



GRAD STAR | **STUDENTS' CHOICE AWARDS**

EMPLOYMENT CHOICES OF TERTIARY-LEVEL STUDENTS

2025



GRAD
STAR

STUDENTS'
CHOICE
AWARDS

A SURVEY TO DETERMINE THE VIEW OF TERTIARY-LEVEL STUDENTS FROM SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTIONS ON THEIR EMPLOYMENT CHOICES.

INTRODUCTION

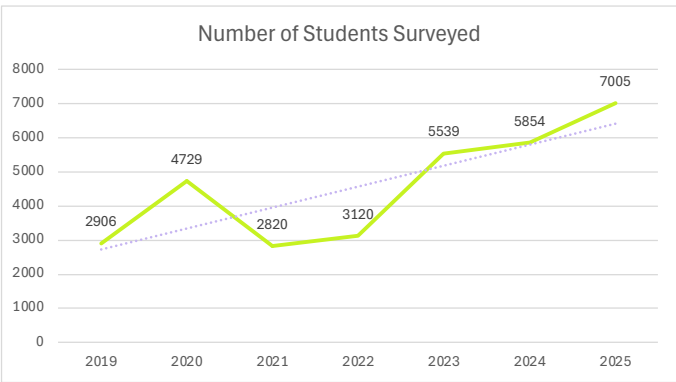
Now in its sixth year, this survey seeks to better understand how students view prospective employment environments. In addition to offering employers valuable insight into student mindsets and self-awareness, the survey reveals the types of workplace cultures students consider to be the best fit when identifying companies to approach for employment.

The report considers the following employment insights from students:

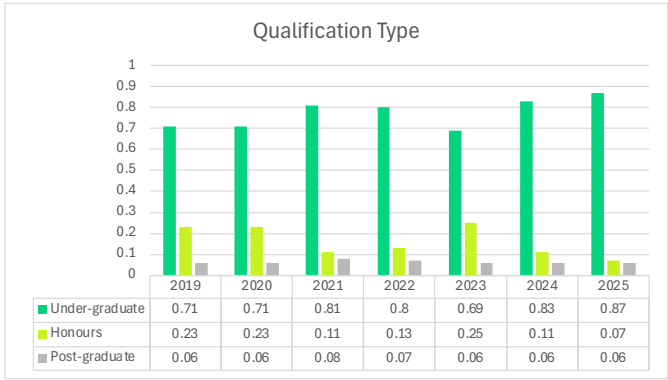
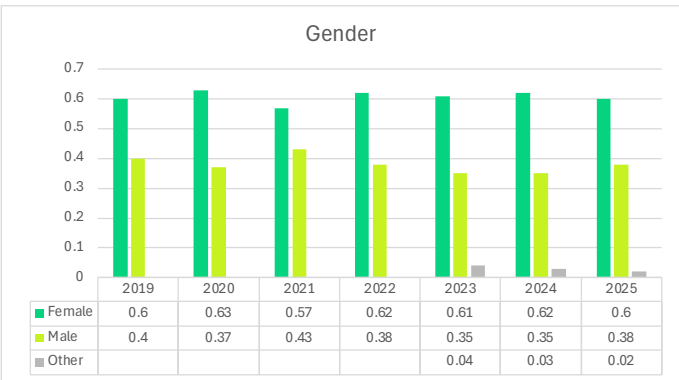
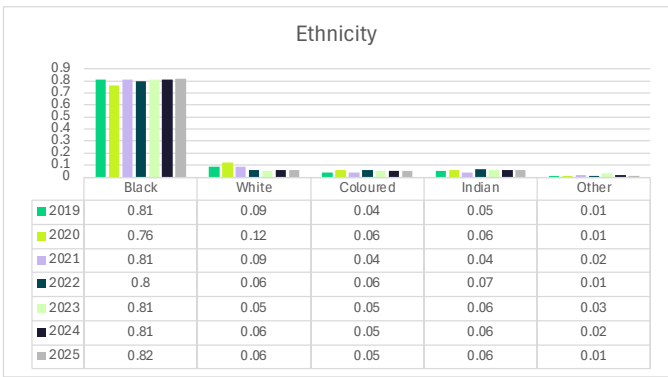
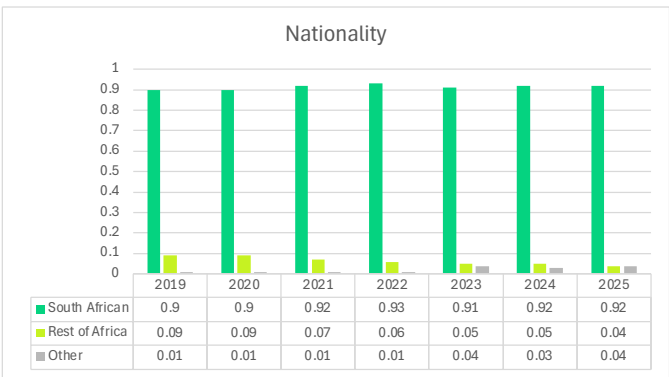
- Preferred office culture
- Likelihood of transferring out of South Africa
- The importance of travel
- Most-valued employee benefits
- Preferred industry to work in
- Salary expectations
- Level of comfort working outside core background
- Top preferred employers

STUDENT SAMPLE

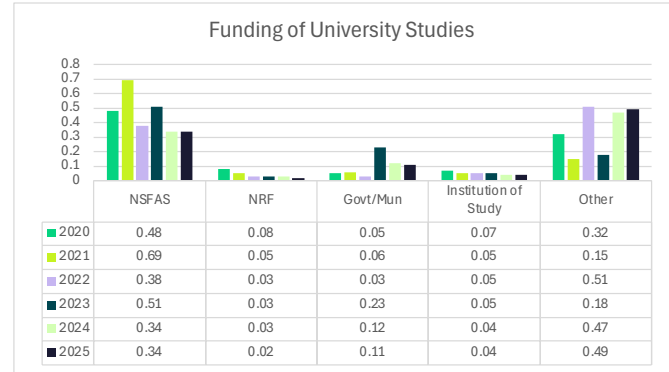
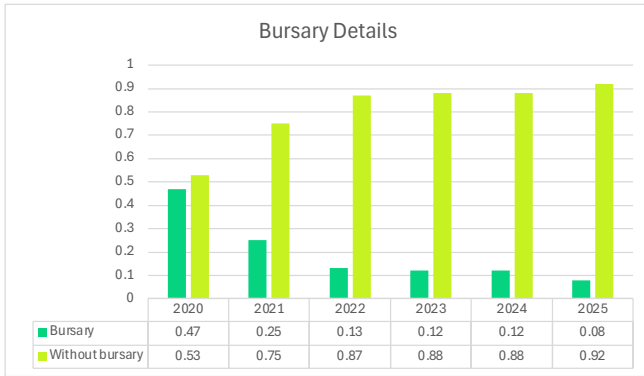
A web-based survey was used, which was completed by students upon registration for entry to the GradStar Awards 2025. The survey took place between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025.



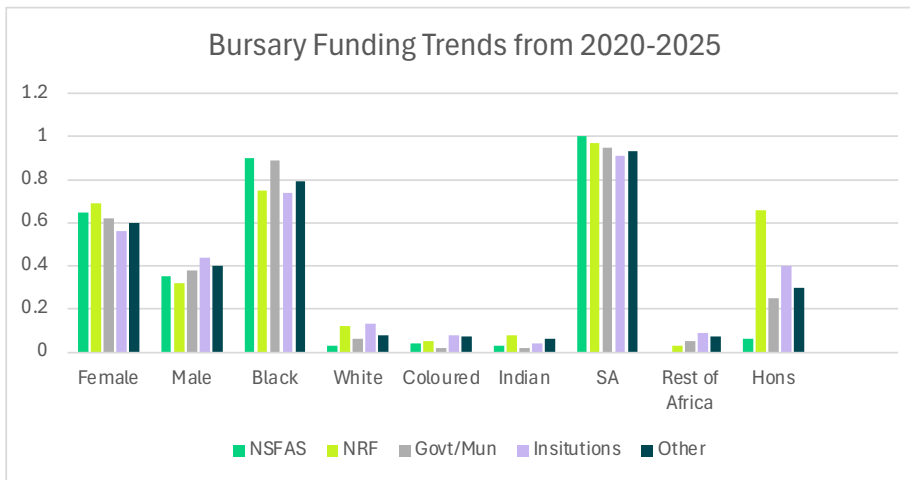
DEMOGRAPHICS



BURSARY FUNDING



Data since 2020 shows that allocations from funding sources to the students surveyed has been relatively stable across demographics:



46%

NSFAS has funded 46% of bursaries over the 6-year period.

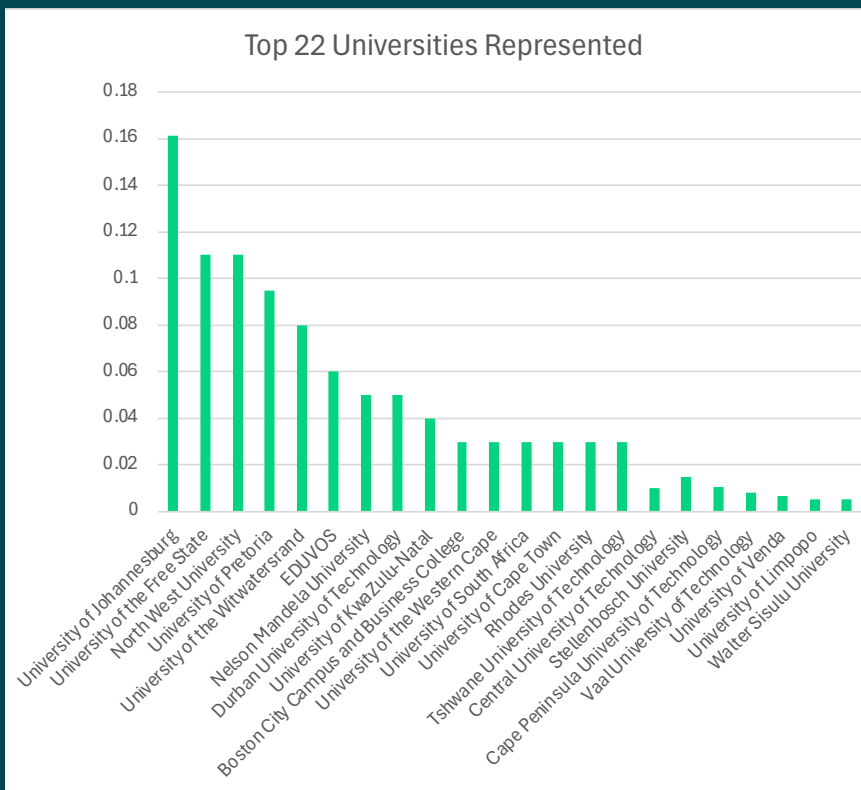
Government averages 10% of bursary funding.

10%

58%

Black females have received 58% of all bursaries awarded from 2020 to 2025.

There were 61 universities represented in the 2025 survey.



Universities with less than 1% representation:

AFDA, Africa Healthcare Nursing College, Academy for Environmental Leadership, Belgium Campus, Berea College of Technology, Boston Media House, CTU Training Solutions, Centurion Akademie (Pty) Ltd, College Campus, Da Vinci Institute for Technology Management, Damelin, Fort Cox College of Agriculture and Forestry, IMM Graduate School of Marketing, Institute of Accounting Science, Intec College, Milpark Education, Monash South Africa, Prestige Academy, Regent Business School, Richfield Graduate Institute of Technology, Rosebank Business College, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, Sol Plaatje University, Stadio, TSIBA Education, The Independent Institute of Education, The South African College of Applied Psychology, University of Durban Westville, University of Mpumalanga, University of Port Elizabeth, University of Potchefstroom, Varsity College, Vega School of Brand Communications

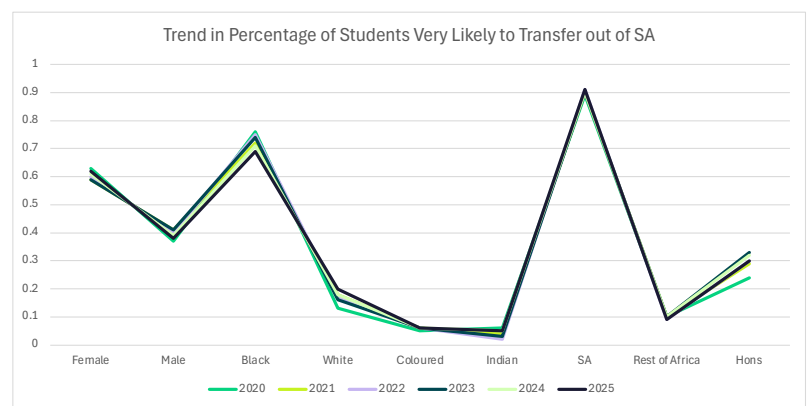
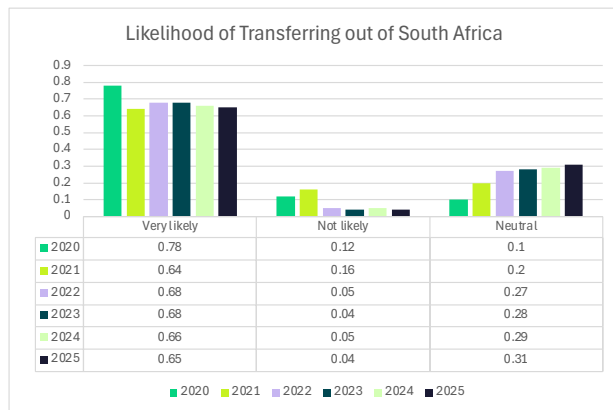
QUESTION 1: WHAT SORT OF OFFICE CULTURE APPEALS TO YOU?

Over the past six years, the survey has shown that students place high value on open and free communication between employers and employees as the most important part of office culture. Respect, teamwork, integrity and a growth mindset complete the top five office culture attributes desired by students entering the workplace.

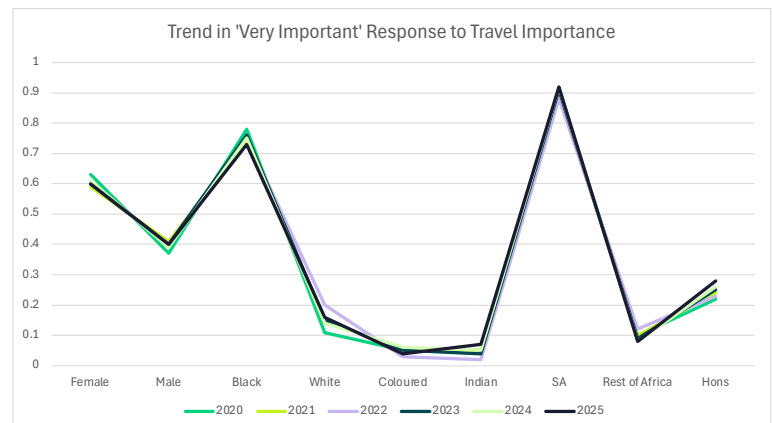
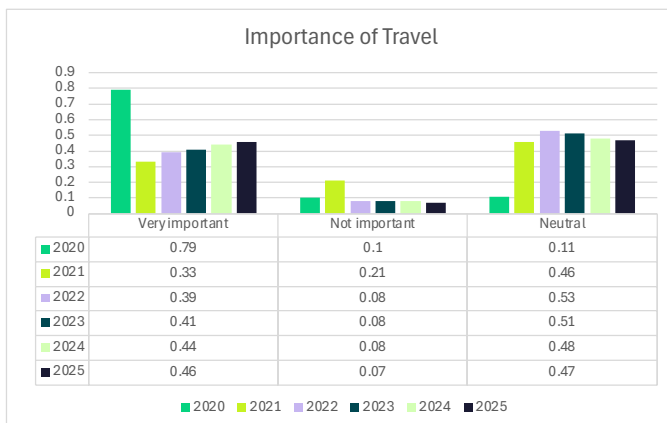
Ranked in order of preference by students:

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Open and free communication between employers and employees | 7. Mentoring | 15. Positive empowerment rating |
| 2. Respectful | 8. Non-discriminatory | 16. Working hard |
| 3. Teamwork is promoted | 9. Transparent | 17. Fun |
| 4. Integrity | 10. Innovative | 18. Formal |
| 5. Growth mindset | 11. Positive | 19. Casual and relaxed |
| 6. Study leave and opportunities for further study | 12. Professional | 20. Clan office culture |
| | 13. Friendly | |
| | 14. Entrepreneurial | |

QUESTION 2: IF YOU ARE EMPLOYED BY A GLOBAL FIRM, WHAT IS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT YOU WOULD LOOK TO TRANSFER OUT OF SOUTH AFRICA?



QUESTION 3: HOW IMPORTANT IS TRAVEL TO YOU?



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As Africa's leading digitally-driven bank, we're committed to success. Our achievements are driven by empowering each team member to learn, grow, and innovate, contributing to our collective narrative of excellence—an excellence built on the diverse stories of our colleagues.

Stories hold immense power. They foster understanding, inspire, motivate, bridge gaps, and transcend barriers, deepening our connections and sense of belonging. Through stories, we have the power to shape our future together.

@Absa your story Matters

Your story matters



QUESTION 4: WHAT BENEFITS DO YOU MOST VALUE IN AN EMPLOYER?

Students value training and learning opportunities the most in an employer. In 2024, making a difference in the community ranked higher than previous years.

All benefits ranked in order of importance to the students:

1

Training and learning opportunities

2

Financial Insurance – pension, medical, disability insurance, maternity pay etc.

3

Personal growth and development

4

Opportunity for promotion

5

Competitive salary

6. Community engagement and making a difference
7. Job Security
8. Conducive work environment
9. Flexible working hours
10. Exposure to other positions
11. Recognition programmes
12. Mentorship
13. Safe and secure environment
14. Travelling
15. Wellness programmes
16. Performance bonuses
17. Work from home
18. Car and travelling allowance
19. 13th cheque
20. Additional paid leave

QUESTION 5: WHAT WILL MAKE OR BREAK YOUR CHOICE IN AN EMPLOYER?

1. Growth potential within the company, including skills development, training and opportunities for promotion
2. Organisational culture and management style where employees are supported and cared for, as opposed to one where employees are exploited and treated unfairly
3. Competitive remuneration, rewards and recognition structure
4. Mutual respect
5. Open communication
6. A conducive working environment
7. Honesty
8. Growth focus
9. Employee benefits
10. A diverse non-discriminative environment
11. Job security
12. Availability of mentorship
13. Physical work conditions including promotion of health and wellness and working hours
14. Flexible working hours and ability to work from home
15. The company values, mission, vision and reputation
16. Inclusive and authentic leadership
17. The way the company treats their clients
18. An employer that encourages creativity
19. The company's outlook on innovation and change
20. The company's social and environmental responsibility

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SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS
VOYAGER

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

QUESTION 6: WHAT ARE YOUR PREFERRED INDUSTRIES TO WORK IN?

The top five industries that students prefer to work in are finance, ICT, public and government, ICT, education and healthcare, with the top three making up over 80% of student preferences.

1. Finance
2. Information and Communication Technologies
3. Public and Government
4. Education
5. Healthcare
6. Consulting
7. Energy and Mining
8. Construction and Engineering
9. Manufacturing
10. Human Resources
11. Retail
12. Logistics and Transport
13. Property
14. Legal
15. CSI and Sustainability
16. Agricultural
17. Automotive, Aviation and Aerodynamic
18. Tourism
19. Other

30%

FINANCE

23%

PUBLIC AND
GOVERNMENT

19%

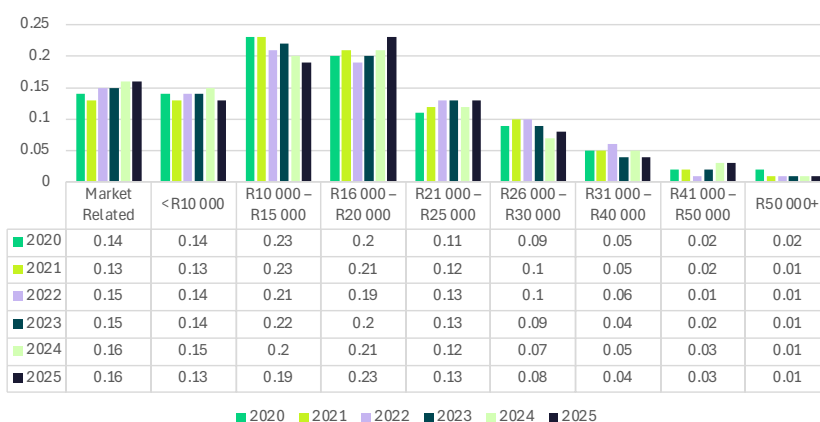
INFORMATION AND
COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGIES (ICT)

QUESTION 7: WHAT SALARY EXPECTATIONS DO YOU HAVE AS A GRADUATE?

Salary expectations for graduates have remained consistent over the past six years, with most students expecting a monthly salary of between R10 000 and R20 000.

- Female students continue to expect a lower salary than male students.
- Students in the rest of Africa expect a higher salary than South African students.
- Honours students expect a salary of between R16 000 and R40 000 per month.

Salary Expectations of Graduates



21%

The six-year average of students who expect a monthly salary of between R10,000 and R20,000 is 21%.

15% of students expect a market-related salary.

15%

3%

3% of students expect a salary of over R30,000 per month.

At RBM, we see the world differently. We are not just a mining company that employs thousands of people, we are a community of thousands of skilled and passionate individuals who choose to do mining.

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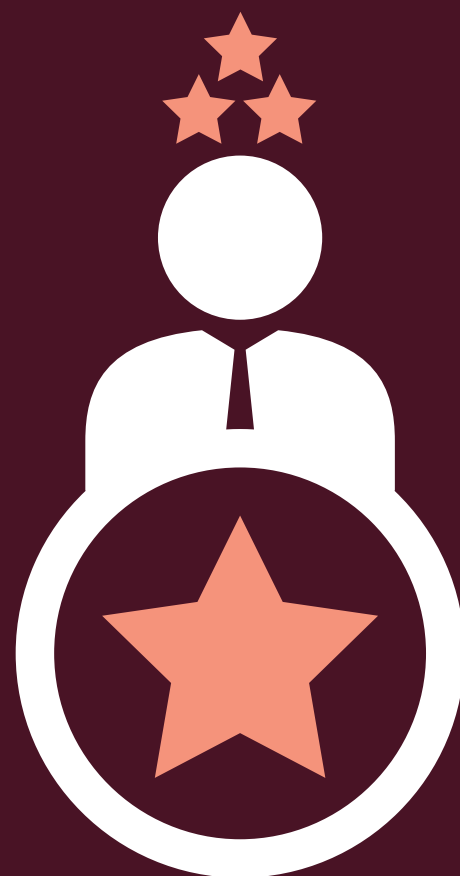
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Communities
Planet

Courage to
Try new things
Speak up
Do what's right

Curiosity,
which fosters
Collaboration
Learning Innovation



A graduate programme that goes beyond expectations.



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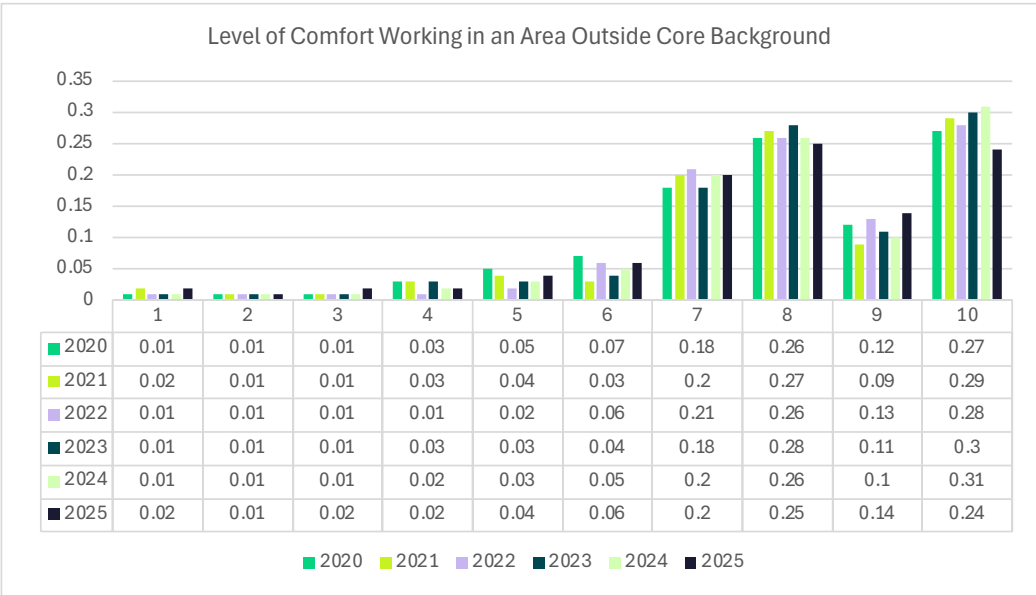
WHY I LOVE  **VE**
THIS PLACE

Living Our Values: Care, Courage, Curiosity

QUESTION 8:
ON A SCALE OF 1 – 10, HOW COMFORTABLE ARE YOU TO WORK IN AN AREA OUTSIDE OF
YOUR CORE BACKGROUND?

Most students are very comfortable to work in an area outside of their core background, with the bulk of students rating their level of comfort as 7 out of 10 and upwards.

The figure below, where 1 is least comfortable and 10 is most comfortable, shows that this is the trend over the past six years, varying minimally over time:



90%

90% of students surveyed are comfortable (score of 6/10 and higher) working in an area outside their core background.

QUESTION 9:
WHERE DO YOU FIND MOST OF YOUR INFORMATION ABOUT GRADUATE OPPORTUNITIES?

1. LinkedIn
2. University Careers Services
3. Recruitment websites
4. Employer websites
5. Word of Mouth/family/friends
6. Career Fairs
7. Google notifications
8. University Website
9. Government websites
10. University lecturers
11. WhatsApp
12. Facebook
13. Other



LinkedIn remains the primary source of information for students on graduate opportunities, closely followed by university resources.



TOP EMPLOYERS 2025

Students identified their preferred employers through an entirely organic process. The survey question was deliberately open-ended – without industry segmentation, examples or prompts. Their choices stem purely from their own awareness of the employment market, with industry categorisation applied after data collection.

It is worth noting that while government tops the list as the most preferred employer, this category represents an aggregate of all government departments, public healthcare facilities, educational institutions and state entities not separately identified in the rankings.

In 2024, the top 5 private preferred employers were Absa in first place, followed by Standard Bank, PwC, Deloitte and FNB.

Absa has once again netted the top spot as the top private preferred employer overall for 2025. Deloitte has moved up two spots to second place, with FNB also moving up two spots, now placed third. In fourth place is PwC, with Standard Bank in fifth place.



Deloitte.



FNB



Standard Bank

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR TOP EMPLOYERS OF 2025!



QUESTION 10:
LIST THE TOP 5 EMPLOYERS YOU WOULD LIKE TO WORK FOR WHEN YOU GRADUATE.

AUTOMOTIVE



2. Mercedes-Benz
3. Toyota
4. Volkswagen
5. Ford

ACCOUNTING & AUDITING

Deloitte.

2. PwC
3. KPMG
4. Ernst & Young
5. BDO

BANKING & INVESTMENT



2. FNB
3. Standard Bank
4. Allan Gray
5. Nedbank

BROADCASTING & MEDIA



2. Multichoice
3. Media24
4. Ogilvy
5. ENCA

CONSULTING

Deloitte.

2. PwC
3. KPMG
4. Ernst & Young
5. Accenture

CONSULTING ENGINEERING



2. Hatch
3. Aecom
4. Murray & Roberts
5. Aurecon

ENERGY, CHEMICALS & HEAVY ENGINEERING



2. Sappi
3. bpSA
4. Total
5. Engen

FMCG



2. Coca-Cola
3. Tiger Brands
4. AB InBev
5. Nestlé

HEALTHCARE



2. Mediclinic
3. Lancet
4. Life Hospitals
5. Ampath

HEALTHCARE INSURANCE



2. Momentum Group
3. Liberty
4. PPS
5. Platinum Life

ICT



2. Google
3. Microsoft
4. BBD Software Development
5. Apple

INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGIES

SIEMENS

2. Samsung
3. Tesla
4. ABB
5. Thermo Fisher Scientific



INSURANCE



2. Sanlam
3. Santam
4. Outsurance
5. Clientele

LEGAL



2. Webber Wentzel
3. ENSAfrica
4. Werksmans
5. Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr (CDH)

LEISURE, TRAVEL & HOSPITALITY



2. Southern Sun
3. Emirates
4. SAA
5. Sun International

MINING & MINERALS



2. Sibanye-Stillwater
3. Epiroc
4. Exxaro
5. Impala Platinum

PHARMACEUTICAL



2. Johnson & Johnson
3. Cipla
4. Pfizer
5. Adcock Ingram

PROPERTY & CONSTRUCTION



2. Concor
3. Raubex
4. Stefanutti Stocks
5. Motheo Construction

RETAIL



2. Woolworths
3. TFG
4. Takealot
5. Massmart

STATE-OWNED ENTERPRISES



2. Eskom
3. SARB
4. CSIR
5. SARS

TELECOMMUNICATIONS



2. MTN
3. Telkom
4. Cell C
5. Afrihost

TRANSPORT & LOGISTICS



2. DP World
3. DSV
4. Barloworld
5. Value Logistics





DISCUSSION AND KEY FINDINGS

Launched in 2020, the Students' Choice survey was designed to capture the perspectives of tertiary students across South African institutions regarding their employment preferences and career aspirations.

Throughout the past six years, this survey has become an essential tool for employers, offering critical insights into what drives student decision-making during their job search, and which attributes they prioritise in prospective employers.

The 2020 and 2021 reports reflected the significant impact of pandemic-related restrictions on student mobility. However, the subsequent four years have yielded more stabilised data, providing clearer insights, particularly regarding students' openness to relocation for career opportunities and their preferences around flexible or hybrid work arrangements.

Two main factors continue to shape the survey findings: South Africa's persistently high unemployment rates significantly influence how students approach post-graduation employment, with 90% expressing willingness to accept positions outside their primary field of study in 2025 (up from 87% in 2024).

Students increasingly emphasise holistic wellbeing, actively seeking workplace cultures that champion both physical and mental health support.

Open and transparent communication between employers and employees emerged as the highest-ranked workplace culture attribute in 2025, and was equally identified as the most critical factor in determining whether students would accept or decline a job offer. Students consistently demonstrate that they seek employers who embody mutual respect, integrity and authenticity, while fostering diverse, collaborative team environments.

Consistent with previous years, most students remain open to international opportunities if presented.

Interestingly, however, travel itself ranks low as a priority, likely reflecting the reality of today's digitally connected workplace, where remote collaboration enables professionals to work virtually anywhere in the world.

Training and professional development opportunities continue to top the list of desired employee benefits, surpassing personal growth initiatives and comprehensive financial packages that include pension contributions, medical aid, paid leave (including maternity and paternity), life and disability insurance, sick leave and UIF. Career advancement pathways, supportive work environments, and the ability to contribute meaningfully to communities also featured prominently among 2025 respondents.

Finance remains the most sought-after industry, followed by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), public and government sectors, education and healthcare.

Salary expectations have held steady year-on-year, with the majority of students anticipating monthly earnings between R10,000 and R20,000. A persistent gender gap remains evident, with female students consistently expressing lower salary expectations than their male counterparts. Notably, only 15% of students indicate they expect a "market-related salary", suggesting a potential knowledge gap regarding actual market compensation levels.

LinkedIn continues its dominance as the primary platform for graduate job searches, with over 21% of students utilising it, and maintaining its top position across all six years of the survey. University career resources consistently rank second, while recruitment platforms and employer websites also feature prominently. Word-of-mouth referrals, career fairs and social media channels round out the most frequently used information sources.



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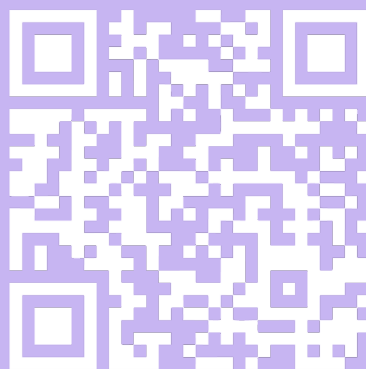
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for a life devoted to others is a life well lived."

Tshepo Kgobe, *Gautrain Management Agency CEO*



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