higher education and systemic inequalities within the university system.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 fundamentally transformed educational delivery, with connectivity gaps and inadequate technology resources further exacerbated by relentless electricity loadshedding that persisted through most of 2022 and 2023. The subsequent economic downturn, coupled with soaring fuel prices and an escalating cost of living, has made both the tertiary education experience and the graduate job search increasingly difficult.

More recently, South Africa's unemployment crisis has intensified, with youth unemployment reaching alarming levels in 2024 and 2025, creating fierce competition for limited entry-level positions. Additionally, the rapid integration of AI and automation into workplaces has heightened anxiety among graduates about job security and the relevance of their qualifications. Despite these compounding pressures, this survey demonstrates remarkable student resilience, with results showing year-on-year stability across most metrics.

Specific factors that have impacted survey results over the past seven years include:

- Unstable study environments, particularly in the earlier survey years.
- Uncertainty around study completion during strike periods.
- Heightened anxiety about employability and career prospects.
- Extended COVID-19 lockdowns, including prolonged school and university closures that disrupted attendance and learning continuity.
- Unsuitable home study environments, including inadequate space, connectivity challenges, and limited access to essential resources.
- Prolonged loadshedding that severely impacted students without reliable alternative electricity sources (resolved in 2024).
- Record-high youth unemployment rates in South Africa, particularly affecting the 2024-2025 graduate cohort.
- AI and workplace automation concerns, creating uncertainty about future job availability and required skills.
- Funding access challenges – parents and sponsors experiencing job losses or financial strain due to pandemic impacts and sluggish economic growth.
- Mental health pressures from cumulative stressors, affecting academic performance and job-search confidence.
- Skills-job mismatch anxiety as industries rapidly evolve and traditional degree pathways face scrutiny.

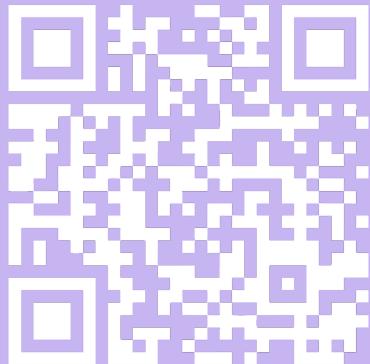
KEY FINDINGS

- 01** Students continue to express confidence in securing employment post-graduation.
- 02** Participation in workplace readiness initiatives is on the rise, though still below pre-pandemic levels.
- 03** Many students report that graduate programmes are poorly advertised and difficult to find.
- 04** New graduates indicate they need clearer guidance on where and how to access job opportunities.
- 05** University careers services continue to be the primary gateway to employment opportunities for students.
- 06** NSFAS remains the leading provider of bursaries in South Africa.



RISING STAR

MOVEMENT FOR GOOD



**SCAN TO FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN HELP A
HUNGRY TERTIARY STUDENT**



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FIRST FLOOR, HARRY GOEMANS CENTRE
151 MAIN ROAD
HEATHFIELD
7945
CAPE TOWN
+27 21 065 1685

To support future research reports, please contact:
Laura Barker, CEO: BlackBark Productions
laura@blackbark.co.za