

# The challenge of attracting graduates - a strategic process in people resourcing

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To explore, identify and understand the issues associated with graduate attraction facing the graduate employers in Ireland, in the current economic situation.

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MA in Arts in Human Resource Management

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## Abstract

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To explore, identify and understand the issues associated with graduate attraction facing the graduate employers in Ireland, in the current economic situation.

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**Purpose** – Attracting the best from the ever-expanding pool of talent is an intense and demanding process (Branine 2008). A poor recruitment experience is not only an expensive financial damage (Cennamo and Gardner 2008) but also a barrier to the organization's performance and future. The aim of this study is to congregate and provide the essential information needed by organizations to attract graduates. The research extends on the past study and identifies the attributes necessary to become an attractive employer in a wide choice of labour market context by examining the outlooks and attitudes of employers towards graduates. It intends to provide an insight into the differences in the organizational attributes of two generations, Gen Y and Gen Z. Gender comparison in the orientations and perceptions of the graduates on the labour market will help to break the conventional views of employers around traditional career management.

**Design/methodology** – The study undertakes a mixed method approach involving two phases. In phase one, interviews with talent management specialists who directly recruit and supervise graduates from two different organizations, as well as focus group with the existing graduate employees were carried out. A shortlist of organizational attributes and graduate expectations was built into a survey of undergraduates, in phase two.

**Findings** – The findings indicated that there was a level of mismatch in the perceptions of employers and graduate employees or students. Organizations struggle to attract talent due to sector preferences of graduates. Lack of competency, cultural compatibility and leadership skills, in undergraduates are the biggest challenges to talent managers. Although gender differences in the attractiveness of the attributes of the organizations seem to be diminishing, generational differences exist, which needs in-depth exploration by the employers before designing the attraction strategy.

**Implications of the study** - It is believed that this research will provide a means of helping organizations and HR specialists to understand and adjust to changing career prospects and work patterns of graduates, especially the technology generation Gen Z, in the contemporary labour market.

# Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

*An analytical attraction strategy is critical to maximizing the value and performance of the organization.*

Companies are always in need of a constant flow of new talent or pipeline that can be trained up for management roles in the future (Arnold and Davey 1994a). Employers search for this new talent in students who are about to successfully complete an academic degree from tertiary educational institutions or ‘graduates’. Attracting the best from the ever-expanding pool of talent is an intense and demanding process (Branine 2008). A poor recruitment experience is not only an expensive financial damage (Cennamo and Gardner 2008) but also a barrier to the organization’s performance and future.

Working to improve the organizational qualities may help companies to become attractive employers (Arnold and Davey 1992). Earlier studies focused on the skills necessary for graduates to be employable in decent professions. But this information is not adequate to ensure positive working environment for organizations as well as graduates unless both the graduate employers and the graduates find their best fit (Earnest and Landis 2014) because “it seems that attracting a large number of applicants is still not a major problem but recruiting the right applicants is the main concern of many employers” (Branine 2008, pp.498). Identifying and reaching the right and targeted talent group at the right time with the right message is crucial to the graduate recruitment process and should be the primary emphasis of the Human Resource team (Breaugh, 2009).

### **1.2 Rationale of the Study**

In the recession, financial regulations had constrained organizations from implementing efficient recruitment and development strategies (Oreopoulos, Wachter and Heisz 2006) for the highly ambitious graduates. Given the recent developments in higher education, increased output of highly qualified

individuals with new approaches to career development, and emerging graduate occupations and expectations, the challenges that employers face in terms of graduate recruitment and retention is highly complex and contentious (Harrison, Heaton and McCracken 2008). Graduate employers are expected to act swiftly and efficiently not just to attract applicants but also to succeed in the race of 'war for talent'. In this period, graduates no longer preferred medical, financial and engineering jobs but were prepared to serve all the different sectors, which were traditionally for non-graduates, as they faced a challenging labour market with a complex set of ethical values (Mangan, McDermott and O'Connor 2006). However recent years have seen this state bounce back.

According to Graduate Salary & Recruitment Trends Survey 2013, there has been a growth in the overall number of graduates being hired as compared to 2012. This is a significant trend signaling that the employers have adjusted to the economic changes that have taken place since 2008 and are now prepared to predict either a stable outlook or a cautious return to growth. The recurrent explanation cited by employers for this increase has been the growth in business and a strategic focus on graduate recruitment, another indicator of a more optimistic outlook amongst graduate recruiters (GradIreland 2013).

In this economic context, graduates occupy a vital position especially in populations confronting demographic shifts and aging community, where they could be resources to increase the economic capacity and human capital of the country (Brown and Scase 1996). Given the extent to which graduates represent the largest generational cohort joining the work place whether they are affordable, provide return on investment, equipped with up-to date business skills and offer a diversity of new perspectives are still under scrutiny (Graduate Recruitment Bureau 2012).

Now that the economy seems to be recovering and more graduate opportunities being created in the market again, the most interesting question that surfaces is - if the supply of graduates (regardless of the sector), and the vacancies is on the rise, why do employers still report difficulties in filling these vacancies (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development CIPD, 2013). The Accenture

Great Expectations Survey reported that the major setback in talent management was that the expectations and attitudes of graduates did not match with the realities of the working world (Abbatiello, LaVelle and Smith 2014). Has the economic situation triggered any disparity in the expectations of graduates? Obviously not, Connor, Hirsh and Strebler in the 1990's emphasized that organizations, which fail to understand the expectations of graduates will certainly face deficit of skills as well as high turnover amongst existing graduates, which was backed by Bedingfield (2005) who proposed that it was the utmost responsibility of the organizations to make clear decisions and define the purpose of the graduate scheme and to focus the communication process to the new entrants. Lindquist (2008) asserted that there were not only dissimilarities in the expectations of graduates and employers, but also between generations and gender (Terjesen, Vinnicombe and Freeman 2007) of graduates.

Organizations with impressive graduate structures and systems endure the risk of competition (Bedingfield 2005) while organizations with less significant systems run the risk of graduates becoming uninterested in the job and moving to another organization (Herriot 1989, cited in Branine 2008). Therefore, an organization's successful survival depends on their proficiency in planning the recruitment activities of this regiment (Arnold and Davey 1992) and offering a competitive graduate proposal. Despite the way things look, companies are still hiring and students are still-hunting. Labour market is much more complex than the previous years and the employers have to actively promote their vacancies in order to avoid the risk of not being able to attract the best skills (CIPD, 2004).

There is substantial amount of research on graduate recruitment process, since the 1980's and the existing pieces of literature brings out the relationship between various dimensions of talent management and provides information on the graduate expectations in the contemporary world of work and its impact on their career; the attributes needed by organizations in order to attract graduates in a demanding and challenging economic landscape (Shaw and Fairhurst 2008) and the constructs that define and influence graduates that would help them see their long-term career in an organization (Oreopoulos, Wachter and Heisz 2006).

However, in this whole sequence of recruitment, attraction (getting students to apply) plays a vital role (Carlson, Connerley and Mecham 2003).

The aim of this study is to congregate and provide the essential information needed by organizations to win this 'Battle for talent'. The research extends on the past studies and identifies the attributes necessary to become an attractive employer in a wide choice of labour market context. The study also seeks to compare the anticipations of two different generations, gen Y's (students who graduated from 2007-2013 and would graduate in 2014) and gen Z's (students graduating from 2015 onwards). It intends to provide a holistic view of the elements involved in primarily attracting the graduates by examining the outlooks and attitudes of employers towards graduates. Gender comparison in the orientations and perceptions of the graduates on the labour market will help to break the conventional views of employers around traditional career management. It is believed that this research will provide a means of helping organizations and HR specialists to understand and adjust to changing career prospects and work patterns of graduates in the contemporary labour market.

Further down the research,

Chapter 2 focuses on the key literature regarding graduate attraction process. The stages in the attraction procedure such as advertising and marketing the vacancies have also been discussed. Literature elaborates the differences that exists between employers and graduate employees and also highlights the factors of attraction that have been identified by previous studies.

The chapter also explains the research aims and objectives that have emerged from the literature and former studies by experts in the field of graduate recruitment.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology that has been employed to address the aims and achieve results. It demonstrates the research design or the plan of action, which includes identifying target population, sampling technique, data collection methods and the ethical implications of the study.

Chapter 4 analyses the research findings in different stages using specific interpretation tools and compares the outcomes to the literature to recognize themes of convergence and variance.

Finally, Chapter 5 synthesizes the key findings in relation to the research aims, provides recommendations to the stakeholders and summarizes the conclusions drawn from this study.

Some recommendations for future research have also been suggested.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

### **2.1 Graduate recruitment**

Graduate recruitment has become one of the robust challenges for Human resources in organizations that have understood that their future depends on engaging the best graduates. Carlson, Connerley and Mecham (2003) identify that recruitment plays an important role in organizational success and the recruitment style and approach makes a significant difference. Although the number of students completing higher studies has increased and the graduate market is healthier, employers are still unable to find the right fit for their organizations (CIPD 2006). The debate, on behalf of employers is, whether graduate schemes are profitable, sustainable and can add value to the organization, considering the high outflow, poor return on investment, time devoted by managers and the retention issues that it involves (Bedingfield 2005). This array of hitches clearly elevates the challenge for Human Resource Development specialists and puts forward a vital question – Why invest in graduate recruitment? Bedingfield (2005, pp.201) gives a compelling argument that:

“Well-managed graduate development schemes are particularly good at growing a group of people who are well networked within the organisation and who know the organisation as a strategic whole. These individuals are likely to be more successful at gaining internal support and enthusiasm for important projects and more astute at perceiving and solving strategic problems”.

According to the CIPD (2013) report, 7 out of 10 employers agreed that graduates bring benefits, such as versatility, improving their employer brand, and developing their talent pipeline by bringing in new and fresh ideas and digitalization to business. Given the pros and cons to every organizational decision, it becomes vital to understand the factors that drive this whole process called ‘Graduate Recruitment’ which goes beyond the simple dynamics of

demand and supply (Carlson, Connerley and Mecham 2003). In the past, before the commercial catastrophe, employers were more realistic and unbiased towards entry level jobs (Knowles and Stewart 2001), and understood the reimbursements of engaging young people (Branine 2008), which gave the graduates access to organizations. However, in any business, one of the biggest stimulus is the variation in the environment and economic situation.

Prior to a detailed discussion, a basic question that needs clarification is whether graduate jobs are the same as graduate programs? Are these terms identical? According to Kiley P (2012), an author in GradIreland, “graduate job is any job that a graduate gets in the labour market, an entry-level permanent or temporary job that requires a degree”, especially in SME’s whereas a graduate program is a structured, formal training program offered by graduate recruiters or generally large multinational organizations, focusing on training and development, mentoring and building talent pipeline leading towards management roles and leadership positions. Graduate programs lasts for a year or two requiring graduates to demonstrate impressive academic as well as soft skills such as communication, presentation, problem-solving and analytical abilities. However, it has been noticed that there is virtually no literature that handles the concept of ‘formal graduate programs’ as being different from graduate jobs and in many instances, authors have used these terms interchangeably. Therefore, the research assumes the use of graduate jobs and programs as one, namely graduate opportunities in the labour market.

## **2.2 Economic Context**

A couple of years before, the Irish economy was clearly in a financial crisis where we have seen house values dropping at unprecedented levels, consumer confidence hitting the bottom, and most significantly the job market eroding rapidly with job losses and salary freezes (Pacurar and Walker 2011). Whether in terms of falling employment, rising unemployment, redundancies or insolvencies, the labour market in Ireland and UK had experienced the full damage of the economic downturn. Pay and benefits, training budgets and

provisions were declined markedly in the public sector and modestly in the private sector (Coughlan, Fahy, Roche and Teague 2011).

In many organizations, the graduate programmes were washed out. Firms responded by increasing flexibility in employee numbers where more part-time and temporary workers were employed instead of full time workers (Coughlan, Fahy, Roche and Teague 2011). There was a structural shift towards high skilled jobs and preference to recruit experienced workers who were immediately productive (CIPD, 2013). According to an article in *The Telegraph* (2013), UK employers, cut down on graduate recruitment by 0.8% in 2012, while the annual college tuition fee had risen to £9000 and the number of students working in non-graduate jobs in the UK had increased by 6%. The report suggested that the scramble for jobs was so tough that on an average, employers received 56 applications per graduate vacancy while the number of vacancies itself had dropped down by 11%. The *GradIreland* (2009) survey, reflecting its 2008 trends in Ireland, shows that the average number of graduate positions or entry level jobs per company was just 5, down from 6 the year previously, and this sank to 4 in the next year. So it is evident that the graduate intakes were immediately and drastically cut as a direct result of the financial collapse. Securing a productive employment after college was the biggest challenge with more and more companies backing off from college campuses and concentrating on internal recruitments to ensure that they had the appropriate staff and skill set to deal with the future of the company in providing a versatile and innovative approach to business and customer solutions (*Graduate Careers Ireland* 2009).

It is evident that the economic context has had an immediate impact on the career options of newly cast graduates but it still remains to be proved to what extent does it have an effect on the long-term prospects, job quality, success and earnings (Pacurar and Walker 2011). From a historical perspective, apart from the other benefits of a university degree, a common assumption is that a degree provides access to a graduate job and virtually any job offer was accepted by graduates during recession (Anderson, Lievens and VanDam 2002, cited in Branine 2008). Tervi (2009), Pacurar and Walker (2011), Oreopoulos, Wachter and Heisz (2006) provide evidence that job scarcity and fear of unemployment



had led graduates to make wrong choices to enter the labour market, resulting in switching employments frequently.

### **2.3 Higher education**

Recently it has also been noted that more young people take up to higher education and gain degrees, which result in excess supply of highly skilled graduates (Walker and Zhu 2003), and the negative impact being that this wide spectrum of skills gave the employers the freedom to substitute graduates into the non-graduate domains, causing attrition of the value and monetary benefits of higher education (Elias and Purcell 2004). However there are marked differences within sectors. The findings of the study conducted by Harrison, Heaton and McCracken (2008) indicated that sector is an important differentiating factor in terms of recruiting, developing and retaining graduates. This sectoral segregation is also highlighted in the GradIreland survey (2013) ‘Graduate salary and graduate recruitment trends’. The complexity is the combination of the demand for highly qualified graduates in a few sectors, but the relatively low supply in these key areas (GradIreland, 2013). The sector deviations and discrepancies have led large companies to recruit across a number of different areas. However, there is not enough evidence in literature that implied if these sectoral challenges are industry based because, certain international banks are taking on as many IT graduates as they do with business and finance backgrounds and many of the IT companies recruit engineers and accountants (Harrison, Heaton and McCracken 2008; GradIreland 2012). The Recruitment and Employment Confederation’s (UK), Chief Executive Kevin Green reveals that, in six years, the current period is the best time for graduates entering the job market where the employers intentions of hiring young students is high (Kirton 2014).

### **2.4 Advertising and Marketing the job**

A small group of experts claimed that the incompatibility between employers and graduates originates even before handshakes and there is more to it.

Branine (2008) notes that the challenge of attraction begins at the stage of marketing the job. Although the number of vacancies is down overall, there are still opportunities being advertised. While some companies advertise through the

recruitment websites and agencies, some do through the college careers services and their online vacancy boards (Keenan and Scott 1985). Given the costs involved, many companies with opportunities do not advertise them. Belt and Mason (1986) found that ambiguity of information on applicant qualifications in a job advertisement had a negative effect on the quality of applicants responding. Herriot and Rothwell (1981), cited in Keenan and Scott (1985) found that recruitment brochures, career services and fellow students and friends (Keenan and Scott 1985) were stimulus in the attraction of potential applicants to organizations. As years moved on, young people are more likely to use social and professional media to search for job opportunities than the websites or career advisory boards (CIPD 2013). Gatewood, Gowan and Lautenschlager (1993) suggest that logically, recruitment information or adverts is significant for students to decide whether or not to pursue employment with an organization and all subsequent decisions and outcomes of the job search, as it also creates a general organizational image. The link between where organizations should direct their campaigns and where students search for jobs is an important component to consider in this process. Therefore, source of advertisement forms a vital part of the attraction strategy.

## **2.5 Selection procedure**

Adding another dimension to this argument are studies that suggested that graduates tend to have positive views of their employers based on the sophistication of the selection procedures they follow (Branine 2008). Rewinding back to 1985, Alderfer and McCord cited in Keenan and Scott (1985), suggested that the interviewer had a positive influence on students for job offer acceptance while Arnold and Nicholson (1989) suggested that youth-friendly and transparent selection process and easy to use application forms would attract the bright and best talents. Katerina Rudiger, Head of Skills and Policy campaigns at the CIPD emphasized that

“employers needed to redirect their young people selection procedures in order to underline the need for positive and professional attitude at work, which goes way beyond qualifications and academic results” (Kirton 2014).

The GradIreland (2012) survey indicated that 5% candidates backed off from choosing an employer due to improper and slow selection and assessment process. This was also evidenced in Arnold and Davey (1992) study that selection and induction tended to have positive influence on the graduates and their decision to join an organization.

Most researches of the past, focuses on the first year of the graduates career dealing with transitional issues, attitudes and behaviours and work place compatibility issues while some others deal with the subsequent years and matters of retention. But there are only handfuls of research that deal with the initial issues that arise even before the recruitment process. However, these studies provide a useful background and valuable insights and clues into what we could expect in our research.

## **2.6 Expectation mismatch**

The next significant issue raised by experts is the differences in the graduates' expectations from the organization to that of the employers' perceptions of the graduates and what do the graduates and the employers actually offer. In recent years, graduates are entering the labour market with high expectancies and entrepreneurial approach (Roberts 2001). When a mismatch occurs in the graduate expectations, such as the role, development path and working life from what the employer can more likely provide, "begins the churn in the future of the organization, as well as the graduates, specifically, for those whom it will be their first experience of the industry" (Bedingfield 2005, pp.201). Connor, Hirsh and Strebler (1990) concede that graduates are assenting to a culture of 'phased employment' with a new kind of work pattern and soon moving from one organization to another to gain experience. They argue that the incongruity of expectations and reality, is the most probable cause of poor attraction (or even retention) of talent. Many researchers also propose that unmet work expectations and mismatches between employer and graduate perspectives are the most commonly cited reasons for frequent job shifts and transitions. Substantiating this argument, according to the GradIreland (2013) report, 32% of graduate

employers quote 'graduates perceptions of careers' as an important challenge to be overcome in their graduate recruitment activities. This also indicates that, in an International and open labour market, graduate employers are not only combating amongst themselves to acquire the top talent but also the credibility of Ireland itself is an important factor in attracting the best graduates to accept roles based in Ireland. The majority of employers prefer graduates to be willing to travel or move but according to research conducted by AGCAS (Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services) and AGR (Association of Graduate Recruiters) in UK, nearly 40% of graduates prefer to stay near their family and friend. This is another example of the mismatches between employers' and graduates' expectations (Office of National Statistics 2013). The work-based expectations of graduates (Sturges, Guest and Davey 2000, cited in Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs, 2013) relate to issues including promotion, salary, status, and the level and difficulty of work. Sturges, Guest and Davey 2000 cited in Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs (2013) found that graduates employed in large organisations are often left with unmet expectations of career management while in a study conducted by Arnold, Schalk, Bosley and VanOverbeek (2002), expectations of graduates were under-met in the areas of training, salary, and benefits. Reflecting these studies, Zhao (2006) found that organisations lack general understanding and underestimate the expectations of graduates. The latest CIPD report 'Driving New Success Strategies in Graduate Recruitment 2014' states that two-thirds of students resign from their first job in less than a year due to expectations mismatch (Churchard 2014). The graduate expectations study conducted by Accenture exhibits that entry level graduates' expectations are unsatisfied at various levels such as providing formal training, salary and significantly 46% graduates reported they were underemployed.

From the graduates perspective, exercising their abilities, conferring their status, career development, travel to work and company culture are a concern (Harvey and Contributors, cited in Harrison, Heaton and McCracken (2008). Harrison, Heaton and McCracken (2008) indicated in their study that organizations that struggle to meet graduate expectations on salary provide effective mentoring, career progression and development opportunities as a trade off for pay. Garavan and Morley (1997) stated that high salary levels, career planning and counseling

were the most important hopes of the graduates that attracted them to an organization. Mayrhofer, Steyrer, Garger 2005, cited in Mangan, McDermott and O'Connor (2006) noted that graduates are attracted to organisations that provide growth and learning opportunities.

There is always another side to the coin. From an employer standpoint, remuneration, skills (or soft skills), competencies, communication and appreciation for the organisation and the business are the key expectations from graduates. Meyer, Strunk, Shiffinger and Iellatchitch (2005) who studied the career choices of graduates conclude that graduates with characteristics such as high flexibility, motivation, assertion, self-monitoring, leadership and networking proved to be the best choice for organizations. The GradIreland (2012) survey reported that 64% of graduate employers found 'finding applicants with the right skills' as their biggest challenge.

Literature still needs to elaborate on how should organizations promote themselves in order for the graduates to comprehend what to expect or which method of selection would reveal the true identity of the applicants?

## **2.7 Graduates choices – Extrinsic or Intrinsic factors**

Authors who studied the work expectations of graduates also shed some light on the choices of graduates regarding the salary levels and other motivational factors leading us to think whether the graduates expect remuneration, salary, pay and benefit in kind or organizational effectiveness, policies and procedures, ethics and culture. In other words, what are the factors that enhances the attractiveness of an organization? Arnold and Davey (1992, pp.46) noted,

“Past research is almost unanimous in concluding that graduates say they choose their first post-graduation jobs and employers on the basis of job characteristics, training and career prospects more than starting salary, location, prestige or other "extrinsic" factors”.

There are too many experts in this space casting their votes and tossing their opinions at each other. Once again, there are opposing views in literature that

supports either group. However, Keenan and Scott (1985) rightly noted that these preliminary studies dealt with the final employment decision making rather than the initial decision to apply. Gatewood, Gowan and Lautenschlager (1993), Sheridan (1992), CIPD (2006) proposed that the graduates intentions of choosing an employer depends on cultural congruence and corporate image. Mirroring this statement, Judge and Bretz (1992) elucidated that organizational emphasis on value orientation and ethics enhances the attractiveness of working environment to newcomers. The authors established that individuals were more attracted to employers whose ethics and values were similar to their own. Some researches suggested that offering an attractive set of benefits would add to the package, especially good training schemes and graduate programs, the organizations ethics and integrity, operational effectiveness, working conditions and work-life balance. Almost all of the past research concludes that graduates choose their first employer on the basis of job characteristics, training and career prospects, growth opportunities, flexibility and autonomy, placing career prospects on top of the list or in other words “intrinsic” factors (Hawkins and Barclay 1990; Keenan and Scott 1985; Arnold and Davey 1994; Sackett and Ostgaard 1994) more than salary, location, bonus, incentives or other "extrinsic" factors, Zedeck (1977) found that job advancement opportunity emerged as the most important attribute. Sheridan (1992) argued that the force of cultural values was much stronger than the combined influence of the extrinsic factors of the labour market and demographic characteristics. GradIreland, in 2013, conducted a survey of 3,090 Engineering and IT students studying in Ireland probing for their attitudes towards employers, in which, good career prospects scored the highest followed by work-life balance, training and development and personal development. According to Universum’s survey of 65,679 undergraduates at top academic institutions in US, the top preference for being an attractive employer is work life balance. Universum’s research (2013) also indicates that an organization’s people and culture has been consistently important to students in recent years, while remuneration, advancement opportunities and an employer’s reputation have become less important. Earnest and Landis (2004) produce evidence that perceptions of working as a team and interdependence in jobs has an effect on individual decisions to join an employer.

There were some exceptions to this argument. Connor, Hirsh and Strebler (1990) claimed that initial job choice was based on short-term benefits rather than longer-term career prospects. Feldman and Arnold (1978), cited in Rynes, Schwab, and Heneman (1983) also reported that pay and benefits had greater influence than the intrinsic factors. In their analysis of salary, location, promotional opportunities, and type of work, Rynes, Schwab, and Heneman (1983) noted that pay was an important determinant of job attractiveness. According to the Graduate Recruitment Bureau (2012) common techniques used to attract graduates, is to offer remuneration, reward or benefits including competitive salary, golden handshakes or bonuses, annual leave entitlements, pension, gym memberships and discounts on products and services. Interestingly, competitive salary expectations was not a key challenge for recruiters during the economic pressures in 2010-2012 but according to the CIPD survey report in 2013, 16% of employers stated that offering competitive graduate starting salaries was a challenge in their graduate recruitment activities.

These studies provide the background for our understanding of how job and organizational attributes affect the attractiveness of employers. However, our knowledge of how do graduates acquire these information regarding employers seems to be limited, reminding the sources of information, vacancy boards and websites.

## **2.8 Generation and Gender comparisons**

Lindquist (2008) provided evidence that the policies and methods used previously to secure the best candidates from previous generations are likely to be relatively ineffective with Gen Y. Generation Y have been found to be noticeably different from their predecessors Gen X (Lindquist, 2008). Reflecting on this, Crumpacker and Crumpacker 2007, cited in Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs (2013) proposed that Gen Y preferred to travel, socialize and move from one organization to another, valued mentoring and training. Collaborative environment, honesty and fairness are their preference whether it is organisational decision-making processes or deciding the corporate social responsibility (Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs 2013). The CIPD (2006) survey also

noted the importance Gen Y graduates placed on good relationships with employer and company culture. According to Broadbridge, Maxwell and Ogden (2007a) Gen Y join an organization with high expectations such as significant responsibility in the workplace, creative and challenging work, motivating team, clear feedback and positive managers. Their working style incorporates empowerment, multi tasking and result oriented work with a preference for technology, autonomy, career prospects, training and skills usage (Shaw and Fairhurst 2008). The importance of career prospects and career progress to these graduates is well sustained by these authors. Despite empirical evidences from previous researches suggesting that Gen Y hold characteristically high expectations relating to work, the authors Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs (2013) were unable to provide evidence through their study, the reason being that certain characteristics or issues of Gen Y were not adequately assessed. However, this study has been the first instance to provide intergenerational comparison and hence deemed a valuable contribution to the literature. Terjesen, Vinnicombe and Freeman (2007) in their study, identified that there was also dissimilarities in gender where the career expectations of female students is different to that of the males. Where care for employees, friendly culture, stress-free working environment and standard working hours were the ideal employer characteristics for women; men preferred long term career progression, training and development, dynamic approach to business and very high starting salary (Terjesen, Vinnicombe and Freeman 2007) and also recommend that women are the fastest growing section of the labour market and recruiters need to channelize the attraction strategies appropriately. A most recent survey by global research and advisory firm Universum found that the average starting salary expected by male business students is more as compared to females (Irish Independent 2014) which has been attributed to the negotiating power of men. However, literature reminded the greater levels of career orientation, preference and autonomy by females in the labour market.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

Acknowledging the complexities in various spheres of the graduate attraction process such as economy, business, expectations, skills, talent shortage,



globalization and so on, it remains to be justified what is the underlying reason for these complexities? Organizations and the job conditions change with economic conditions, business strategy and management philosophies and decisions (Arnold and Davey 1994) and so do graduate expectations. Williams and Owen 1997 cited in Branine 2008 argued that “although new graduates have traditionally sought employment with large organizations it now appears that this will have to change and the markets for the new graduates must be found in the expanding small and medium enterprise (SME) sector” and therefore becoming an attractive employer is no longer guaranteed with the conventional approach to campuses. Although the CIPD and various institutions in the UK have carried out research in this arena of graduate recruitment, there appears to be a lack of research in Ireland into the effectiveness of this process and specifically attraction techniques and its outcomes. Moreover, there are very limited resources on the themes such as expectation disagreements in gender and generations of graduates. Does location play a major role in the attraction process, do graduates prefer the spotlight on local market or global market – are topics yet to be investigated. In addition, it is a known fact that the Information and Communications technology (ICT) industry is at war for talent due to the scarcity of the IT skills set (Percival 2013). Sector or industry based challenges open up a new dimension for a distinctive review.

CIPD in UK and GradIreland in Ireland are conducting surveys and studies every year on the trends of graduate recruitment, to help employers and graduates understand each other better. But survey data are only trendsetters and generalization of the movements in this area and are not exclusive or critical. It is also noted, that the preceding studies are more inclined towards the graduates and fail to highlight the exertions of the organizations. Therefore, the employer perspective of the whole process needs more exploration by the experts. The literature also provides scope for gap comparisons including employer to graduates expectations, attraction factors and, gender and generational differences.

## **Aims and Objectives**

The literature review provided the scope for the research by encompassing the relevant and main theoretical aspects of the topic, which underpinned the aims and objectives of the current study. Given the extent of debates and discussions, it is evident that attraction is central to recruitment (Barber 1998). The ability to attract competent graduates is vital to organizations to ensure that the business has the competency for constant innovation (CIPD 2006). As Keenan and Scott (1985) precisely identified that focused and seamless attraction strategy is half the battle won, for which organizations need to understand themselves as well as their target population.

In his study Branine (2008) points out that there is more opportunity for graduates to understand the organizational framework before they commit to a job, as compared to organisations who have very little chance of understanding the graduates apart from what they can gather from the application, the psychometric tests and the interview. Therefore, organisations need to measure and assess the graduate expectations in detail, before they commence the employment. Secondly, organizations need to diagnose attraction difficulties and identify areas of improvement. Where the general consequences of changes in supply and demand are already well established (Carlson, Connerley and Mecham 2003), organizations needed to focus on the wider scenarios.

For instance, the issue of compensation and salary levels post-recession is becoming gradually important to both employers and graduates. We have also found contrasting evidences in previous studies that suggested that graduates demand high rate of pay in recent years (CIPD 2013) while a couple of years earlier, they were ready to accept lower pay in return for structured training and development programs, and mentoring (Quarterman 2008), and also appreciated its contribution to their career progression (Harrison, Heaton and McCracken 2008).

The literature by experts on generational differences and Gen Y graduates makes it important and timely to achieve greater understanding of the current generation of undergraduates, Gen Z and their expectations, to find the best means to recruit and retain them. Generation Z (undergraduates who are currently studying in the

second year of colleges and universities) is the newest generation entering the labour market. The difference in the attitudes, working characteristics and expectations of Gen Z may have implications on recruitment. The literature available currently regarding work expectations of graduates across generations is quite abstract. Currently, there is limited or even no empirical evidence regarding the work expectations that addresses the technology generation, Gen Z. This aspect of intergenerational comparisons on the expectations scale provided an interesting avenue for research particularly after the impairments triggered by the financial predicament.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to fill the gaps in the attraction of diverse and dynamic graduates, by understanding the difficulties of the employers and the expectations of the new generation students. The findings of this research have implications for Human resource managers who wish to overcome the challenge of attraction, and understand the most influential advertising techniques and factors that interest the current generation. The study extends on previous studies (Arnold and Davey 1992; Terjesen, Vinnicombe and Freeman 2007; Zhao 2006) which compared two groups of participants, working Gen Y and student Gen Z and the sexual orientation. This comparison was an effort to understand the generational similarities and differences. The research would provide the much-needed insight into what drives Gen Z and their decision to approach an organization (Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs 2013).

The intention of this study was also to find successful approaches and provide recommendations to organizations to address the challenges identified through the research. In a nutshell,

## **2.10 Research Objective**

**To explore, identify and understand the issues associated with graduate attraction facing the graduate employers in Ireland, in the current economic situation.**

## **2.11 Sub-Objectives**

**1. To gain insights into the perceptions and ordeals of the private sector graduate employers regarding graduate attraction.**

what are the strategies presently adopted by employers towards graduate attraction? what are their perceptions of the current students and their expectations, and is it in agreement or disagreement with the employers choices?

**2. To identify the expectancies of Gen Z graduates concerning the attributes, which make an organization attractive.**

Second (and most fundamental), what exactly are current under- graduate students' (Gen Z) preferences of employers - work characteristics, career development, induction, pay and benefits, supervision, training, organizational practices or other features? Are the graduates' choices career and development oriented, process-based, tilted towards monetary benefits or concerned with organizational culture, ethics and social responsibilities?

**3. To determine the level of mismatch in expectations between two generations – Gen Y and Gen Z and gender – male and female.**

To what extent do the above expectations vary between different generations or within gender — are some experiences more or less universal and others, generation or gender -specific? Have the choices altered with time and economic situation?

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

The preceding chapters provided the background of the study or the conceptual framework, noted the findings of relevant literature or the theoretical framework and stated the research problem relevant to graduate attraction. This chapter delivers the methodological framework, including the ethical principles of the research (Quinlan 2011). In any research project, the rationale of the study influences the choice of the scientific methods used and applied (Fowler 2002). Therefore, the alignment between the purpose of the investigation and the methodology is crucial (Fowler 2002). Therefore, before designing the methods and the data collection techniques, the researcher has identified the output criteria (Table 1) for each research objective.

<b>Aim of the research</b>	<b>Criteria for the analysis</b>
1. To understand the perceptions of the graduate employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Generate new understanding of diversified ideas and theoretical evidence</li> <li>➤ Clear and unbiased subjective interpretation</li> <li>➤ Identify the contextual stance</li> </ul>
2. To identify the expectancies of Gen Z graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Generalizability</li> <li>➤ Sizable target population</li> <li>➤ Analysis of large sample data</li> <li>➤ Test hypothesis developed from existing literature on Gen Y</li> </ul>
3. To determine the level of mismatch between employers and graduates  4. To recognize the differences in the expectations of two generations and genders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Connect to the existing evidence and explore on a small sample before testing on a wider population</li> <li>➤ Comprehensive evaluation of the differences</li> <li>➤ Control group to compare findings</li> <li>➤ Assimilation of findings from distinct sources to draw a collective inference</li> </ul>

Table 1 - Description of the criteria for analysis based on the research aims and objectives (Heyvaert, Hannes, Maes and Onghena 2013)

### **3.1 Research design**

The research methods were designed based on the criteria for analysis for each item in the research objectives (See Table 1 above). While this research is primarily concerned with graduates, it also integrates issues related to management and the organization itself. Although there is an objective or deductive outlook to every hitch, there is also a subjective or inductive stance where each individual experience and interpretation counts in a unique way (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009, cited in Quinlan 2011). Based on the references of Scandura and Williams (2000), and Miles and Huberman (1994), in the event of deficient background literature or dearth of research backdrop, qualitative research would be the most coherent fit in adding sense to open-ended questions such as an exploratory investigation which does not require a prior framework. This method was also found to be effective by Harrison, Heaton and McCracken (2008) in their study. Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs (2013) too suggested that intergenerational context and graduate expectations could be best addressed through qualitative research. However, a qualitative analysis of a small group of current students would not suffice the purpose of understanding the change in trend and needs and cannot be generalized (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2000). Hence, to ensure that a large amount of data was collected from a wider sample of current graduates, a quantitative research model was considered (Arnold and Davey 1992; Branine 2008; Fowler 2002).

In order to balance the drawbacks of the individual methods, use of interviews for gaining valid insights and surveys for gathering data, was considered a useful combination (Creswell 2006; Mangan, McDermott and O'Connor 2006). In a study conducted by Dillman, Phelps, Tortora, Swift, Kohrell, Berck and Messer (2009), mixed mode of gathering data was considered valuable in improving responses. The increasing popularity of mixed methods for social research has been evidenced in 'The Journal of mixed methods research (MMR)', which critics, evaluates and provides a detailed overview of numerous journals, authors and organizations which have used mixed methods in several domains (Heyvaert, Hannes, Maes and Onghena 2013).

Creswell (2006, pp.5) noted,

“Mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone”.

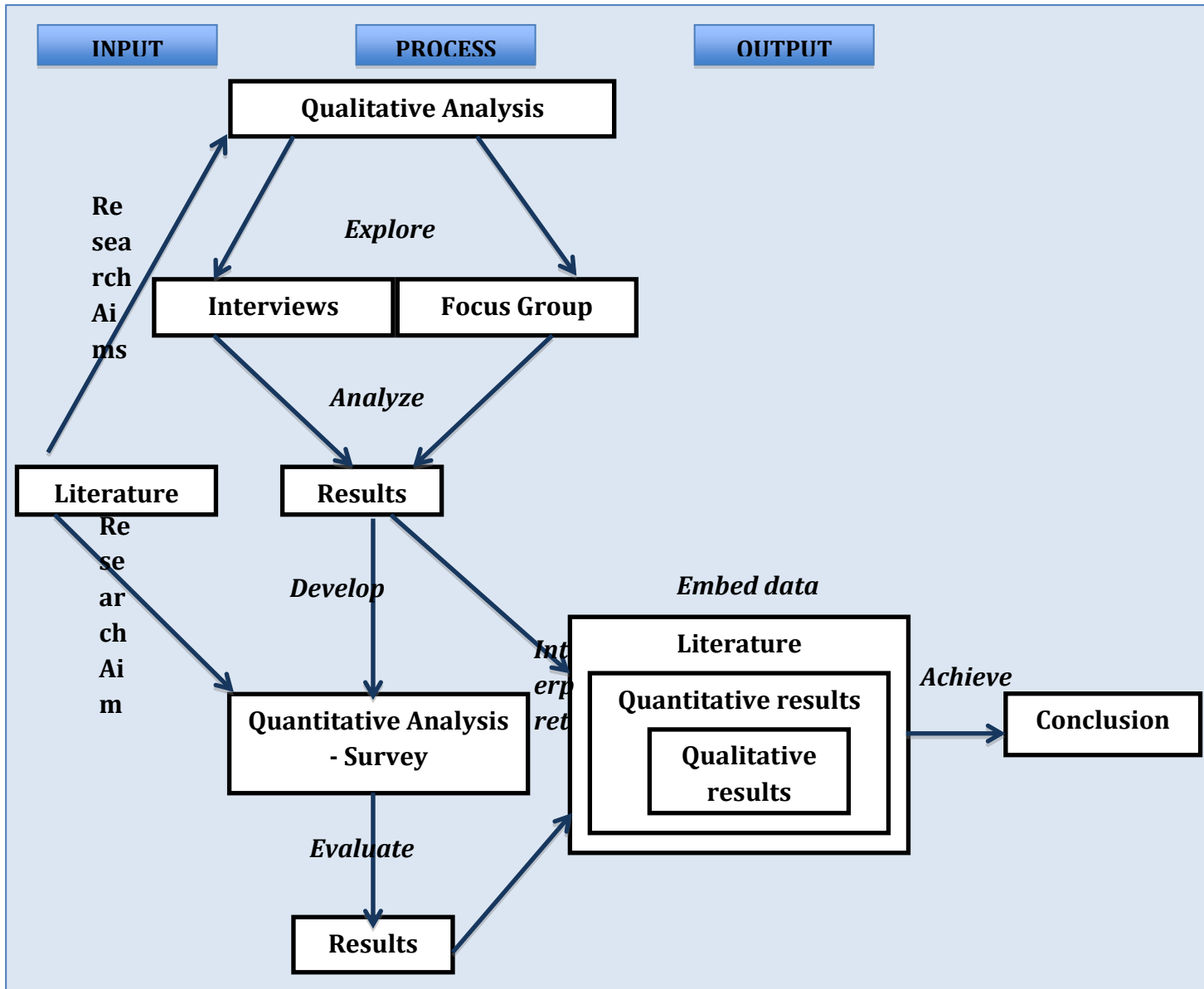
Consequently, data collection involving both quantitative and qualitative methods was deemed appropriate in examining a variety of sources of information to gain a better understanding of the changing nature of the graduates and employment (represented in Figure 1 below). The aim of the preferred methodology was to embed the theoretical framework and the reality of the experiences of the participants of the qualitative study within the quantitative study (Neuman 2000).

### **3.2 Documentary Research**

This study did not involve any complex documentary analysis (Denscombe 2007, cited in Quinlan 2011) such as company financial reports, government records or other archives and files that could have any negative impact on the study population or generate any issues of violation of privacy. However, to begin with, the researcher did some elementary Internet research. Graduate recruitment web sources such as GradIreland, Irish jobs, target jobs (UK) helped in understanding the top graduate recruiters, the type of jobs and roles advertised, the context within which the jobs were offered, salary guidelines for the jobs and other basic information; the Irish Universities Association website offered some facts and figures. GradIreland, being one of the active members in this area in Ireland, was a valuable source to expand the study and prepare an open portfolio about the topic. Once the research samples for qualitative analysis were identified and confirmed, by signing the consent forms for participation, a further study was carried out in the Internet to understand the profile of the sample

organizations, the graduate program they offered, the manner in which the programs were explained and represented in their web page.

Figure 1 – Diagrammatic representation of the steps involved in the research design (Creswell 2006)





### **3.3 Qualitative Research Method**

A qualitative research was used to identify the barriers, and strategies of attraction of a diverse population of graduate students as perceived by the employers. In addition, insight into the graduate recruitment trends was acquired from a short asynchronous online interview (Meho 2006, cited in Quinlan 2011), with a key member in this area- Mark Mitchell, Chief publisher, GTI (GradIreland).

It was proposed to conduct the qualitative study in two stages

1. Gathering information from employers about their perceptions on graduate attraction
2. Collecting data from a control group or working Gen Y graduates to allow for comparison between generations.

#### **Phase 1**

##### **Study Population** – Graduate Employers in Ireland

The organizations were denominated based on sector and size, to minimize the sampling frame. Predominantly, organizations within the same sector was important to avoid sector influences and variations in the study.

**Sample** - The talent development specialists of large, technology based, private sector graduate employers in Ireland were deemed to be appropriate participants because they were most likely the people to have realistic perceptions of the topic and experienced the theme under discussion. As we have already discussed in the literature, large organizations are more likely to engage in structured graduate programs and formal recruitment channels as compared to SME's. Organizations whose major business functions are based on technology were included, in order to understand the impact of skills deficit in this area.

**Sampling technique** - Further, the selection of the talent development managers in 10 different technology oriented organizations was based on the researcher's judgment. Non-probability, convenience and random sampling procedures were applied where the aim was to obtain preliminary, defined and detailed information (Lincoln and Guba 1994 cited in Quinlan 2011).

**Study Instrument** - Invitation, giving the details of the nature of the study and the extent of participation, with an informed consent form and information sheet (Appendix A), was sent to the attention of the talent management team to 10 organizations via email. Out of which only one organization volunteered to take part in the study. A second organization was referred to the researcher by snow bowling (by the first respondent). However, the decision to include the referent in the study was purely the researchers decision, based on his/her applicability to the study and the inclusion criteria (Neuman, 2000). The choice of two companies for the study, offered the researcher, the opportunity to analyze the common and unique features in organizations as well as compare and contrast the findings (Bryman and Bell 2011).

On account of confidentiality and sensitivity of bringing professionals from different organizations together, an **exploratory face-to-face individual interview** was proposed, which would guide the research instrument to extract the key issues and challenges associated with the graduate attraction program (Mangan, McDermott and O'Connor 2006) and to provide a substantial base for the assertions and to increase the rationality of the findings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2000).

### **Data collection**

For each organization, an in-depth semi-structured interview was held with the talent development managers who directly recruit and supervise graduates (Harrison, Heaton and McCracken 2008). The interviews were set-up at a mutually suitable time at the interviewee's business campus. The information sheet provided with the invitation gave the participants an opportunity to prepare in advance avoiding any surprises. Then, an interview schedule was decided, and conducted in a systematic manner encompassing some background information about the company, and then more general and finally some specific open-ended questions related to the topic. Under ethical obligations, due to the unintended and unforeseen sensitivity of any information given by the interviewee in relation to roles, figures, organizational issues or interpersonal issues, the participants chose to remain anonymous and every attempt has been made by the researcher

to maintain this anonymity, by changing the names of the organizations to Company A and Company B.

**Limitations** - Due to hitches in getting access to high caliber personnel in organizations, snow bowling was inevitable. The sample size (two) is only a small subset of a population of graduate recruiters (more than 100) and cannot be representative of the entire population as the experiences might vary with the industry, sector, nature of business, size of the business, global operations and many other factors of the labour market.

## **Phase 2**

### **Study population** – Graduate Employees

Graduate employees who have recently completed graduation (within the last couple of years) and are employed as interns or trainees at various stages of the business. This sample was the victims of recession and was expected to share their experiences of graduating in that period, providing a scope for comparing two generations as well as the level of expectancy in terms of organizational values or monetary benefits.

**Sample and Sampling technique** - For the purpose of analysis, the selection was a non-probability convenience sample of graduate employees within the organizations being studied - Company A and Company B. Company A graduate employees volunteered to participate in the discussion although they varied in the main discipline of education and the type of work undertaken in the company. Company B did not give consent to meet their graduate employees.

**Study instrument** - Approval to meet the graduate employees was obtained from Human resource department of the Company A prior to the investigation. Following the consent, issues that were intended to the participants, were created as sample semi-structured questions and mailed to Talent development specialist (Dillman and Salant 1994). The discussion was mainly concerning the conditions in which the graduates joined the company enfolding all aspects of the attraction process. Once again, the themes were drawn up from the literature and the

objectives of the study. Subsequently, a meeting date, time and venue were agreed with the participants. 15 graduate employees agreed to participate.

The idea was to generate data from a range of participants simultaneously by using group dynamics (Neuman, 2000), particularly when all the contributors were likely to have had similar experiences with the breakdown of the economy. Therefore, a **focus group** was proposed.

### **Data collection**

Participants, their manager and the researcher attended the session. After the formal introduction, the respondents were explained the context and the purpose of the study and the procedures for protecting confidentiality. The participation was completely voluntary and the participants were given the choice to back off at any time during the session. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, personal details, specific references or descriptions of the partakers were excluded from the research. This enabled contributors to share their experiences and views without any hesitations. It was also made clear that the report would be composed in collective expressions and all the conversations would be masked, so that no individual could be identified.

**Limitations** - The sample was drawn from one organization only. Again, owing to the sample size (fifteen), it could not be considered as a representative sample as there could be differences in expectations across groups. According to the Irish Universities Association, there are approximately over 30,000 students graduating every year in Ireland. Also, the experiences of one group do not allow for judgments to be made for other groups or contexts i.e. the findings are not transferable (Lincoln and Guba 1994 cited in Quinlan 2011).

**Data management** - The raw information collected through qualitative methods was analyzed and transcribed as conversations on paper and stored securely.

The qualitative research provided the grounds for analysis and understanding of graduate attraction as a strategic step towards recruitment, it created a theme for the study by scaling the different aspects of the attraction process combated by

the employers, as well as the graduates of the commercial calamity era. It rolled out to be indispensable to test these philosophies with the current generation in order to move forward with our research objectives.

### **3.4 Quantitative Research Method**

**Study population** – Under-Graduates (graduating in 2015 considered as Gen Z) Undergraduates who are currently in their second year in colleges and universities were deemed appropriate because of the ease of access and the focus of the research. The point of focus for this sample is their orientation or their attributes relating to employability. At the documentary research stage, the researcher noticed that the graduate recruitment for the current year (2014) has already been completed by the organizations. Therefore, the findings of the study would not have any implications for the organizations.

**Sample and sampling technique** – The sampling method used was a probability simple random selection from a pool of educational institutions. The target group was the future job applicants and the focus of the study was on those who were at the attraction stage. More relevantly, the research aims to provide some indications to the organizations, about the preferences of the new generation, variations (if any) to the existing generation, in order for them to dig deep and re-define their attraction strategy for the forthcoming year.

**Study instrument** - Given the short time to complete the data collection, cost-effectiveness, the elimination of the need for assistants, and bearing in mind that the study population is geographically scattered all over Ireland (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2000), **survey method was intended**. Surveys may be utilized for both exploratory and explanatory purposes (Babbie and Mouton 2001, cited in Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2000) and also offers the ease of automating and analyzing the data. In the context of the current study, anonymous exploratory survey research was proposed since the aim of the study was to obtain preliminary evidence on Gen Z and initial insights into the topic. Nevertheless, in the survey method it is not possible to prompt and explore issues in further detail (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2000). The research aimed to minimize the

disadvantages of the survey method by conducting the study with the essential quality. This choice of methodology is supported by previous studies that have also used quantitative approaches for this topic (Branine 2008; Arnold and Davey 1992; Terjesen, Vinnicombe and Freeman 2007; GradIreland 2013; CIPD 2009, 2014).

### **Questionnaire construction and design**

The composition of the questionnaire was very critical to ensure high quality, and reliability. Also, the data collection instrument had to be short, precise and relevant to the themes of the study. The literature and previous studies (Broadbridge et al., 2007a; Sutherland and Jordaan 2004; Arnold and Davey 1992) that used quantitative methods provided the basis for developing the questions. The information gathered from the qualitative evaluation also contributed to some of the elements in the questionnaire. In order to obtain standardized responses and allow for a comparative analysis and discussion, all the elements in the survey were close-ended questions. The main aspects of the questionnaire were information associated to the employer characteristics and the graduate preferences or in other words, the relative importance for students' decisions to apply to a particular company (Quarterman, 2008). In addition, students' opinion on the various sources of career information, offers to relocate and salary scale were also examined. Once again, personal details or demographic data indicating to any individual was excluded. Gender was used as the factor variable in order to analyze the gender differences (if any) in the preferences of graduates. The questionnaire included a small note explaining the purpose of the investigation, and participation in the study was completely voluntary.

### **Pre-testing**

No pilot testing was conducted. However, the draft questionnaire was sent to and consulted with the academic supervisor and the Talent development managers in order to determine the relevance, validity and the time taken to complete the survey. Based on their feedback, minimal revisions were made, and the questionnaire was finalized for the study.

**Data collection**

Data was collected through the use of a structured questionnaire designed using KwikSurveys, an online software package. An online package facilitates the execution of the instrument and also the collation of the results (Quinlan 2011). What are the ‘Graduates expectations of their first job and employers’ was designed as an online survey and its link was emailed in May 2014 to the Heads of career Services and research support offices of colleges, universities and Institutes of Technology (10 in total) across Ireland, for onward distribution to the second Year undergraduates, who were the sample population. The online survey was open for 2 months until the end of June 2014. Two weeks prior to the survey closure deadline, reminder emails were sent to the colleges to follow up with students, as the response rate was very low. This was the final attempt to collect the data for this investigation.

**Limitations** - The survey had to be circulated at the earliest opportunity as students were appearing for their exams in May and June 2014 and colleges were soon to be closed for the summer, after which access to students would be nearly impossible. Secondly, the sample size alone does not guarantee a representative sample of the entire population or accuracy. By applying the principles of sampling ratio in order to reduce errors (Neuman, 2000), for a large sampling frame (approximately 45,000 students join higher education every year, according to the Central Applications Office report 2012), the response rate was not sufficiently high and hence the sample cannot be established as being representative (Leedy and Ormond 2005) and cannot be accepted as a constant. Low response rate was a limitation of this method (Leedy and Ormond 2005). Although a survey method allows for precise and concise data gathering, it raises concerns of reliability, truth, dependability (Riege 2003, cited in Quinlan 2011) and multiple and self-reported data (Birnbaum 2004, cited in Quinlan 2011).

**Data management** - The data collected from the survey was stored as files and reports in the researcher’s laptop for analysis.

### **3.5 Ethical engagement of the research**

There are ethical responsibilities for the researcher towards each and every member of the study population as well as the contributors to the research. All the contributions have been acknowledged and the participants dealt in a professional manner (Bell 2005). Data protection, anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed at every stage, to the participants. Names, identities and data presented in this research were by informed consent of the participants. It is guaranteed that this research does not involve any issues of privileged access, intrusive questions or vulnerable populations, and has been undertaken in a transparent fashion (Quinlan 2011). The researcher aims to adhere to all the ethical standards set by the Research Ethics Committee for data gathering, negotiating access, engagement with participants, data analysis and disseminating the research (Collins and Hussey 2009).

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this study, the researcher believed that using only one method would not give a deep insight into the context. Therefore, the use of multiple sources of data (Creswell 2006) or the triangulation method (Yin 2008, cited in Quinlan 2011) that would yield a more comprehensive and valid representation of the phenomenon was considered to be appropriate. Altogether, the mixed method approach involving interviews, focus group and a short survey, assisted in progressing from one phase of the data collection into another.

The researcher has ensured a level of validity and credibility (Lincoln and Guba 1994, cited in Quinlan 2011) to this research by deploying the appropriate samples to represent a population (not conclusive), and data gathering methods to the study (Creswell 2006).



## **Chapter 4 - Data Analysis**

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the data collected through qualitative and quantitative methods. While the former sightsees experiences and perceptions, the latter examines facts (Riege 2003). In this section, the researcher has taken a simple but systematic approach in analyzing the data. The raw data collected from the interviews, focus group and survey was initially explored, thoroughly understood, then collapsed, grouped and finally coded in order to report the key elements of the analysis that would subsequently answer the research objectives (Bell 2005).

### **4.1 Qualitative data analysis**

Interviews and focus group, as stated above, were the data gathering techniques used as part of the qualitative analysis module. However, the preliminary insight into the level of graduate recruitment was obtained from Mark Mitchell, GTIreland.

When asked about his views on the graduate recruitment and salary trends pre and post recession, Mitchell stated that, although the overall recruitment had decreased due to the financial pressures, the graduate intake is backing to 2007 levels showed evidence that in the GradIreland survey of 2013, the predicted intakes were up to an average of 14.4 per company while in 2011, the figures were just below 11. Regarding salary, he explained that there was sectoral variation in the starting salaries paid to graduates as well as in the percentage of jobs created in different sectors and mentioned that, “the issue seems to be evident for IT and engineering employers who are experiencing problems in attracting graduates of a sufficiently high caliber”. He had also written that IT was one sector which created the highest number of graduate jobs and paid the premium salary, but suffered the most due to skills shortage.

#### **4.1.1 Interview data**

The researcher studied graduate attraction in two different organizations (to maintain anonymity, the organizations are named company A and B, and the participants 1 and 2 respectively). The purpose of the one-to-one interview was to probe, clarify and gather elaborate information on certain issues related to the process of graduate attraction, which was essential for the knowledge requirements of the research. In order to maintain consistency in the responses, the researcher followed a similar interview pattern with both the participants and did not influence or impose any preconceived ideas on their experiences. The interview schedule is presented in Appendix B.

Brief introductory facts about the samples:

- Two organizations were studied (n=2)
- One participant from each organization was interviewed.
- Both the participants were Talent development Coordinators or specialists, directly involved with the training and supervision of the graduates.
- Both the organizations are large multinationals in the online industry and their major business operations were technology centered.
- While one company is listed in the ‘100 best workplaces to work in Ireland - 2014’ (Great place to work, 2014), the other is listed in the ‘Top 100 graduate employers in Ireland - 2014’ (GradIreland, 2014).
- Both the companies offered a formal structured graduate program that lasts for 18 months involving inter-department rotational assignments and a placement opportunity at the end of the program.

#### ***4.1.2 Observations from the interview***

The data was transcribed, grouped into common themes and presented collectively as the key reflections of the interviews.

The main objective of graduate recruitment in both the organizations was succession planning and reduce overhead expenses for Human resources. While participant 1 also added “Graduates were quick learners, technology whiz, easy to shape and can be easily tailored towards leadership roles”.

Talking about the Return on Investment for graduate schemes, the participants were happy to accept that the scheme pays off in terms of retention. While participant 1 aired 70% retention rate, participant 2 expressed 80% retention. Participant 2 added that, “Once brought into the organization, they are easy to retain”.

The next major issue that was dealt was the effect of recession on the graduate schemes. At this point, the participants denoted that their respective organizations had recently entered the graduate industry. Company A has been recruiting graduates for the last 5 years; Company B since 4 years.

In responding to the number of graduate entries every year and the changes post-recession, both the participants agreed that the graduate absorption and talent development has doubled thereon. While Company A had recruited only 10 graduates in 2011, in 2013 they had 26 graduates on-board. Participant 1 supplemented the fact by saying,

“Our German and Italian counterparts recruit 60 graduates every year, 20 every quarter. In Ireland, graduates are allocated to each project based on its priority and by negotiation between teams. With limited number of intakes, allocation becomes challenging. Well, even if the numbers have increased, no more golden handshakes and imperial treatment, right from day one graduates are treated just as any other employee”.

It was a similar observation in Company B where the numbers had gone up from just 6 in 2012 to 12 in 2013. But participant 2 quickly added, “We projected to recruit 25 graduates this year (2014) but the overall number of applicants has reduced by 15%”. Participant 1 did not report any decrease in numbers of overall applicants but revealed that Company A had also experienced a 5% decrease in the graduate applications for technical or IT sector. When asked for the presumed reasons for this decline in number of applicants, participant 2 gave students preference for travelling, holidaying and migrations to US and Australia as the supposed reasons.

An unexpected revelation was that the companies imported graduates from the UK and other EU nations in order to meet their graduate numbers and demands in Ireland. In stating the reasons behind recruiting graduates from UK, both participants expressed their displeasure with the graduates in Ireland, in terms of their behaviors, attitude towards work, personal ethics and more importantly cultural compatibility. Participant 1 stated,

“We expect our graduates to understand our organizational culture, ethics and values. We have mentors for each graduate who would teach them what is required to complete their job successfully and help them in the transition from being a student to an employee, to a certain extent. However, working in teams, communication, leadership attributes and cultural binding needs to be acquired and cannot be taught”.

Participant 2 explained,

“Our organization needs self-starters who are ready to pick up on the demands of the business at the drop of a hat. Students in Ireland lack competency and are unable to cope up with the steep learning curve. We have buddy system where each graduate is being mentored, monitored and coached by a senior employee; however, the graduates are not able to meet our expectations. Therefore, we are very choosy and careful while recruiting which would atleast help us save on the replacement costs”.

Conversing about the organizations expectations from graduates and their preference – academic qualification or experience, Participant 1 chose to eliminate both and picked on cultural fitness, right attitude and potential while participant 2 selected experience over qualification and said,

“a mix of both - 450 points with 3 months work experience or 2: 1 grade with 12 months work experience is preferable because experienced candidates settle-in smoothly and are more culturally fit and possessed good interpersonal skills”.

Participant 1 also added that that the Company A preferred to hire postgraduates rather than undergraduates and particularly from the disciplines of engineering, law, human resource, marketing, finance and IT. Relatively, company B did not

have any preference for discipline or field of study. Further, participant 1 emphasized,

“Undergraduates are immature and expect to be treated like kids and royalties. They fail to understand the realities of the world. Working culture is very different to a student life and they struggle immensely in understanding the difference”.

The next and the most fundamental issue related to the research was the attraction strategy. The discussion included topics related to techniques, and steps taken by the organizations to reach the students. Company A and B adopted similar attraction techniques, which included advertisements in company website, sourcing through college career services, participating in career fairs and campus events. Participant 1 mentioned,

“Our company believes that the idea of employment and employer should be developed right from school. Hence, we run campaigns in schools. As far as universities are concerned, we focus our campaigns to specific campuses such as D, E and F\*\*. These colleges consult with us before designing their academic curriculum and hence we know we can find the right people in these campuses”.

Participant 2 shared a similar view and had their own preference of higher educational institutions D and G\*\*, where the courses are custom made for company B. Participant 2 also added that the “quality of existing graduate employees gave an indication of the colleges and disciplines to source from”.

Moving on and addressing the factors that influence the whole process, Participant 1 and 2 agreed that it was a combined force of business calls, quality of applicants and availability of resources. Further, participant 1 explained,

“demands of the business has a huge impact on the graduate recruitment process. For example this year, our company is hiring only 5 graduates as the business is venturing into a new arena and we have been asked to hire more experienced colleagues and reduce the number of graduates”.

(\*\*The researcher has disguised the name of the colleges and universities mentioned by the participants in order to maintain the esteem and respect of other colleges intact. Assessing the

college or university that produces best quality students is not the intention of the research or the researcher. It was purely the perception of the participants).

Graduates choice of industry was quoted as a major setback by the respondents. The other factors that were cited were shortage of skills in Ireland, offering competitive salary, meeting the unreal expectations of the graduates and offering working environment like Google and Facebook. Participant 1 also added that the company had increased the graduate salary scale from 25 to 30K in the previous year to meet the graduates' requirements.

Participant 2 supplemented that,

“Graduates prefer travelling, working on international assignments, high salary and career progression within a short timespan which are challenging for the organizations”.

Finally, Participant 1 was glad to make some recommendations to colleges and universities. Participant 1 said,

“Colleges need to produce proactive and skilled graduates and not merely academics, especially at the undergraduate level. Analytical skills, communication, presentation and interpersonal skills are mandatory”

while participant 2 said, “Students need to learn and develop certain skills that would take them a long way in their career. Education alone does not suffice”.

#### **4.1.3 Focus Group data**

The graduate employees (addressed as ‘GE’ from now on) who participated in the focus group were experts in some way in expanding the knowledge and making useful contribution to the topic under research. The graduates were asked to think back to the time when they were seeking employment and to reveal what had influenced their decision to apply to a particular company i.e. share their ‘lived’ experiences. As it was not a formal interview, no template was used and no choices were provided by the researcher. Only the themes for discussion (included in Appendix C) was initiated by the researcher and the spontaneity of the response was rather very important in recording the results. Once again, data collected in a 60-minute session, was transcribed, grouped into relevant themes

and presented collectively using numerical illustration tool (Bar and Pie charts), as the key contemplations of the focus group.

Basic facts about the sample:

- Number of participants was 15 (n=15).
- Number of males was 9 and 6 were females.
- All the participants were graduate trainees of Company A, involved in different projects and facets of the business.
- The participants belonged to a mix of educational backgrounds such as engineering, finance, IT and human resources.
- All the participants were postgraduates, and more or less belonged to the same age group. This information was vital to the research as the sample represented a single generation, the Gen Y. Although the researcher had no intentions of inclusion criteria for the focus group, ambiguity of information from a mixed generation or level of education (undergraduates or postgraduates) was avoided.

#### ***4.1.4 Observations from the focus group***

Source for gathering information about the graduate employers

As shown in figure 2, 10 out of 15 participants responded that employer websites and college career services were the commonly used sources. Some participants admitted that the graduate career websites such as GradIreland was very useful.

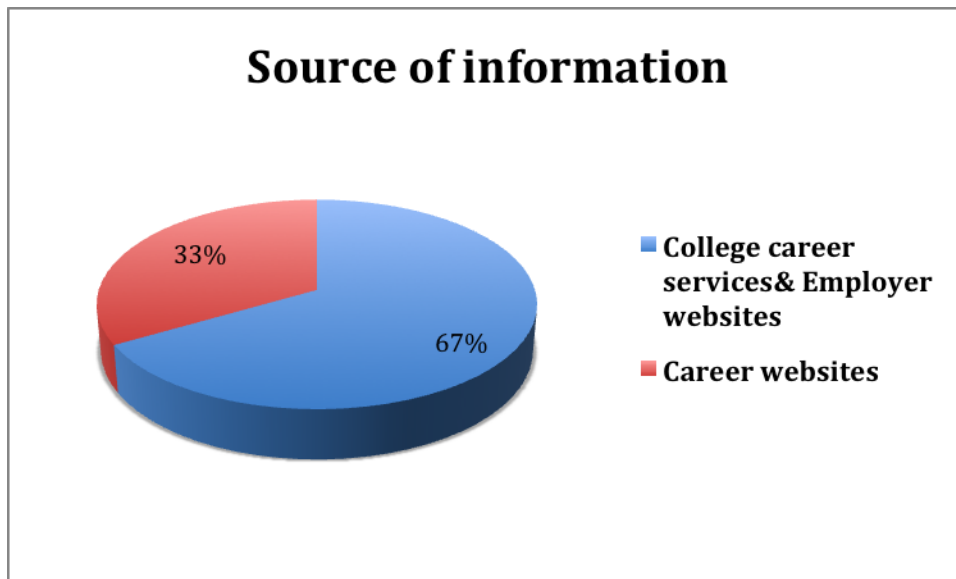


Figure 2 – Indication of the graduates source of information (n=15)

#### Attributes of attraction to the current employer

Out of 15, 10 GE unanimously replied salary (Shown in Figure 3 below). GE 1 commented,

“We had graduated at the very wrong time, when the choices were limited and there was a huge bank loan to pay. I was ready to take up a job in any company. The organization did not really matter. It was the salary that counted”.

To GE 2 added,

“I had to shoulder my responsibilities. In this situation, I am lucky to have found a job while some of my friends are still hunting”.

Upon probing, 2 out of the remaining 5 GE said, “the organization had a good reputation in the market”.



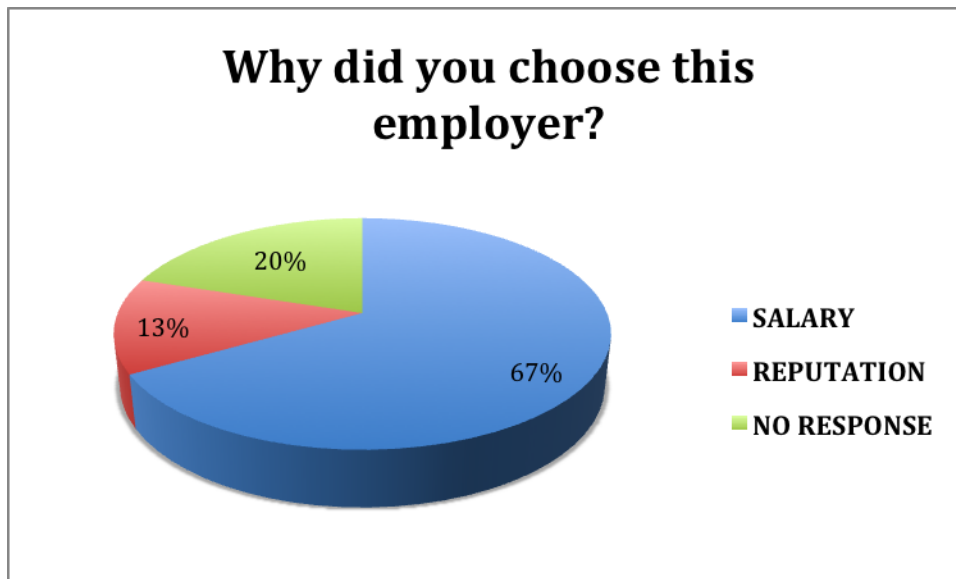


Figure 3 - Measures for choosing an employer (n=15)

Almost everybody agreed that their first choice after graduation was to seek employment.

#### Organizational values and Corporate social responsibility

In responding to the discussion on organizational values, ethics and corporate social responsibility (CSR), only a couple of the participants acknowledged that they were aware of the organization's ethical values. While the majority agreed that CSR was not a criteria while choosing a prospective employer. Still further, a couple of GE said, "not sure what it means".



Figure 4 - Responses for Corporate Social responsibility as a measure of attractability (n=15)

Expectations of Gen Y graduate employees

The motive behind this discussion was to identify, excluding salary, what other features would you expect from an employer? The participants gave varied and distorted answers to this question. While a couple of the GE stated the job has to be aligned with my education, 3 participants stated work life balance. Scope for learning and development was the choice by a couple of respondents while 6 others said job security. A most interesting factor that emerged as an answer was when a GE said selection process. The respondent elaborated,

“Some companies have a long and time consuming selection procedure. They have multiple layers of assessments and interviews. I would rather join an organization that has the least number of steps involved in selection and would say a yes or no as early as possible”.

Another participant in the group also agreed that selection procedure was important in the decision-making.

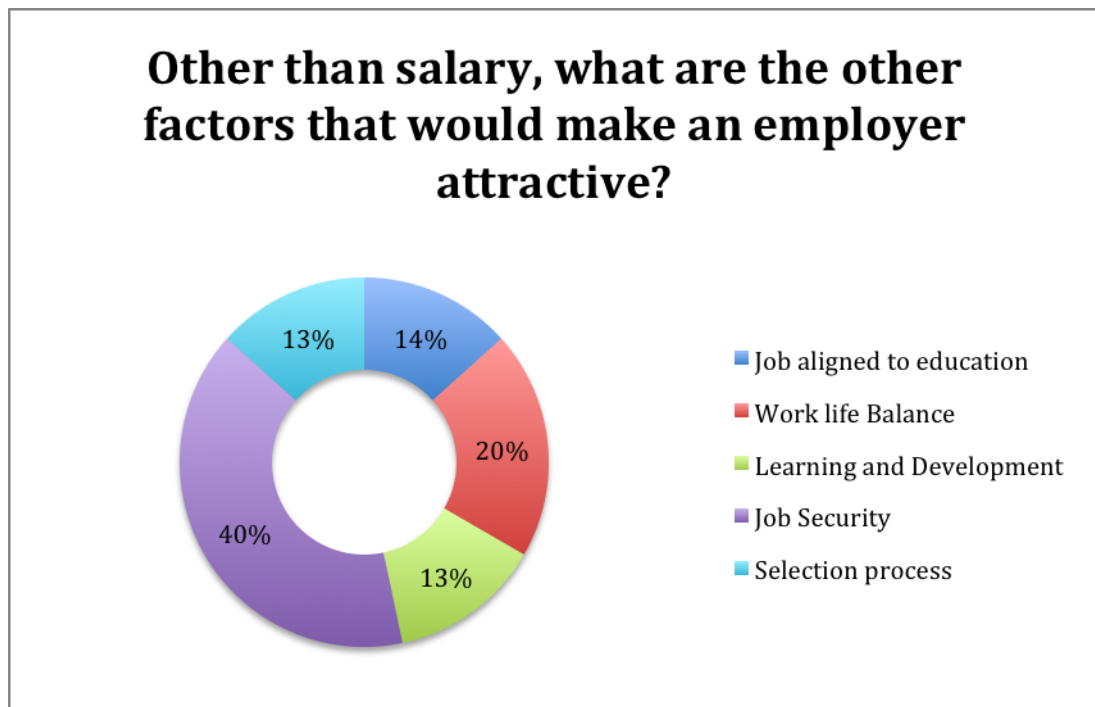


Figure 5 - Description of responses for the factors that would make an employer attractive (other than salary)

#### Closing comments and suggestions

One GE went back to the point were another participant had mentioned about the job being aligned with the education and said,

“I would like to second that opinion and feel that most of us are doing a job that does not match our area of expertise. When we joined a particular course in college, we had different job ideas and expectations. The demands and requirements of the labour market has gone way ahead of the curriculum”.

To this comment, another GE added,

“It is the draw back of the outdated courses and curriculum in colleges. Colleges need to redesign their modules to meet the demands of the employers in that particular industry or department. We don't think we are fully equipped by the colleges for the current labour market”.

Surprisingly, all the participants collectively approved this suggestion.

## **4.2 Quantitative data analysis**

Quantitative data was analyzed using a software package designed specifically for this purpose, called SPSS, which allows the researcher to gain inferential data and statistics (Darcy and Lambert). This tool was used because of its assumed validity and reliability in studying large datasets (Branine, 2008). The analysis allowed for the objective comparison and interpretation of quantitative data in the most appropriate and possible way (Quinlan 2011). The survey responses were first coded into SPSS as ‘variables’ and then tested by examining the relationship between them. The results assisted in making decisions about the data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2007). At the close of the survey, 106 students who are currently in the 2nd year and would be graduating next year answered the questionnaire. All the responses were valid as the researcher chose to enable the ‘required answer’ option provided by the Kwik survey tool, for all

the questions in the survey instrument. In other words, there were no partial, incomplete or missing data. All the 106 responses were used to collate the results using SPSS. The questions were formulated in conjunction with the input received from the qualitative analysis and the literature (Appendix D). However, the relevance of the questions was tested against the surveys developed by GradIreland and the Graduate Recruitment Bureau, UK. The only demographic data that was collected from the respondents was gender, which would allow for comparative analysis.

Quick facts about the survey:

- Total number of responses – 106
- Number of universities / colleges targeted – 10
- Location – All over Ireland
- Survey period – 1st May 2014 to 30th June 2014

#### ***4.2.1 The contents and the rationale of the questionnaire***

1. Gender – Male or Female. It was used as a differentiation factor or the independent variable while all the other data were the conditional or the dependent variables (Quinlan 2011).
2. First Choice after Graduation – Employment or Internship; Travel or Holiday; Higher Studies – In this case, the researcher chose to include employment and internship as a single category as both relate to seeking a job on a purpose basis (namely, salary). Moreover, in practice, graduate job and internship is used interchangeably.
3. Intention to stay in Ireland – Yes or No – The purpose of this question was to understand the mobility of the generation Z; if they preferred to relocate or immigrate outside Ireland, or stay close to family. Also, this question was important in the context of the economics of the country, as the graduates drive the income of the community (Quarterman 2008).

4. Annual salary expectation – 4 ranges were provided and the aim of the question was to grasp whether the students had a realistic or an unrealistic remuneration expectation.
5. Factors that make an organization an attractive employer – 13 choices were given on a ‘likert’ scale of 1 to 5. The elements included only the attraction factors, so as to not diverge from the focus of the research. Employer attractiveness could hold a different meaning from the viewpoint of an experienced worker or an expert in the industry. The options were selected recalling that the target population of the research was novices or students with a fresh, young and early thinking.
6. Preferred Business area – A choice of 10 business segments such as Telecommunication, Information Technology, Banking, etc. was given, to determine the sector preference of the graduates.
7. Methods used to research potential employers – Once again, this question was derived to identify the equality of variance between the employers’ approach of advertising and marketing and the choices of the students in gathering information about employers.

#### **4.2.2 Observations based on SPSS Inferential Statistics**

In total, the survey had 106 responses, of which 51% (n=54) were male and 49% (n=52) were female. The response rate of males and females was almost equal in proportion. The statistics table 2 below indicates the gender distribution of the samples and the figure 6 shows the frequency distribution for gender.

Gender distribution

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	54	50.9	50.9	50.9

Female	52	49.1	49.1	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 - Summary statistics for Gender distribution

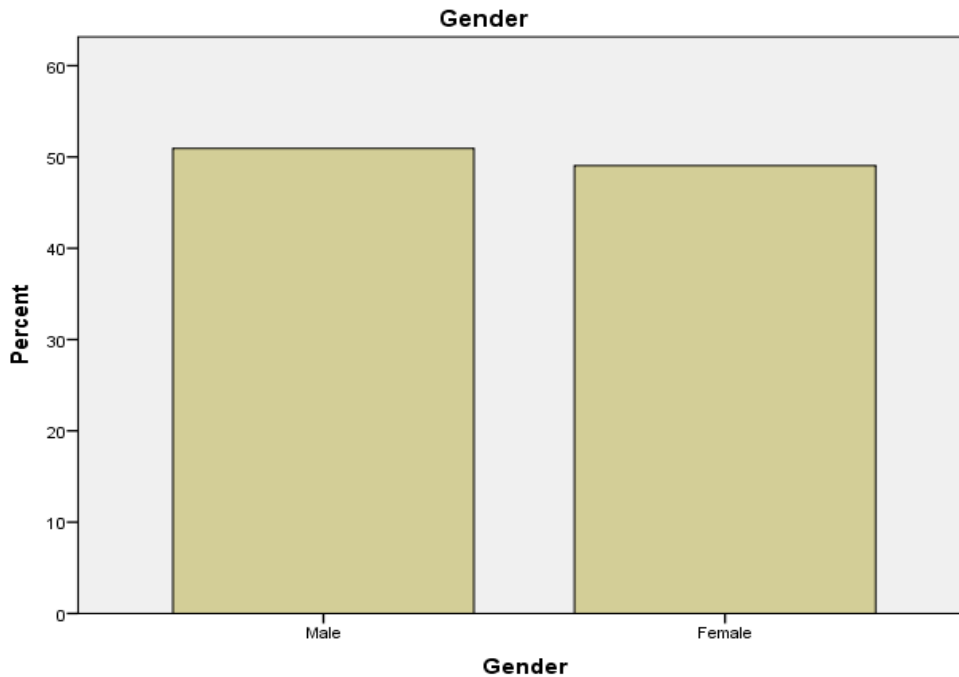


Figure 6 – Frequency distribution for Gender represented as a bar chart

#### Normal distribution of data

Tests of normality were undertaken for all the dependent items in the survey grouped by gender, as normal distribution of data is the underlying assumption for parametric statistical tests. The results of these tests are depicted in the Table 3 below. The value presented under the ‘Sig’ column of Shapiro-Wilk decides whether the data is normal. It can be seen that for the factor, choice after graduation with regards to males, a test statistic of 0.620, 54 degrees-of-freedom and significance of zero (Shapiro-Wilks = 0.620, df = 54, p = 0) was observed, which implies that the p value or ‘sig’ value is less than 0.05 and hence the assumption of normally distributed data is violated. For all of the proceeding assessments and statistical tests, the Shapiro-Wilk’s results are relied upon.

Further, statistical tests such as the Mann-Whitney U and the Chi-square tests were used to analyze the results.

#### Tests of Normality

	Gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Choice after graduation	Male	.422	54	.000	.620	54	.000
	Female	.475	52	.000	.518	52	.000
Intention to stay	Male	.462	54	.000	.546	54	.000
	Female	.536	52	.000	.295	52	.000
Salary Expectation	Male	.278	54	.000	.831	54	.000
	Female	.289	52	.000	.847	52	.000

#### a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Summary of the test of Normality grouped by Gender

Table 3 - Shapiro-Wilk test of Normality for factors based on gender

#### Tests of association based on Gender

A cross tabulation descriptive analysis using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between two categorical variables. In this case, combination of 3 categorical variables was assessed.

1. Choice after graduation and Gender.
2. Intention to stay in Ireland and Gender
3. Salary expectations and Gender

The observations of each of the above tests have been reported in the tables below. All the tests assume the null hypothesis, which is ‘there is no association between the categories’ and the alternative hypothesis that ‘there is a significant difference between the measures’ (Darcy and Lambert).

#### Association between Choice after Graduation and Gender

The cross tabulation or the contingency table 4 (below), represents the actual number of times each category combination (e.g. Number of males who voted

for employment, number of females who voted for employment) occurred in the sample data and the expected count.

The row variable is Gender (categories: Male, Female) and the column variable is choice after graduation (Employment or Internship, Travel or Holiday, Higher studies). The table dimension is 2\*3. There seems to be a small variation in the actual and the expected count in each of the cells, although it is not statistically significant.

The table 5 below, provides the summary statistics of the Chi-Square test. The first row of the table represents the Pearson Chi-square values, which is  $\chi^2 = 1.457$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p$  (Asym Sig) = 0.483. The test favors the null hypothesis of no association as  $p > 0.05$ . This tells us that there is no real evidence of association between gender and preferred choice after graduation. However, the  $\chi^2$  can be used only if no more than 20% of the expected frequencies are less than 5 (see note 'a.' at the bottom of table 5 showing the Chi-Square test values). In this case, the expected count for the number of females preferring to travel is 4.9. It is possible to collapse categories for a small sample size but this can only be done if it is meaningful to group the data in this way. The observation values of 'travel' cannot be pooled with any of the other categories and hence we consider this to be an exception in the research.

Gender \* Choice after graduation Crosstabulation

			Choice after graduation			Total
			Employment/ Internship	Travel	Higher studies	
Gender	Male	Count	37	6	11	54
		Expected Count	39.7	5.1	9.2	54.0
	Female	Count	41	4	7	52
		Expected Count	38.3	4.9	8.8	52.0
Total		Count	78	10	18	106



Expected Count	78.0	10.0	18.0	106.0
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Table 4 – Description of Contingency statistics values for gender and choice after graduation

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.457a	2	.483
Likelihood Ratio	1.467	2	.480
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.332	1	.248
N of Valid Cases	106		

a. 1 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.91.

Table 5 – Description of Chi-square statistics test for gender and choice after graduation

A visual examination of the differences between choice after graduation and gender is presented in Figure 7 (below). The horizontal axis represents both male and female levels of measurement, with the vertical axis showing the observed count of the choice after graduation at these levels of measurement (Darcy and Lambert). As can be seen in figure 7, the most popular choice after graduation for both males and females is employment.

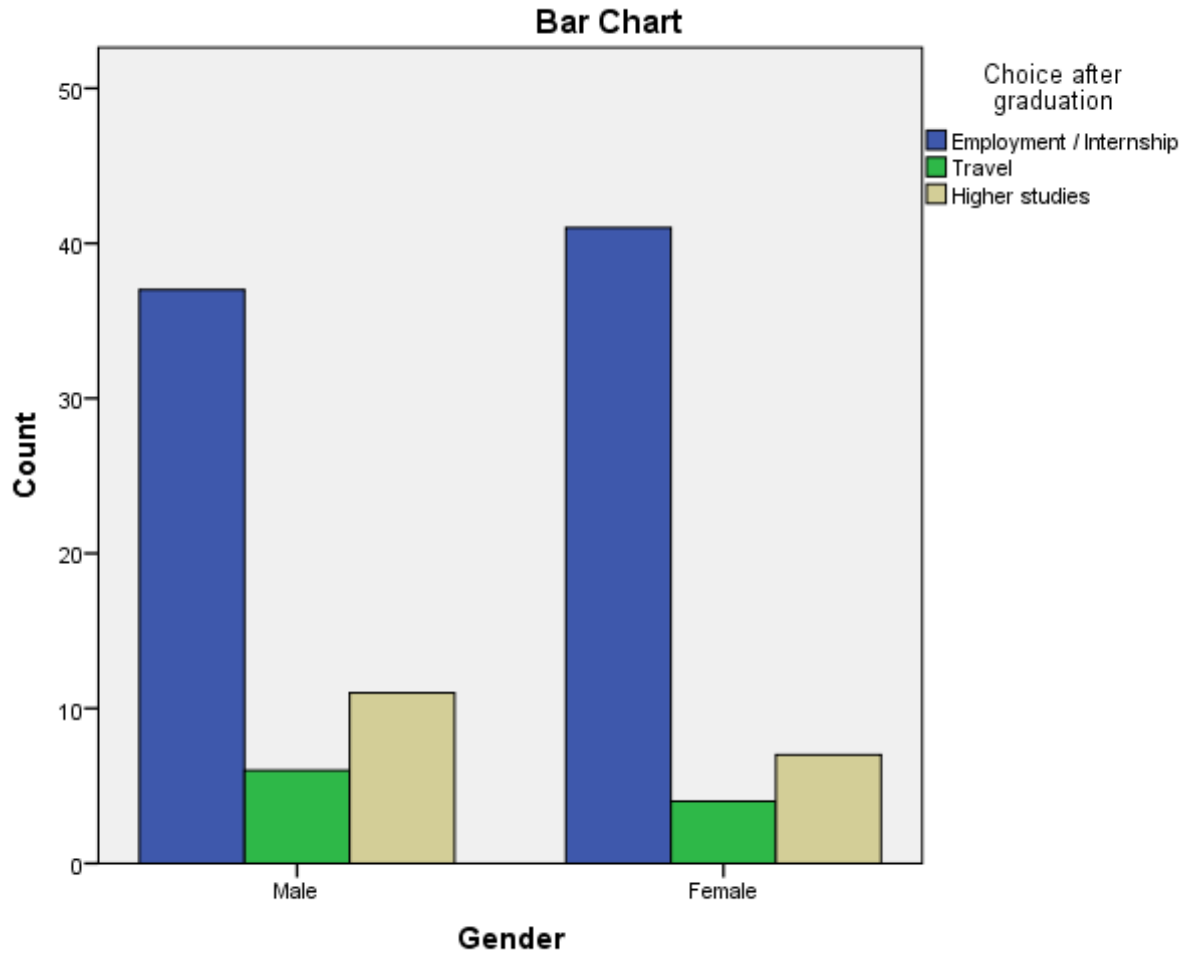


Figure 7 – Graphical representation of level of measurement for gender (x axis) and choice after graduation (y axis)

Association between Intention to stay in Ireland after graduation and Gender

The row variable is Gender (categories: Male, Female) and the column variable is the intention to stay (Yes or No). The table dimension is 2\*2 square cross tab. The contingency table 6 shows the observed count for the males and females. It can be seen, that for a sample of 54 males and 52 females, 40 males and 48 females preferred to stay within the country.

The table 7 provides the summary statistics of the Chi-Square test. The first row of the table represents the Pearson Chi-square values, which is  $\chi^2 = 6.247$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p$  (Asym Sig) = 0.012. The  $p$  value is less than 0.05 and we reject the null

hypothesis in favor of the alternate hypothesis, which implies that there is a correlation between gender and intention to stay in the country after graduation.

Gender \* Intention to stay Crosstabulation

			Intention to stay		Total
			Yes	No	
Gender Male	Count	40	14	54	
	Expected Count	44.8	9.2	54.0	
	% within Gender	74.1%	25.9%	100.0%	
	% within Intention to stay	45.5%	77.8%	50.9%	
	% of Total	37.7%	13.2%	50.9%	
Female	Count	48	4	52	
	Expected Count	43.2	8.8	52.0	
	% within Gender	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%	
	% within Intention to stay	54.5%	22.2%	49.1%	
	% of Total	45.3%	3.8%	49.1%	
Total	Count	88	18	106	
	Expected Count	88.0	18.0	106.0	
	% within Gender	83.0%	17.0%	100.0%	
	% within Intention to stay	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	83.0%	17.0%	100.0%	

Table 6 – Description of crosstabulation statistics values for gender and intention to stay in ireland after graduation

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.247a	1	.012		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	5.021	1	.025		
Likelihood Ratio	6.574	1	.010		
Fisher's Exact Test				.019	.011
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.188	1	.013		
N of Valid Cases	106				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.83.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 7 – Description of Chi-square statistics test for gender and intention to stay in Ireland

It can be seen in the table 6 above, that out of the 54 male respondents, 74% students selected ‘yes’ and only 26% (within males) selected ‘No’ while out of the 52 female students who answered the questionnaire, 92% (within females) selected ‘Yes’ and only 8% respondents selected ‘No’. The crosstab table 6 also shows that the observed count in two cells is more than the expected count, males against no and females against yes. There is difference between the measures where more females prefer to stay in Ireland after graduation as compared to males.

The figure 8 below, depicts the observed relationship between intentions to stay, plotted in the vertical axis of the bar chart to the Gender, which is plotted in the horizontal axis, with larger values for females indicating stronger agreement with respect to the measured variable.

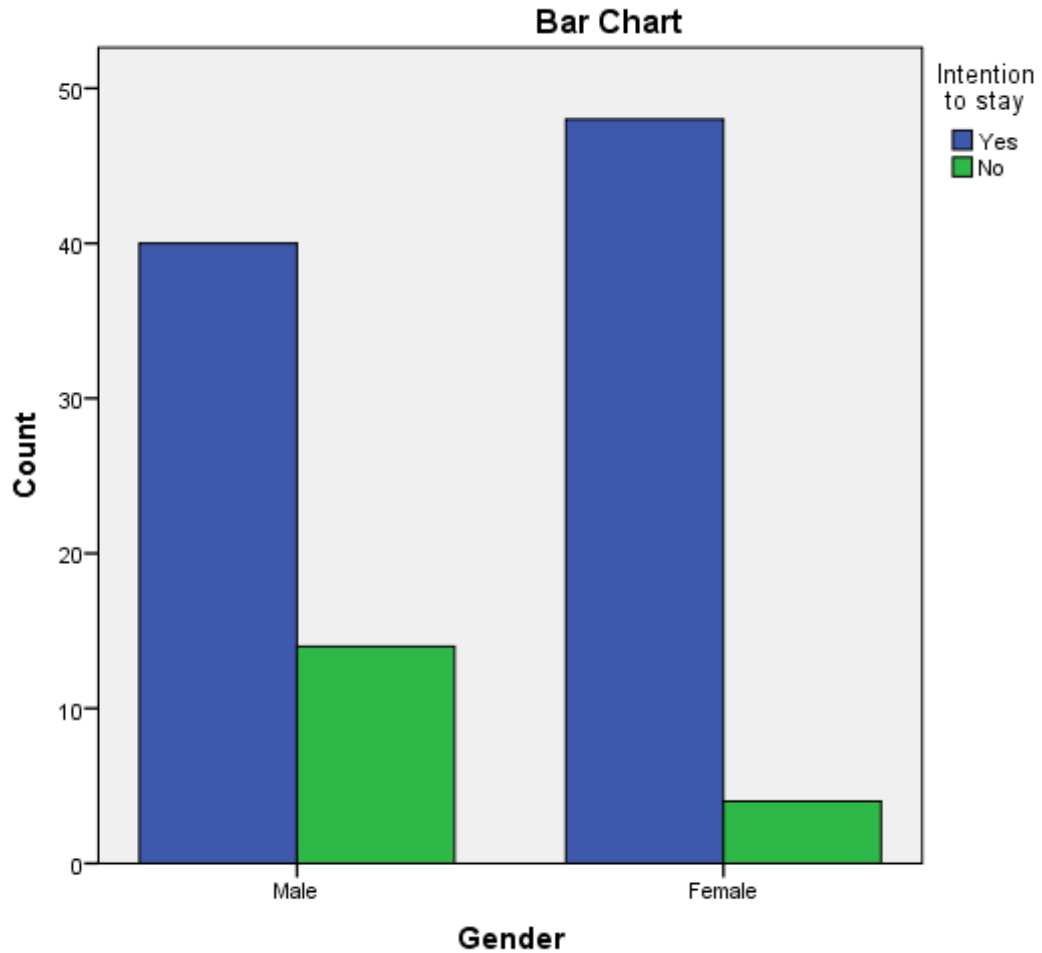


Figure 8 – Graphical representation of level of measurement for gender (x axis) and intention to stay in Ireland (y axis)

Association between salary expectation after graduation and gender

The cross tabulation table 8 shows the observed and the expected frequencies for the males and females, and the measures are found to be almost similar.

The table 9 provides the summary statistics of the Chi-Square test or the Pearson Chi-square values, which is  $\chi^2 = 1.785$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p$  (Asym Sig) = 0.618. We accept the null hypothesis to be true, that there is no association between gender and the salary expectation.

Gender \* Salary Expectation Crosstabulation

			Salary Expectation				Total
			<15K	15-20K	20-30K	>30K	
Gender Male	Count	4	8	26	16	54	
	Expected Count	5.6	8.7	26.0	13.8	54.0	
Female	Count	7	9	25	11	52	
	Expected Count	5.4	8.3	25.0	13.2	52.0	
Total	Count	11	17	51	27	106	
	Expected Count	11.0	17.0	51.0	27.0	106.0	

Table 8 – Description of crosstabulation statistics values for gender and salary expectations

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.785a	3	.618
Likelihood Ratio	1.801	3	.615
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.710	1	.191
N of Valid Cases	106		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.40.

Table 9 – Description of Chi-square statistics test for gender and salary expectations

An examination of the differences between the salary expectations based on gender is presented in the frequency distribution table 10 and a graphical representation of the same is shown in figure 9 below. The most popular choice for both the categories was observed to be at the salary scale of 20-30k.

Salary Expectation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid <15K	11	10.4	10.4	10.4
15-20K	17	16.0	16.0	26.4
20-30K	51	48.1	48.1	74.5
>30K	27	25.5	25.5	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Table 10 – Frequency distribution for gender in comparison to the salary expectation

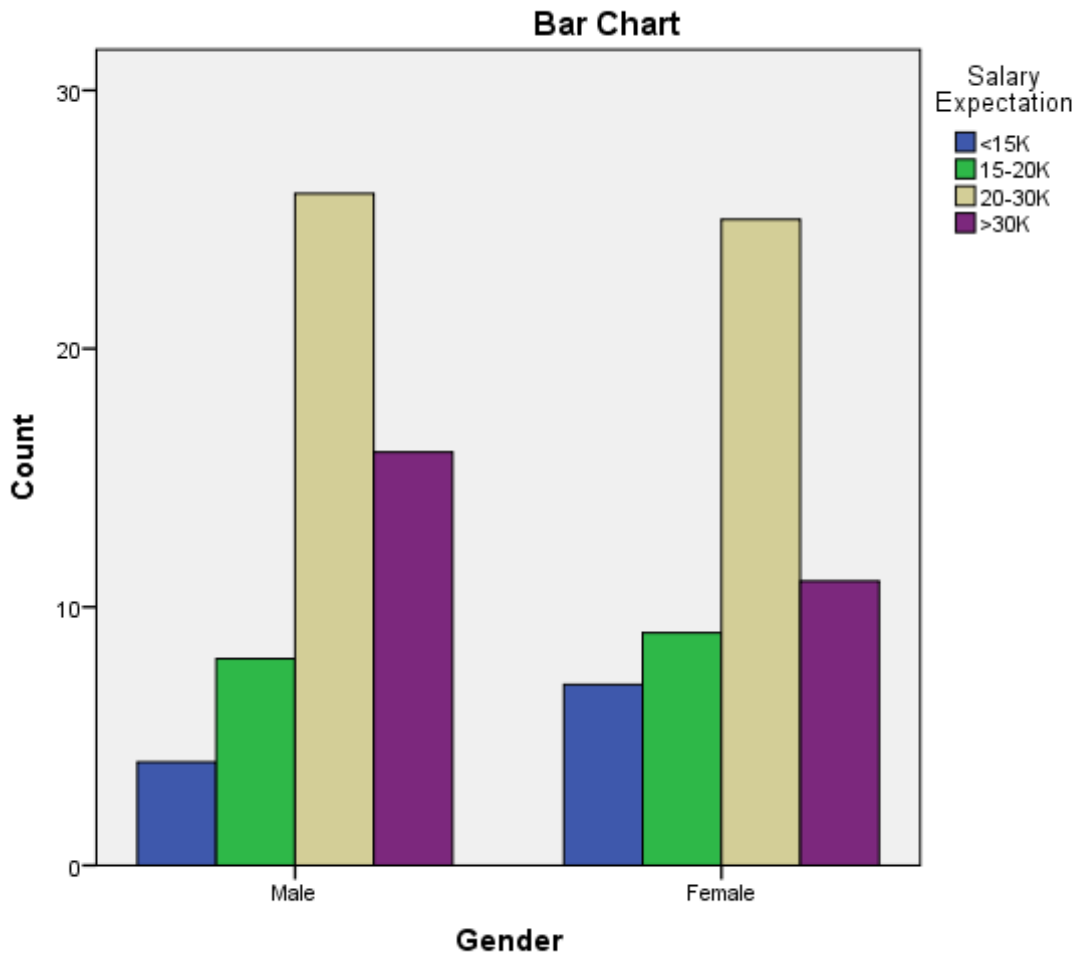


Figure 9 - Bar chart representing the salary expectations of students based on gender.

Measurement of factors that influence employer attractiveness among students

For the purpose of analysis, the researcher had grouped the factors into 4 broadly classified sets namely Monetary Benefits, Job characteristics, Organizational Image and the Recruitment process. The individual components of each category are shown in Table 11 below.

<b>GROUP NO</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>VARIABLES</b>
1	Recruitment Process	Selection Induction Coaching and Mentoring
2	Monetary Benefits	Pay Benefits Rewards
3	Job Characteristics	Job Design Job matches skills Career progression
4	Organizational Image	Organization Culture Employer Brand Corporate social responsibility Leadership style

Table 11 – Grouping of individual components into broad categories of employer attractiveness

Grouping items into a single category is concerned with the degree of reliability and consistency or agreement between the items of independently derived scores (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2000).

The statistic that was used to measure the internal consistency and reliability of the individual items within the group was Cronbach's Alpha reliability test (table 13,15,17 and 19). A preliminary understanding of the correlations between the items was achieved through the inter-item correlation matrix (Darcy and



Lambert). The inter item relationship exhibited in the tables shows the directionality of the item scales for each group and as can be seen, all the correlations within the group in table 12,14,16 and 18 are in the same direction and positive.

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix – Recruitment process

	Induction	Selection	Coaching/Mentoring
Induction	1.000	.711	.406
Selection	.711	1.000	.421
Coaching/Mentoring	.406	.421	1.000

Table 12 – Inter item correlation statistics for group recruitment process

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.762	.759	3

Table 13 – Cronbach’s alpha value for group recruitment process

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix – Monetary Benefits

	Pay	Benefits	Reward & Recognition
Pay	1.000	.439	.554
Benefits	.439	1.000	.526
Reward & Recognition	.554	.526	1.000

Table 14 – Inter item correlation statistics for group monetary benefits

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.753	.755	3

Table 15 – Cronbach’s alpha value for group montary benefits

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix – Job Characteristics

	Job Design	Job Matches skills	Career progression
Job Design	1.000	.546	.425
Job Matches skills	.546	1.000	.417
Career progression	.425	.417	1.000

Table 16 – Inter item correlation statistics for group job characteristics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.719	.721	3

Table 17 – Cronbach’s alpha value for group job characteristics

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix – Organizational image

	Corporate responsibility	Employer Brand	Organization Culture	Leadership style
Corporate responsibility	1.000	.429	.448	.326
Employer Brand	.429	1.000	.388	.327
Organization Culture	.448	.388	1.000	.571
Leadership style	.326	.327	.571	1.000

Table 18 – Inter item correlation statistics for group organizational image

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.736	.739	4

Table 19 – Cronbach’s alpha value for group organizational image

The tables 13,15,17,19 depict the results of the Cronbach Alpha statistics. The survey item results exhibit a Cronbach Alpha value in excess of 0.70 for each of the grouped categories. This certainly is a significant evidence to conclude internal consistency and reliability between the item scales.

Tests of association between the grouped categories

As can be seen from the above table 11, the number of elements in the recruitment process, monetary benefits and the job characteristics was 3, but for the organizational image, 4 items were included in the scale in the survey. In a likert scale of 1-5, the highest score for any individual group with 3 items would be 15, while the last group organizational image could score 20. In order to equalize the items on a reliable scale for analysis, the mean value of the group

was taken off from each of the responses and was divided by the standard deviation of the group. This produced a consistent dataset result, which was used to test the association of the 4 groups.

Figure 10 below depicts the simple scatter plot graph which was used to assess if the relationship between the factors recruitment process (group 1), monetary benefits (group 2), job characteristics (group 3) and organizational image (group 4) was linear. Determining if the relationship was linear or not, is an important assumption for analyzing the data using correlations or regression matrices. The horizontal axis in the figure 10 depicts the employer attractiveness factors 1,2,3 and 4, and the vertical axis depicts the students' score for the factors, with larger and darker dot values indicating stronger agreement. All observations can be seen to be on an equal variance scale and the relationship was observed to be linear.

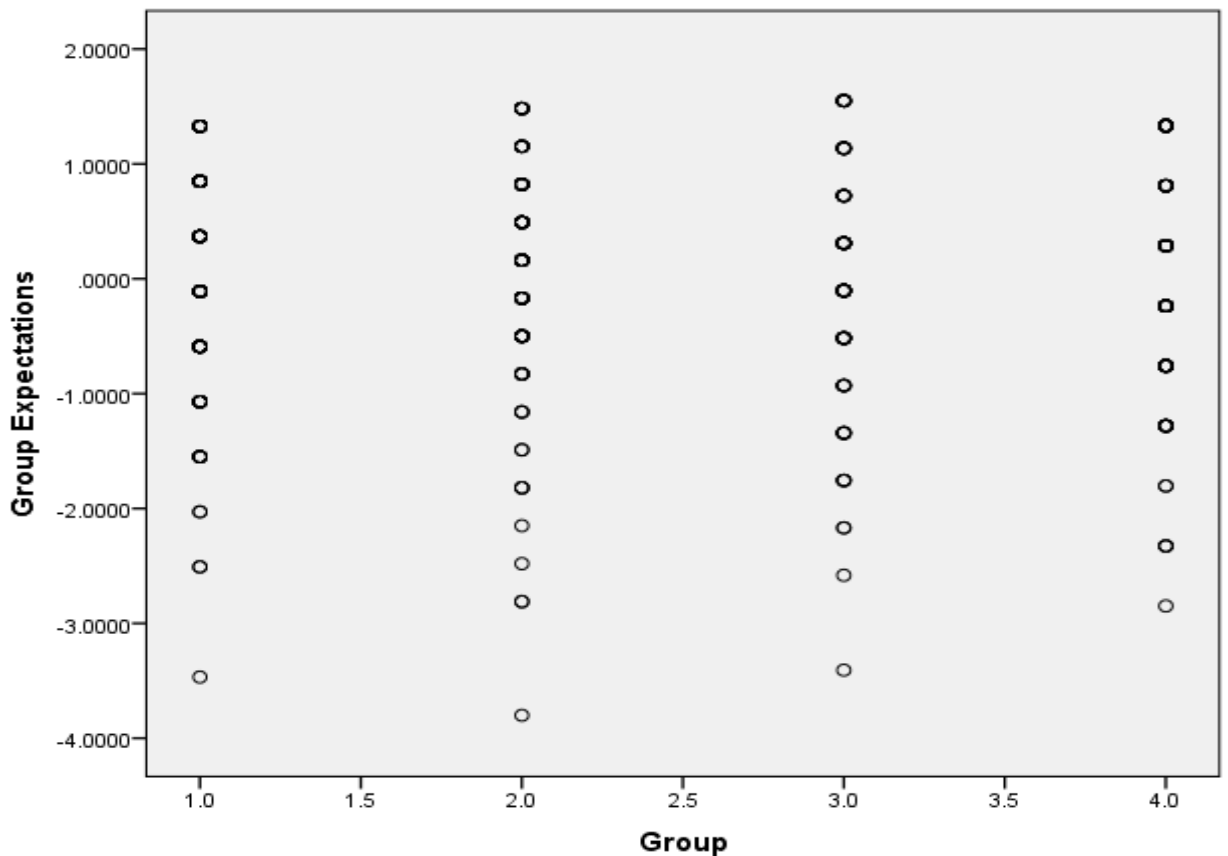


Figure 10 – Scatter plot depicting the 4 employer attractiveness factor groups (horizontal axis) and the students' scores for each factor (vertical axis)

The following figures 11,12,13 and 14 depict the frequency distribution histogram for each of the categories or groups 1,2, 3 and 4. As can be seen from the histograms, the groups are not normally distributed.

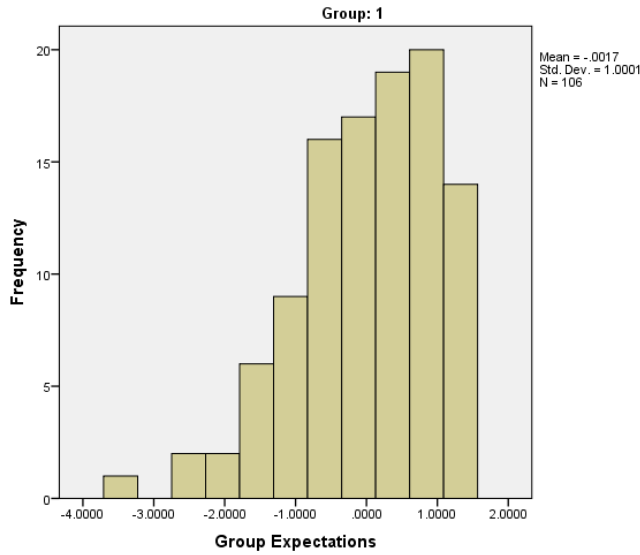


Figure 11 – Frequency distribution histogram for group 1 recruitment process

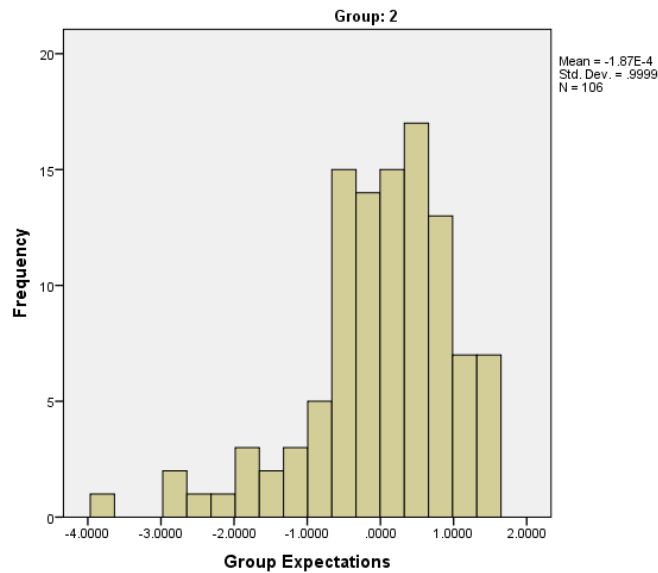


Figure 12 – Frequency distribution histogram for group 2 monetary benefits

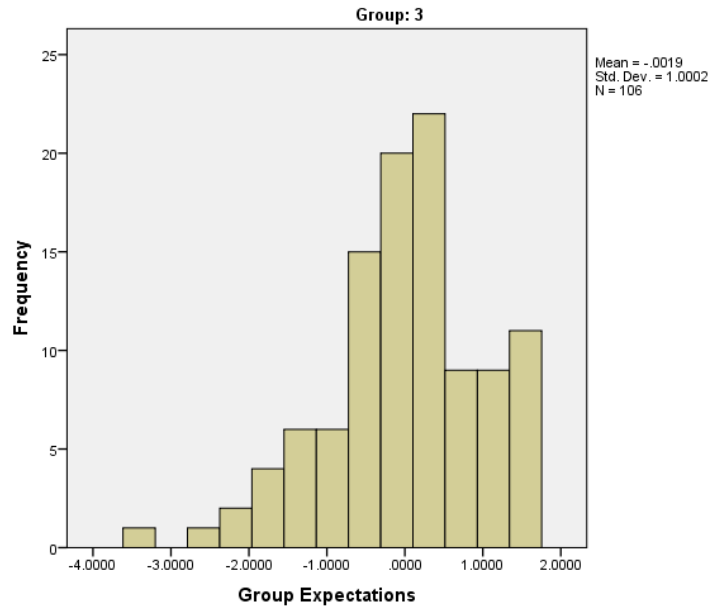


Figure 13 – Frequency distribution histogram for group 3 job characteristics

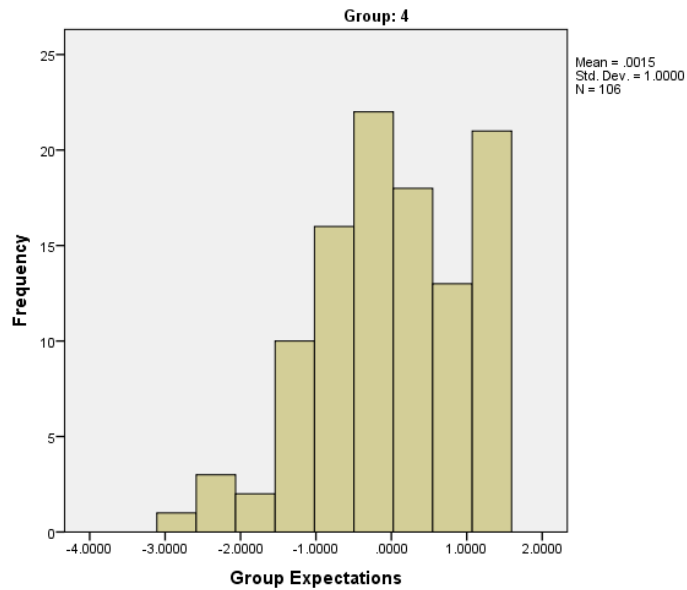


Figure 14 – Frequency distribution histogram for group 4 organizational image

The assumptions of sample normality were also tested through an application of the Shapiro-Wilks statistic. The table 20 below suggests that the normality was not assured in all the 4 groups.

Tests of Normality

	Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Group	1	.145	106	.000	.932	106	.000
Expectations	2	.139	106	.000	.921	106	.000
	3	.129	106	.000	.952	106	.001
	4	.111	106	.002	.934	106	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 20 – Shapiro-Wilk Normality test for group expectations

The non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test was undertaken to assess the variance between the groups. The results of the statistical procedure is shown in the below tables. Table 21 shows the mean ranks of the groups. The difference in the mean ranks is observed to be low. The table 22 presents a more statistically important value that needs to be considered before an inference could be made. Our results show  $X^2 = 0.534$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.911$ , which indicate that there is no statistical difference between the 4 factors of employer attractiveness.

Ranks

	Group	N	Mean Rank
Group	1	106	215.43
Expectations	2	106	215.85
	3	106	213.60
	4	106	205.11
	Total	424	

Table 21 – Descriptive statistics of the mean ranks of the groups

Test Statistics<sup>a,b</sup>

	Group Expectations
Chi-Square	.534
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.911

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable:Group

Table 22 – Kruskal wallis non parametric statistics for the groups

Tests of association between the individual factors based on gender

In order to assess the differences of the factors recruitment process (group 1), monetary benefits (group 2), job characteristics (group 3) and organizational image (group 4) based on gender an initial examination of the distributions characteristics were undertaken. The normal distribution assumption was tested by applying the Shapiro-Wilk test of Normality. The results of the test are depicted in the table 23 below.

Tests of Normality

	Gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Monetary Benefits	Male	.133	54	.018	.937	54	.007
	Female	.148	52	.006	.931	52	.005
Organizational Image	Male	.157	54	.002	.913	54	.001
	Female	.122	52	.053	.936	52	.008
Recruitment Process	Male	.136	54	.014	.966	54	.126
	Female	.171	52	.001	.915	52	.001
Job Characteristics	Male	.153	54	.003	.924	54	.002
	Female	.174	52	.000	.918	52	.002

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 23 – Shapiro-Wilk normality test for graduate expectations categories based on gender



There is evidence in the table 23 to suggest that the factors deviate significantly from normality, although, in the male distribution of the recruitment process (Shapiro-Wilks = 0.966, df = 54, p = 0.126) normality was assured. As the sample distributions deviates significantly from normality the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was undertaken to assess for differences based on gender.

The results in the table 24 indicate no statistical differences between Male perception rank (M = 49.19, n = 54) and Female perception rank (M = 57.98, n = 52), (Mann-Whitney U = 1171, p = 0.136) for the item monetary benefits (table 25), which implies that null hypothesis of no association is assured. The Mann whitney results of the other items are detailed in the tables 26,27 and 29 below.

Ranks

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Monetary Benefits	Male	54	49.19	2656.00
	Female	52	57.98	3015.00
	Total	106		

Table 24 – Discriptive statistics for monetary benefits based on gender

Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>

	Monetary Benefits
Mann-Whitney U	1171.000
Wilcoxon W	2656.000
Z	-1.490
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.136

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

Table 25 – Mann-Whitney U test statistics for monetary benefits grouped by gender

Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>

	Job Characteristics
Mann-Whitney U	1387.500
Wilcoxon W	2872.500
Z	-.106
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.916

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

Table 26 – Mann-Whitney U test statistics for job characteristics grouped by gender

Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>

	Organizational Image
Mann-Whitney U	1258.000
Wilcoxon W	2743.000
Z	-.929
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.353

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

Table 27 – Mann-Whitney U test statistics for organizational image grouped by gender

Ranks

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Recruitment Process	Male	54	47.47	2563.50
	Female	52	59.76	3107.50
	Total	106		

Table 28 – Descriptive statistics for recruitment process based on gender

Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>

	Recruitment Process
Mann-Whitney U	1078.500
Wilcoxon W	2563.500
Z	-2.079
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.038

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

Table 29 – Mann-Whitney U test statistics for recruitment process grouped by gender

As can be seen from the Mann whitney U test results indicated in table 26 and 27 for job characteristics and organizational image respectively, the null hypothesis is assumed to be true. However the results of the test for association between recruitment process and gender (table 29 above ) indicates Mann-Whitney U = 1078.5 and  $p = 0.038$ . In this case the p value is less than 0.05 and the null hypothesis is rejected indicating that the variables are not independent and there exists a statistically significant association between gender and recruitment process.

Most preferred source of information

The figure 15 represents the responses from the graduates (n=106) indicating the most preferred source of gathering employer information. As can be seen, college career services, employer websites and career websites are the most preferred sources among Gen Y graduates.

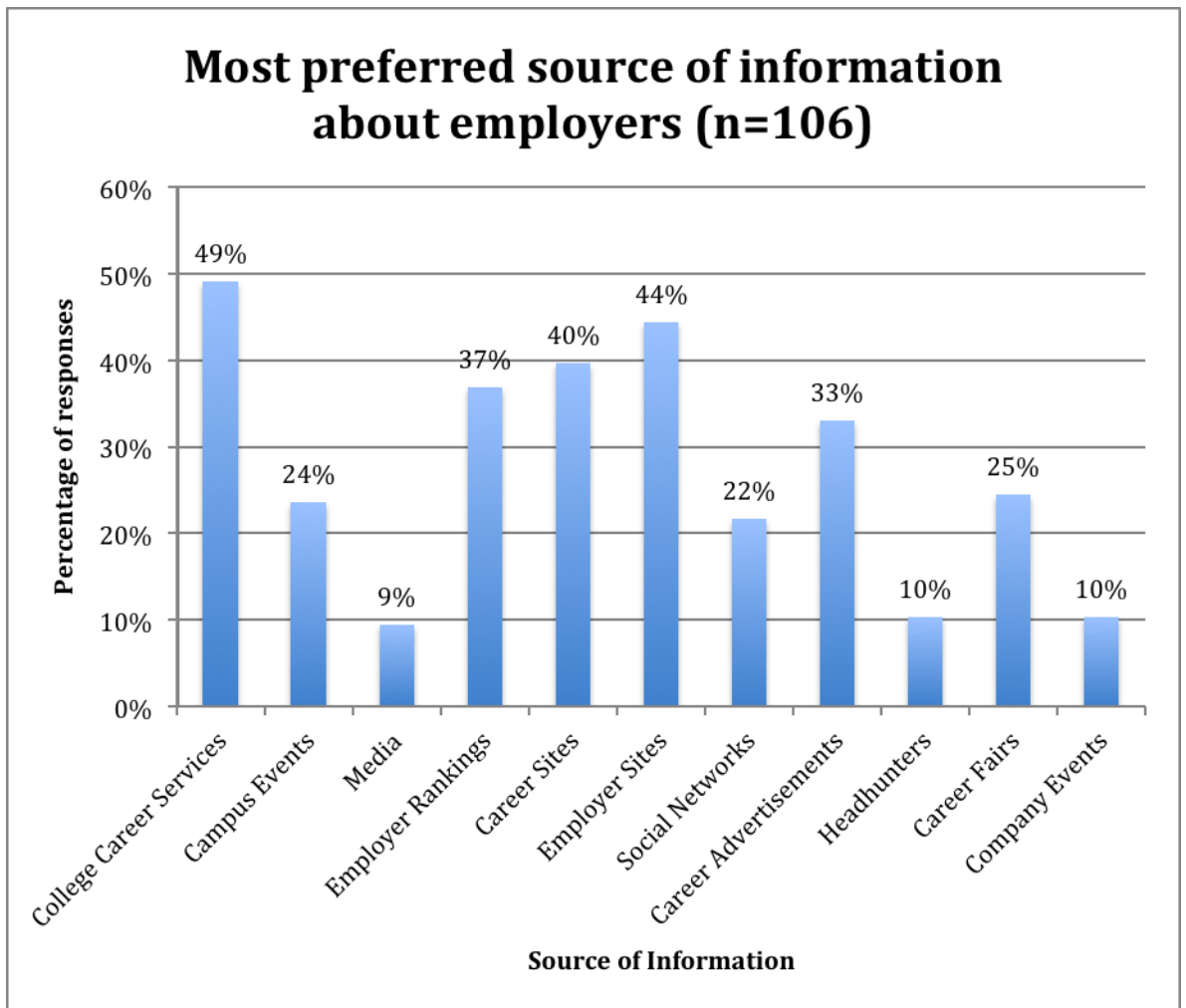


Figure 15 – Bar chart representing the most preferred source for gathering employer information

Most preferred business area

The figure 16 represents the responses from the graduates (n=106) indicating the most preferred industry or business area. The figure 16 shows that financial services, IT and Engineering are the most popular business area choices of GenY.

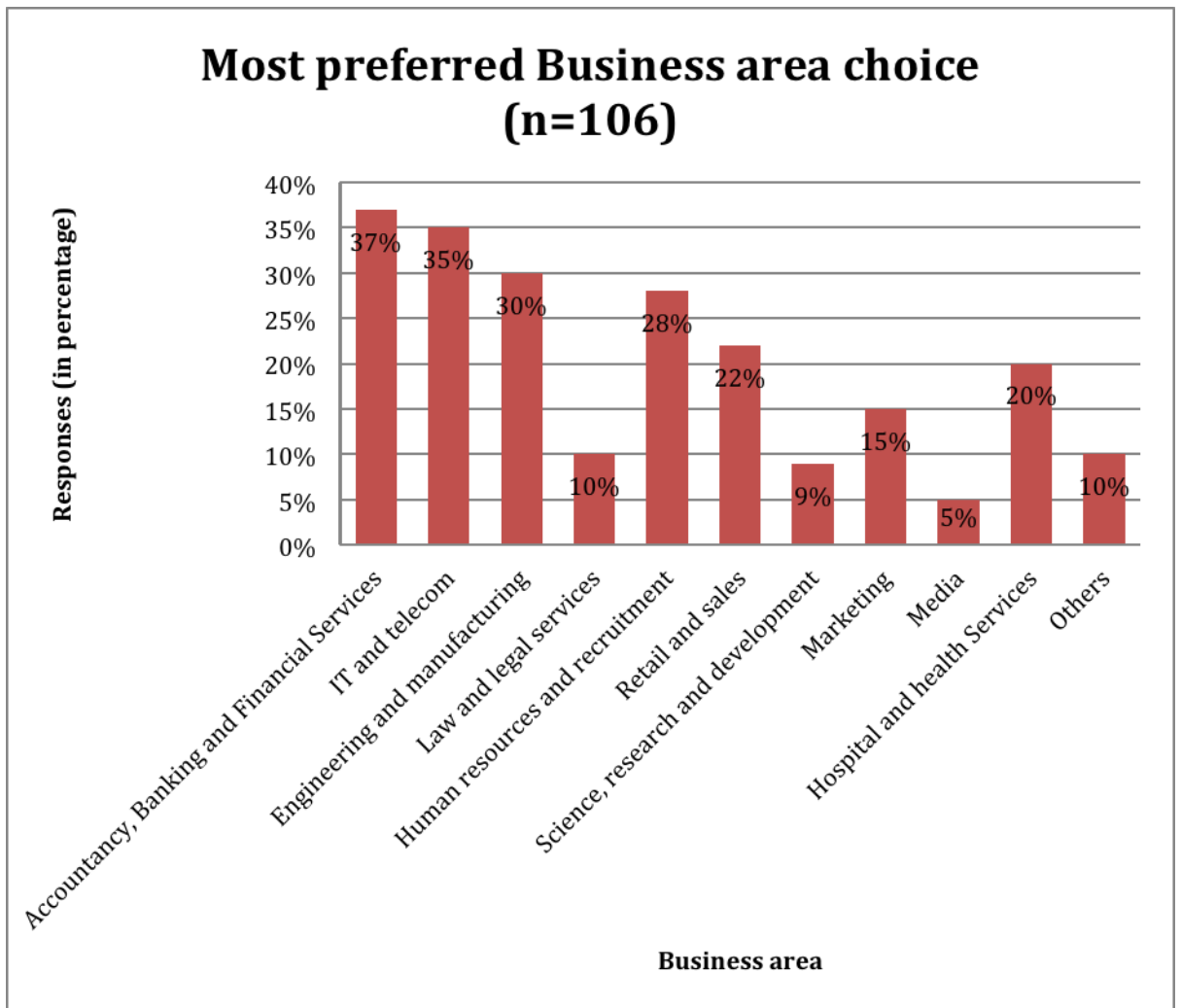


Figure 16 – Bar chart representing the most preferred business area or industry by the graduates

### 4.3 Findings and Discussion

In this section, the researcher attempts to compare the research findings with the previously conducted literature review and demonstrate whether the findings fit or contradict the judgements and conclusions of other theorists based on the aims and objectives of the research.

#### 4.3.1 Economy and Employer perceptions

The financial backdrop was a crucial role in the graduate recruitment process. GradIreland (2009) and other surveys found that the recession caused a decline in the graduate programs and employers preferred to recruit experienced hands (Coughlan, Fahy, Roche and Teague 2011). CIPD (2014) and GradIreland (2013)

revealed that the graduate industry has grown in the last couple of years indicating the progression in the economy. The findings of the research also showed that the graduate numbers in Company A and B have increased in over the years and organizations understand the value proposition of the graduates. Walker and Zhu (2003) noted that large number of students entered higher studies recently and there is excess supply of graduates. It is evident that the supply and demand for graduates is high, inspite experts raised the concern that the graduates find it difficult to find a job and companies are struggling to fill up the vacancies. Both Company A and B studied in the reseach, admitted to small variations or decrease in the number of applicants especially in the area of technology, which denoted the lack of skilled employees especially in the IT sector (GradIreland 2013). Skills insufficiency on one hand, sector preferences (Harrison, Heaton and McCracken 2008) played an important role, which was also observed in the outcome of the research where 37% of the undergraduate students preferred to work in the financial industry followed by IT and Telecom. In considering the excess supply of graduates in the recent years, the research has been able to show that employers had their own choice of discipline of study, level of education and educational institutions. In elaborating on the preferences, the companies attributed this choice to the lack of soft skills such as communication, interpersonal skills and leadership qualities in young graduates.

Connor, Hirsh and Strebler (1990); Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs (2013); Bedingfield (2005); Arnold, Schalk, Bosley and Van Overbeek (2002) and many other experts emphasized that expectation mismatch between employers and graduates at different levels such as salary, training, status and job characteristics was the biggest challenge in the graduate market. In our research, the Company A and B also agreed to the argument. However, employers perceived the expectations of the graduates to be unrealistic while the focus group graduate employees deemed their salary expectations as necessity. Both the organizations are highly concerned about the cultural compatibility and issues of ethics between the graduates and the company. Yet again, the findings of the focus group reveals that the graduate employees had least expectations on the cuture, ethics or CSR of the organization.

### **4.3.2 Expectations of Gen Z graduates**

Literature analyses graduate attraction as a series of strategically planned stages including marketing, advertising and selection procedures. The factors that make an employer attractive is embedded into each of these stages. Experts argue that the quality of the job advertisement (Mason and Belt 1986; Gatewood, Gowan and Lautenschlager 1993), recruitment brochures, career services, fellow students and friends (Keenan and Scott 1985) and the sophistication of the selection procedures (Nicholson and Arnold 1989; Breaugh 2009) had an effect on the quality of applicants responding and graduates tend to have positive views of their employers based on these characteristics. The importance of the advertising strategies and selection procedures has been established by the findings of the current study. The companies A and B participated in career fairs, campus events, held their own campaigns and company events in schools and colleges. In comparison, employer website, career websites, employer rankings and career advertisements were the popular choices found among students who participated in the survey. The results showed that 49% of the respondents collect information about prospective employers through the college career services and 44% through employer websites. Employer rankings (33% votes) was found to be a prevalent criteria in the findings of the study. Interestingly, both the companies A and B were listed as best employers. The fact that Company A did not see an overall decrease in the applicants could be related to the ranking, however the decline in the applicants in the technology division and the 15% decrease in the overall number of applicants in Company B, implies that sector had a major influence on the students. In extending on the expectancies of Gen Z, the results showed that they preferred to find employment within Ireland. Secondly, the survey results implied that 78% of the under-graduates selected employment as the first choice after graduation. However, Company A and B preferred post graduates and more mature candidates with business knowledge, adaptability, realistic expectations and leadership and interpersonal skills (Meyer, Strunk, Shiffinger and Iellatchitch 2005), leaving behind a wide pool of unemployed undergraduates in the labour market. In terms of work-based and salary expectations of graduates (Sturges, Guest and Davey 2000 cited in Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs 2013) employers perceived that graduates had

unrealistic salary expectations but the research findings showed that 48% graduates expected an annual salary at the range of €20,000-30,000 which indicates that graduates have lowered their expectations realising the tough economic times. According to the Gradireland (2012) survey, the average starting salary paid to graduates was €26,000-30,000 depending on the industry where the Engineering, Management and IT firms paid the highest. The universum (2014) survey found that the average salary expected by business students in Ireland was just €28,000 in their first job while it was slightly higher for IT students who expected €33,000 (Irish Independent 2014). Therefore, it can be seen that the gap in the salary expectations of graduates and the salary offered by employers is bridging gradually.

#### ***4.3.3 Graduate choices – Extrinsic or Intrinsic***

Literature indicated various factors such as corporate image and brand (CIPD 2006; Judge and Bretz 1992), career growth and job effectiveness (Keenan and Scott 1985; Hawkins and Barclay 1990; Arnold and Davey 1994; Sackett and Ostgaard 1994) and salary, bonus and short-term benefits (Zedeck 1977; Heneman, Rynes and Schwab (1983); Connor, Hirsh and Strebler 1990) as the elements of attraction towards employers. However, the findings of the survey points out that, all the 4 groups Recruitment process, Monetary benefits, Job characteristics and Organizational Image were found to be on a linear scale indicating that students gave equal importance to all the features of being an attractive employer. The most recent universum (2014) survey statistics on graduate students found that almost two thirds of the respondents expected work life balance while nearly half of the students selected job security and stability; 49% opted for a friendly work environment while 36% wanted career growth. Interestingly, this survey, which was published just in August 2014, where 23% of the respondents were students who would be graduating in 2015; also found that salary was not as important to the current students as job characteristics or career (Irish independent 2014). Once again, it can be seen that the perception of employers vary widely in understanding the requirements of the graduates. Employers seem to believe that graduates are only interested in monetary



benefits and quick growth. However, from a students' perception there are so many other factors which the employers fail to notice. Both the companies in the study have been able to show an outstanding retention rate, which implies that employers associate the intrinsic factors more to retention than attraction.

#### ***4.3.4 Level of generation and gender Mismatch in expectations***

Lindquist (2008); CIPD (2006); Broadbridge, Maxwell and Ogden (2007a) have been able to identify that expectations mismatch exists not only between employers and employees but also between generations. The literature has been able to point out differences between Gen X and Gen Y. Responsibility in the workplace, creative and challenging work, motivating team, clear feedback and positive managers, empowerment, multi tasking and result oriented work with a preference for technology, autonomy, career prospects, training and skills usage have been recognized as the attraction factors for Gen Y (Shaw and Fairhurst 2008). The research findings indicated some common factors between the Gen Y and the new generation Gen Z. However, it was interesting to note that the focus group employees, who belonged to Gen Y, their expectations were far found compared to the literature. The findings provide evidence that the main criteria for the Gen Y in our sample, was exclusively monetary benefits, although job security, work life balance, learning and development were accepted as marginal factors. This variation could be ascribed to the economic background of the country. While the Gen Z sample findings indicated that students gave equal importance to all the characteristics of an attractive employer. Terjesen, Vinnicombe and Freeman 2007 in their study also identify gender differences (Irish independent 2014). Two survey items in the study, intention to stay within the country after graduation and the recruitment process involving induction, selection and coaching had shown variations in the gender. However, the study has not been able to show statistically significant differences in the other elements of attraction based on gender particularly, monetary benefits or job characteristics. Literature identified the changing career perspectives of women (Terjesen, Vinnicombe and Freeman 2007) and therefore, gender differences in the expectations of graduates might be a diminishing consideration. Cynically, it

could be argued that directing the attraction schemes towards one particular gender is discrimination and organizations need to remember that even positive discrimination is against law.

#### ***4.3.5 Expectations and Maslow's needs theory***

In order to make decisions and judgements on attitudes, behaviours and expectations, human resources needs to understand the environment and the motivation for the behaviour. The findings of the research (in comparing the two generations and even within the Gen Y) could be related to Maslow's Needs theory. Maslow organized human needs as a pyramid and put forward a theory in a particular order. He proposed that food; shelter and sleep were the most basic physiological needs followed by security, protection and income. At the third level were interpersonal relationships and next came needs related to achievement, respect and status and finally personal growth and authenticity. The principle of Maslow's theory is that humans are unlikely to move to a higher level if they are uncertain about achieving the basic needs. Having graduated in the worst financial downfall of the country, it's not surprising that the focus group graduate employees were highly concerned about income and security and were trapped at this basic level. Perhaps the Gen Z students are quite lucky to have seen the economy restore and have made their choices at a higher level of growth and career. This principle would equally apply to the decisions and choices made by the organizations.

#### ***4.3.6 Conclusion***

Organizations need to understand that the graduate expectations change over time across generations within the context of the economy. Therefore, businesses need to integrate their job marketing strategies into the attraction process. What companies forget is to invest in the attraction process to hire the right people and the best fit. Each organization is different and each culture is different. The common mistake that companies tend to make is to believe in the mass information about the millennial generation. Organizations tend to mould their attraction strategies based on these generalized data. The same argument fits for the students as well. Students cannot differentiate between organizations as they

all sound the same. For example, 'innovative culture' is a common term used by vast number of employers to attract graduates. However, innovation, in practice, could vary between a multinational organization and a SME. The assumptions that students make about employers based on their advertisements and messages, and similarly the assumptions that employers make about students based on the surveys and generalized data is the first step of the divergence and incompatibility. When disparity arises at the early stage of attraction, retention becomes a challenge. Organizations need to understand that they are competing against two equally significant but opposite principles - quality versus quantity. The quantitative aspect of literature states that effective recruitment programs are those that can attract large number of applicants and employers can make a better choice from a large pool of talents (Herriot and Anderson 1997). Contradicting this statement, Eugene Burke, chief science and analytics officer at the Global talent assessment board concludes that "organizations are spending millions of dollars in attracting large pool of graduates rather than targeting on the right and strongest fit for their business, thereby losing huge investment costs towards the initial attraction campaigns and then reimbursing to replace candidates who leave within a year" (Burke 2014).

## **Chapter 5 –Recommendations and Conclusion**

### **5.1 Recommendations**

1. Organizations need to define their culture, attributes and value propositions and essentially, their target group before planning their attraction strategies. Rather than spreading the net wide and far and giving favourable information to students, employers need to align their business strategy, attraction strategy, communication channel, preferences of their target audience and the organization experiences into an effective and unique message that establishes the brand in the campuses with its true image (Balley 2014). The mode of communication is another factor to be sensibly planned. Creative campaigns, lively and informative employer websites are advantageous.
2. As indicated in the literature organizations that struggle to meet graduate expectations on salary need to promote mentoring, career progression (Harrison, Heaton and McCracken 2008; Garavan and Morley 1997) and learning and development opportunities (Mayrhofer, Steyrer, Garger 2005 cited in Mangan, McDermott and O'Connor 2006) as trade off for attracting talent.
3. Graduates opportunities are not just limited to the companies main business function, as most of the companies recruit across sectors (GradIreland 2012). Therefore, graduates need to be more flexible in their approach to organizations and preference to sector and overcome the negatively stereotyped decisions about industry choices.
4. Higher education institutions need to work mutually with the organizations, to equip the students with what the employers expect, in order to create a better and healthy future for the young graduates as well as the organizations and the economy. Undergraduates should be given an opportunity to undergo project based learning and personal development training involving working in teams within and across the structure of the organization, understanding organizational culture and business

management skills, before they enter the job market. Research conducted by Barber and Connor (2003), cited in Mangan, McDermott and O'Connor 2006, identified that such short-term graduate schemes could yield substantial benefits to the graduates.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

In comparing the literature to the findings of the research, most of the elements were in agreement, although there were certain contradicting results. All said, the economy has had a huge impact on the graduate employers and employees. The research clearly demonstrated that high salary and fast-tracked employment are the labels given to graduates by the employers. However, a concurring fact that emerged from the research was the need for reinforcing the higher education system in Ireland. The way employers and employees attempt to manage their expectations through educational institutions is a serious challenge for the colleges and universities. The impact of enhancing the teaching and learning policies and procedures around graduates, especially the undergraduates, on the graduates labour market trajectory is yet another theme to be argued.

At the onset of the research, the main objective was to explore, identify and understand the issues of graduate attraction, primarily, from the viewpoint of the graduate employers and employees or students. Predominantly, sector preferences and lack of soft skills in graduates has emerged as the biggest concerns of the employers. Findings for each of the sub-objective is summarized below.

1. To gain insights into the perceptions and ordeals of the private sector graduate employers regarding graduate attraction
  - ✓ Graduates and graduate programs are integrated into the functionalities of the organizations and has gained importance among employers, as a worthy return on investment.
  - ✓ However, employers face challenges in recruitment in the technical area, which could be attributed to the sectoral preferences of graduates.

- ✓ Organizations not only look for relevance in academic qualifications but require graduates with a high level of business awareness, capacity to work in teams, leadership and communication skills and fancy experienced or postgraduates who possess business knowledge, adaptability, realistic expectations and interpersonal skills.
- ✓ Cultural compatibility and issues of ethics is a challenging aspect with graduates, especially the undergraduates.
- ✓ In the context of attraction strategies, companies participated in career fairs, campus events and also ran their own campaigns through social events and activities in schools and colleges and advertised through the company websites.
- ✓ In summary, growth and demands of the business, competitive salary expectations of the graduates, technical skills deficit in Ireland, mismatch of culture and value issues and lack of business knowledge of undergraduates are the factors that influenced the graduate attraction strategies in organizations.

2. To identify the expectancies of Gen Z graduates concerning the attributes, which make an organization attractive

- ✓ Gen Z under-graduates selected employment as the first choice after graduation and intended to stay in Ireland.
- ✓ The salary expectations of the graduates was at the range of 20,000 to 30,000 which has been quoted as a realistic and median salary range by various other studies.
- ✓ In considering the factors that attracted the graduates to an employer, all the 4 groups in the research, Recruitment process, Monetary benefits, Job characteristics and Organizational Image were found to be on a linear scale indicating that students gave equal importance to all the elements.
- ✓ The most reported choice for source of information about prospective employers was the college career services. Employer website was the second preferred while career websites, employer rankings and career advertisements were also very popular choices among students.

- ✓ Students desired to work for the financial industry followed by the IT and Telecom. Engineering, Human resources and Retail are also preferred areas of business.
3. To determine the level of mismatch in expectations between two generations – Gen Y and Gen Z and gender – male and female
- ✓ Both Gen Y and Z provided employment as their first choice after graduation.
  - ✓ While salary was the main norm for selecting an employer for Gen Y, Gen Z graduates gave equal importance for monetary, organizational and job characteristics.
  - ✓ Selection and recruitment process was a measure of attractability for both the generations.
  - ✓ While the employers perceived that the graduates preferred to travel, both Gen Y and Z chose to stay within the country.
  - ✓ In the context of gender differences, no significant variation was found between males and females in the inclinations for an attractive employer.

Today's employment arena is very competitive and the findings suggest that an employers' attractiveness on campus is not based on just being comprehensive and high paying as others, but on exhibiting how different you are. Differentiation is the biggest challenge to employers but is the key to maintaining a competitive edge. Of course, there is no 'One size fits all' solution. Neither the graduate expectations nor the graduate industry is static. One of the upcoming challenges in this relationship between graduates and employers is that the gap between large and small and medium enterprises is narrowing in terms of attracting and employing graduates. Obviously, the subject is a complex one, as there are multiple factors to consider – there are various types of employers, different categories of graduates, variety of jobs, transformations of the labour market, the changing economic background, evolving education system and so on, which demands for organizations to develop a systematic planning to identify the challenges in the graduate attraction process, and make a smarter approach to investing in identifying the future leaders.

### **Recommendations for future investigation**

The scale and scope of this research was limited. Future research could focus on the most influential advertising methods and marketing styles among graduates.

Sector variation is a huge theme for research in order to understand its impact and influence on the graduate recruitment process. A comparative study on organizations belonging to different sectors could be an area for in-depth analysis.

The graduate expectations (4 groups) included in the survey were very broad categories (e.g. job design) and did not include more precise components (e.g. tasks, job rotation, enrichment). The selection process could be divided into stages such as interview, personal assessment. Future research could elaborate on the individual components to assess the expectations on absolute terms.

Analyzing the relationship between the various motivation (or needs) theories and its influence on the graduate employment decisions could be an area of interest, in order to relate the psychological aspect of human resources.

Finally, In depth analysis of the higher education system in Ireland and its impact on graduate employability would be useful in bridging the gaps between employers and graduates.



## Appendices

### **Appendix A – Information sheet and consent form**

#### **Researcher Name: Radha Venkataraman**

As part of the requirements for MA in Human Resource Management in National College of Ireland, I have to carry out a research study.

**Research Title: Challenges of Graduate Attraction- This study involves exploring and understanding the principles behind attracting youth and comparing the employer perspectives and expectations to that of the current graduates.**

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would very much appreciate your participation in this study, which will involve a semi-structured face-to-face interview, with open-ended questions concerning graduate attraction and recruitment strategies of the organization.

However, your participation is completely voluntary and all information provided during the interview will remain confidential and your identity will remain anonymous, if you prefer to do so. You have the option of withdrawing from the study at any stage, even after data collection. The final dissertation report will be forwarded to you before submission, wherein you can suggest any modifications or deletion of data that you consider inappropriate or may have any negative consequences.

The results following the study will be presented in the thesis. My supervisor, a second examiner and the external examiner will have access to the thesis. Also, the thesis might be made available to future students on the course. The study may be published in a research journal.

(Please indicate your involvement by ticking the sentences that you agree with)

- The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.
- I willingly consent to participate in the study.
- I give permission to the researcher to take notes of my interview.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the research, at any time, without consequences.

- I understand that I can withdraw the permission to use the data, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I understand that anonymity of my identity and confidentiality of my contributions will be ensured at all times.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications.

**I ----- agree to participate in this research study.**

Participant's Signature:

Researcher's Signature:

(Adapted from: Quinlan C. (2014) "Ethics in Business Research", *Business Research Methods*, p 81, UK: Cengage Learning).

## Appendix B – Interview Schedule

Date:	
Name of the organization -	
Name and title of the participant -	
Topics for discussion	Observations
Why graduate recruitment	
Changes in graduate recruitment process over the last 5 years	
Changes in number of intakes and strategies	
Return on investment of graduates	
What level of skills and education is preferred by the organization	
How important are these skills and capabilities	
Qualification or work experience	
What are strategies for attraction	
What are the factors that influence the graduate recruitment	
What are the challenges in the attraction	
Reasons for poor attraction	

Suggestions	
-------------	--

**Appendix C – Focus group discussion topics**

Date:	Male:
No. of Participants:	Female:
Topics	Observations
Sources of employer information	
Attributes of employer attractiveness	
Social responsibility and brand	
Expectations when graduated	
Formal graduate programs	
Suggestions	



## Appendix D – Survey questionnaire

### Graduate Recruitment

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by a Master's student from the Department of Human Resource Management. The purpose of the study is to identify the challenges in graduate recruitment faced by organizations. Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time. Please answer the questions in the attached questionnaire as completely as possible. This should not take more than 5 minutes of your time. The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only.

1\* Gender

- Male
- Female

2\* What is your First choice after graduation?

- Employment or Internships
- Travel or Holiday
- Higher studies

3\* Do you intend to stay in Ireland after the Graduation?

- Yes
- No

4\* How much do you expect to earn (gross annual salary) in your job after graduation?

- < 15k
- Between 15k and 20k
- Between 20k and 30k
- > 30k

5\* How important are the following factors in making an organization an attractive employer?  
( 1 - least important to 5 - very important)

	1	2	3	4	5
Induction process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Selection techniques	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coaching/mentoring/buddy systems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pay	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Benefits and Bonus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reward, Recognition and promotion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employer brand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Organizational Culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Leadership / Management style	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CSR	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job Design and responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job matches my skill	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career progression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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6\* what is your most preferred choice of business area?

- Accountancy and financial services
- IT and Telecom
- Engineering and manufacturing
- Law and legal services
- Human resources and recruitment
- Retail and sales
- Science, research and development
- Marketing
- Media
- Hospital and health services
- Others



7\* Which of the following methods do you use most often to research potential employers?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> University careers centre                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Employer presentations/events on campus |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Media channels                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Employer rankings                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Internet job/careers website                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Employer websites                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social media channels/social networking sites       | <input type="checkbox"/> Job Adverts                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headhunters/personnel consultants/company employees | <input type="checkbox"/> Careers fairs                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Information days/company events                     |  |

**Thank you for your effort and time!!!**

Finish Survey

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