

Newcastle University Careers Service

Employer Survey 2010

Report prepared by:

Lesley Cairns, Placement Officer

Ingrid Henderson, Business Engagement Manager

Nick Keeley, Director

Employer Survey 2010 – Table of Contents

List of Figures

1. Introduction
 - 1.1. Purpose of the Research
 - 1.2. Research Objectives
2. Methodology
 - 2.1. Overview
 - 2.2. Data Collection
 - 2.3. Questionnaire distribution and response rate
 - 2.4. Analysis
3. Employers surveyed
 - 3.1. Main activity
 - 3.2. Size and geographical location
4. Applications
 - 4.1. Applications received in last 3 years
 - 4.2. Levels of satisfaction with the skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate applicants
 - 4.3. Overall satisfaction with the standard of applications received from Newcastle University graduates
5. Graduates Employed
 - 5.1. Numbers of Newcastle University applicants employed by respondents
 - 5.2. Levels of satisfaction with the skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees
 - 5.3. Levels of satisfaction with additional skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees
 - 5.4. Overall satisfaction with the standard of Newcastle University graduates the organisation has employed
6. Skills in need of improvement
7. Final Comments from respondents
8. Summary of Key Findings
9. Appendix of Figures

List of Figures

****Unless otherwise noted, all graphs refer to data from the 2010 survey****

1. Main activity (or activities) of participating organisations
2. Comparison of main activities of participating organisations by category between survey of 2008 and 2010
3. Comparison of geographical distribution of participating organisations between survey of 2008 and 2010
4. Comparison of the number of applications received from recent graduates of Newcastle University in survey of 2008 and 2010
5. Importance attached to skills and levels of satisfaction that those skills were displayed by Newcastle University graduate applicants
6. Comparison of differences between importance and satisfaction with skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate applicants in survey of 2008 and 2010
7. Overall satisfaction with the standard of applications received from Newcastle University graduates in survey of 2008 compared to 2010 by sector
8. Number of Newcastle University applicants employed by respondents
9. Importance attached to skills and levels of satisfaction that those skills were displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees
10. Comparison of differences between importance and satisfaction with skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees in survey of 2008 and 2010
11. Importance attached to additional skills and levels of satisfaction that those skills were displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees
12. Comparison of differences between importance and satisfaction with additional skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees in 2010
13. Overall satisfaction with the standard of employed Newcastle University graduates by sector survey of in 2008 compared to 2010

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of the research

In an attempt to measure impact trends of the implementation of the Newcastle Graduate Skills Framework upon employers' perceptions of the University's graduates, in 2008 the Careers Service commissioned Marketwise Strategies (MS) to carry out a survey amongst employers. The survey gathered feedback from those who had recruited from the University's recent graduates over the preceding three years and to measure their satisfaction with the 'University product'.

During summer 2010 we repeated the exercise to enable us to gather comparative data.

1.2. Research Objectives

In order to meet the above overall aims, the following objectives were agreed:

- To make contact with a large number of employers in the region, nationally and internationally who have recruited, or sought to recruit, recent graduates from Newcastle University within the past three years
- To obtain from these employers:
 - Quantitative measures of their satisfaction with the Newcastle University 'product'
 - In-depth, qualitative, indications to supplement and provide a context for the quantitative data
 - Demographic data relating to the employing organisation

2. Methodology

2.1. Overview

An online survey was designed in-house at a very low cost to make it manageable in terms of resources and to meet the objectives and was distributed to relevant contacts. From a total of 1643 email invitations successfully sent out, 121 responses were received representing a response rate of 7.36%. The 121 responses compared to 271 in 2008.

2.2. Data Collection

The Careers Service used the following databases for the survey:

- Database of employers whom we contact for a variety of reasons including: recruitment, careers fairs, employer presentations and employer enquiries
- Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency's DLHE survey which is sent to all graduates to monitor their destinations after graduation
- Regional Graduate Apprentices database of participating employers

Relevant respondents, who had been in contact with the Careers Service in the last two years, were identified as those who were involved in graduate recruitment and/or those who would have a good understanding of the issues around graduate recruitment and graduate performance once employed. In smaller organisations this was usually the Managing Director, whereas in larger organisations this tended to be HR professional and in some cases, specialist graduate recruitment officers. Certain categories of professional jobs (such as medical doctors) were removed.

The databases were built, cleansed and updated in a three stage process comprising:

1. Matching of employers on the DLHE database to the Careers Service employer database
2. Sourcing of contact details via company websites for the DLHE database
3. Cleansing of the remainder of the employer database.

A final sample of 2095 email addresses was achieved. The survey was sent out to all available addresses to maximise response, however, 452 emails 'bounced back' as undeliverable.

2.3. Questionnaire distribution and response rate

The survey was sent out to all addresses on 20th May and to all employers who receive the Newcastle University employer newsletter on 25th May 2010. The

final mail out to all Graduate Apprentices regional employers was sent on 14th July.

Various queries were received in replies to the email. These requests mostly related to respondents not feeling that they were in a position to answer the questions, or not having time to do so.

2.4. Analysis

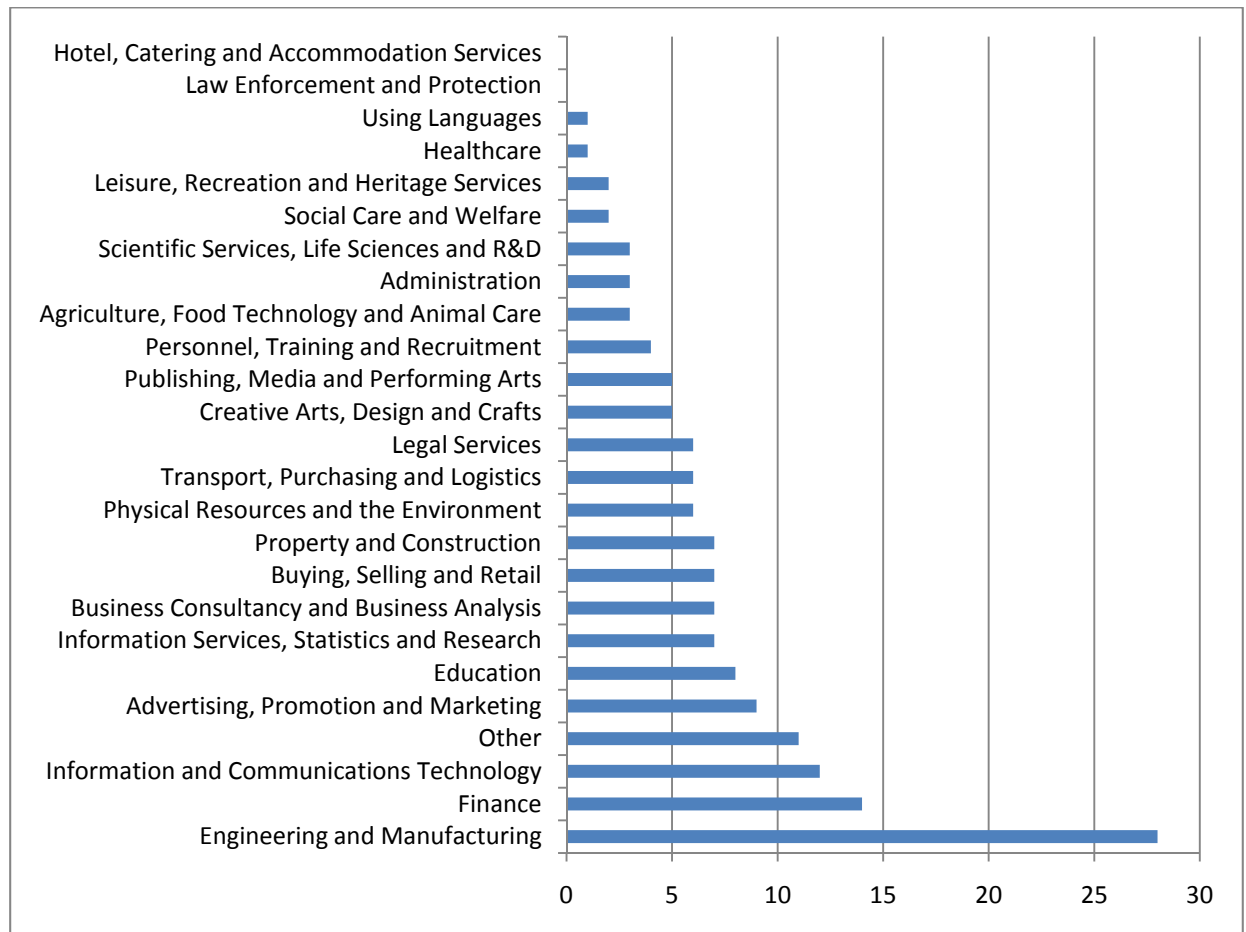
Quantitative data has been analysed and presented in this report in a series of charts comparing the 2010 data with the 2008 results. Key themes from open-ended responses (qualitative data) have been identified, collated and presented as supporting data. Anecdotal evidence has been presented in the 'Final Comments' section.

3. Employers Surveyed

3.1. Main activities

The table below shows the main activities of the organisations that responded to the survey. Please note that respondents were able to categorize themselves under more than one main activity.

Figure 1 – Main activity (or activities) of participating organisations



In order to gain a relevant comparison with data from the 2008 employer survey, these main activities were grouped into the following categories;

Marketing, Research, Admin, Buying, Selling and Retail

ICT

Finance, Legal, Personnel and Consultancy

Healthcare, Social and Education

Agriculture, Environment and Sciences

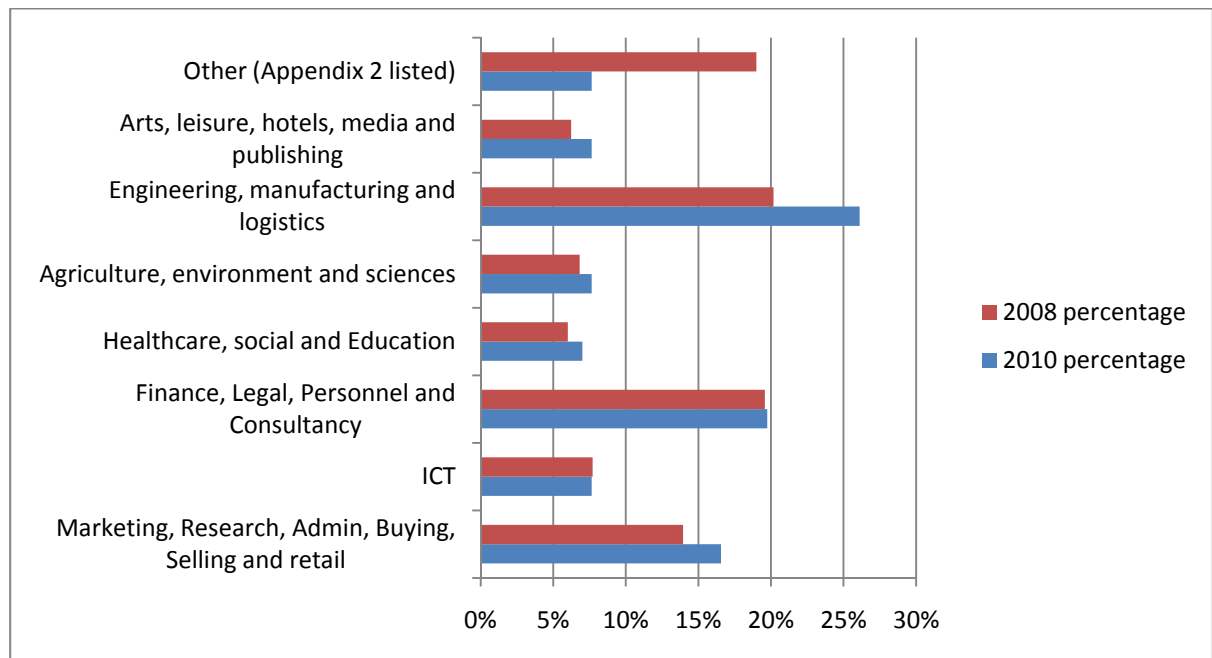
Engineering, Manufacturing and Logistics

Arts, Leisure, Hotels, Media and Publishing

Other (Activities of 'Other' organisations included: Architecture; Armed Forces; FMCG; Insurance Services; and Renewable Energy.)

These categories have been used for comparison purposes throughout this report.

Figure 2 – Comparison of main activities of participating organisations by category between 2008 and 2010

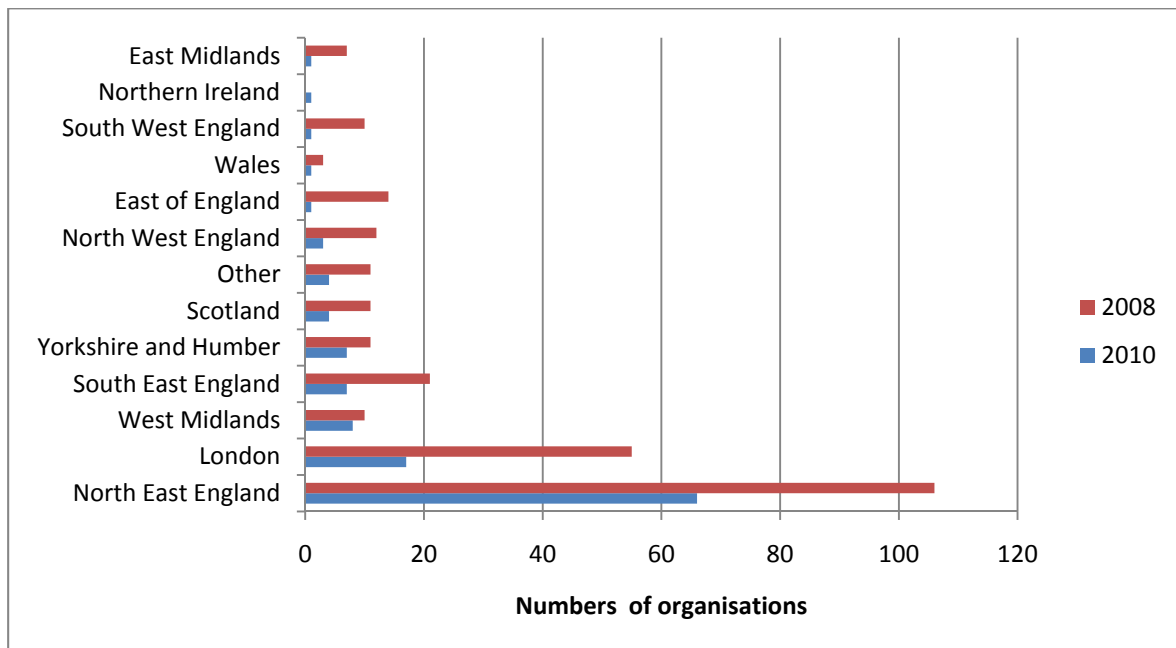


The above table shows a comparison of the main activities of surveyed organisations in 2008 and 2010. Engineering, Manufacturing and Logistics are still the most frequently mentioned areas of activity at 26%, extending their participation levels by 6%. More respondents to the 2010 survey have been specific in their categorisations of their main activity as those in the Other category have dropped by 11%. Broadly speaking though the sector split of responding organisations is comparable to the initial survey.

3.2. Size and Location

The survey was able to achieve a reasonable distribution of respondents across all categories of organisation size and location. 57% of respondents categorized themselves as a Small to Medium-sized Enterprise compared to 67% in 2008. This shows a more balanced range of business sizes responding to the survey.

Figure 3 – Comparison of geographical distribution of participating organisations between 2008 and 2010



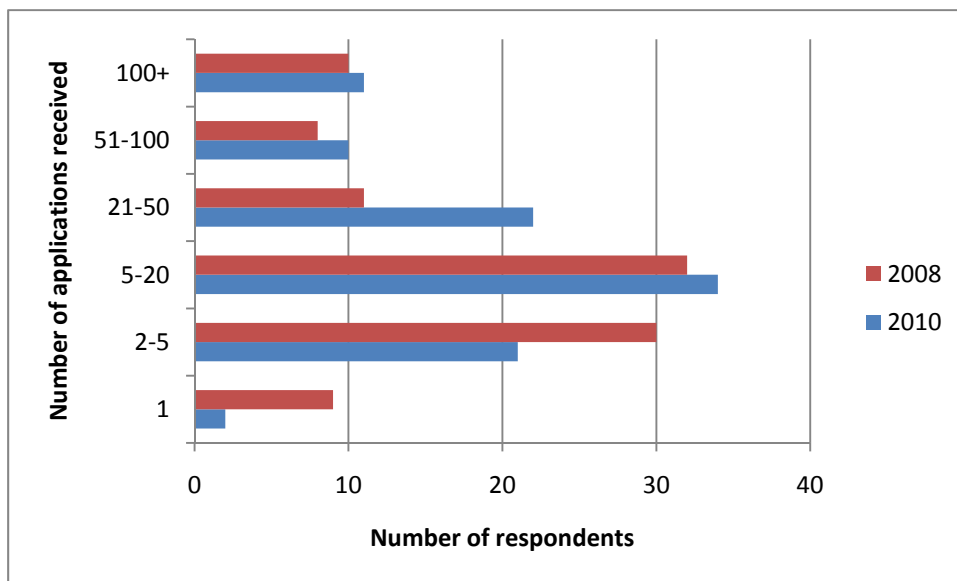
The 2010 survey has seen a large increase in the percentage of respondents identifying North East England as their location. North East England (55%) and London (14%) continue to account for the highest percentages.

4. Applications

4.1. Applications received in last 3 years

70% of respondents had received applications from candidates who had recently graduated from Newcastle University. Of these 85 respondents, 57% had received up to 20 applications and 11% had received over 100 applications from graduates of Newcastle University. 21% had not received any applications from recent Newcastle University graduates in the last three years.

Figure 4 – Comparison of the number of applications received from recent graduates of Newcastle University in 2008 and 2010

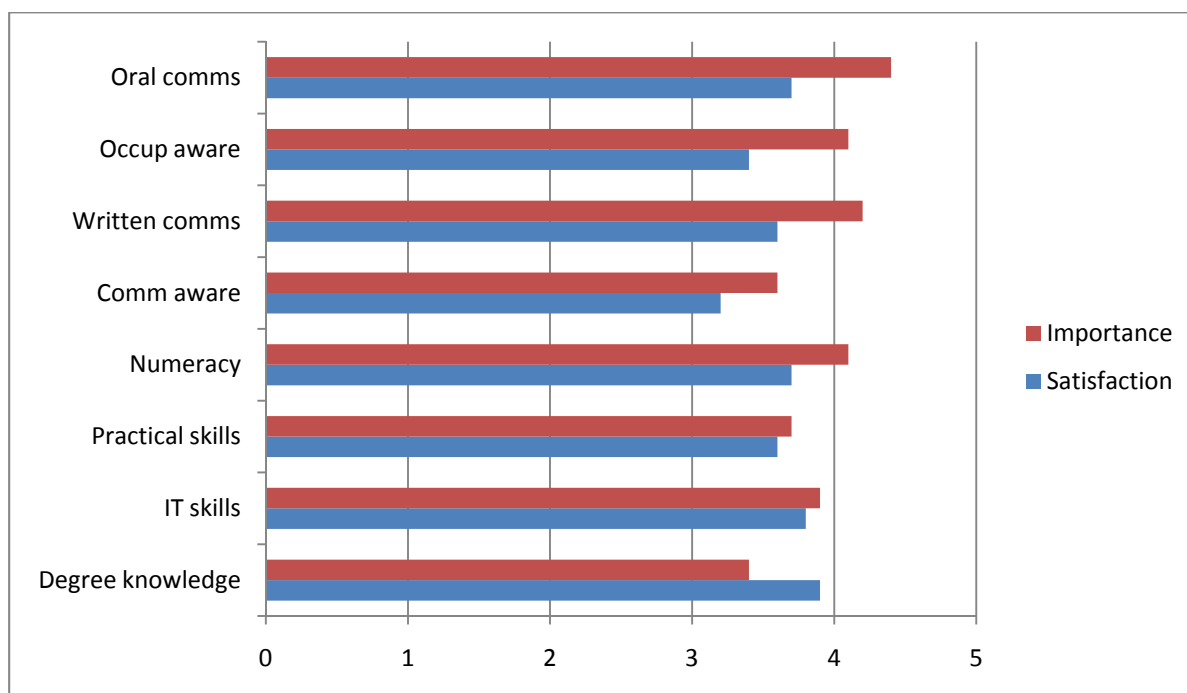


4.2. Levels of satisfaction with the skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate applicants¹

The scores for the importance attached to each particular skill by respondents, together with their levels of satisfaction that graduate **applications** from Newcastle University displayed these skills, are illustrated below.

¹ Please note that graphs showing data on importance and satisfaction levels are ordered from greatest to least differences between the two.

Figure 5 – Importance attached to skills and levels of satisfaction that those skills were displayed by Newcastle University graduate applicants



The skills that were accorded the greatest levels of importance by respondents were **oral** and **written communications** (scores of 4.4 and 4.2 respectively.) In contrast, the skills areas accorded relatively the least importance by participating organisations were the actual **degree subject knowledge** (3.4) and **commercial awareness** (3.6). This suggests that while none of the skills featured were considered to be unimportant, respondents attached particular importance to transferable communication skills over course-specific knowledge.

A comparison of the importance levels that participating organisations attached to skills in both 2008 and 2010 has shown a drop across the board of up to 0.5. Across the two surveys, satisfaction levels have either remained unchanged or worsened in 7 of the 8 skill areas. This worsening of satisfaction levels is however seen to be relative to the lowering in importance levels. The key figures to consider are the premiums of importance over satisfaction when considering skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate applicants. These will show us the most significant differences between the 2008 and 2010 surveys.

Figure 6 – Comparison of differences between importance and satisfaction with skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate applicants in 2008 and 2010

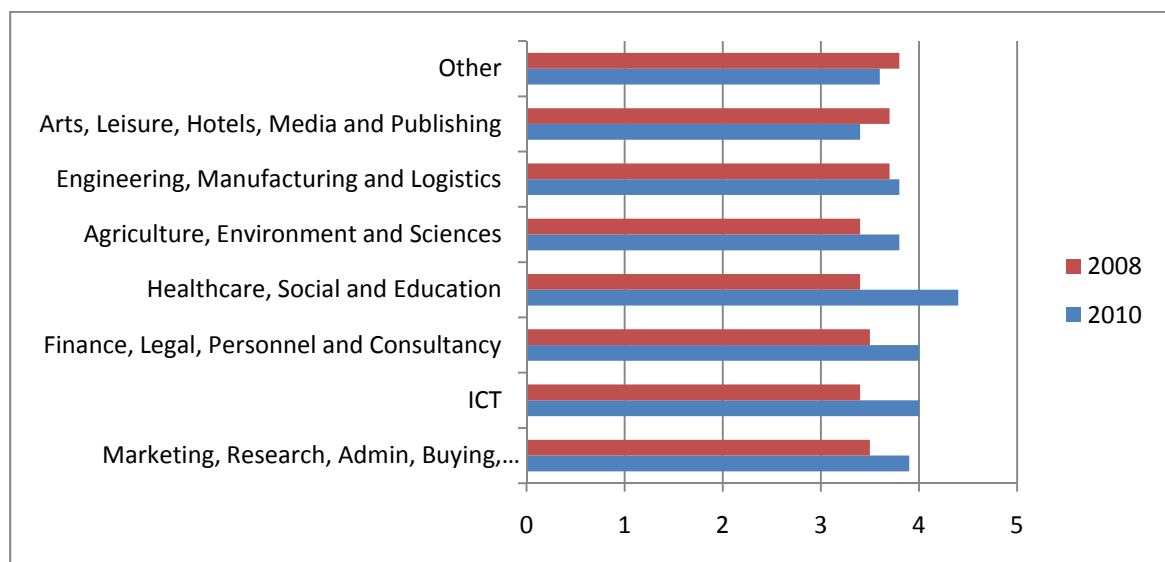
	2010	Change from 2008
Oral Communication	0.7	↓ 0.2 from 0.9
Written Communication	0.6	↓ 0.3 from 0.9
Occupational Awareness	0.7	↓ 0.1 from 0.8

However much the premium of importance over satisfaction has decreased since 2008, these three skill areas still represent the largest difference by a significant margin. Satisfaction levels matched, and in fact exceeded, the importance attached to a skill only in the area of degree subject knowledge. Overall, the margin of difference in the premium of importance over satisfaction tended to be most pronounced for those skills that were considered the most important, and less for those skills judged to be of lesser importance.

4.3. Overall satisfaction with the standard of applications received from Newcastle University graduates

The survey required respondents to rate their level of overall satisfaction, on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being ‘very satisfied’, with the standard of applications from Newcastle University graduates. **Overall, satisfaction levels have increased between the 2008 and 2010 surveys from an average of 3.6 to 3.8.**

Figure 7 – Overall satisfaction with the standard of applications received from Newcastle University graduates in 2008 compared to 2010 by sector

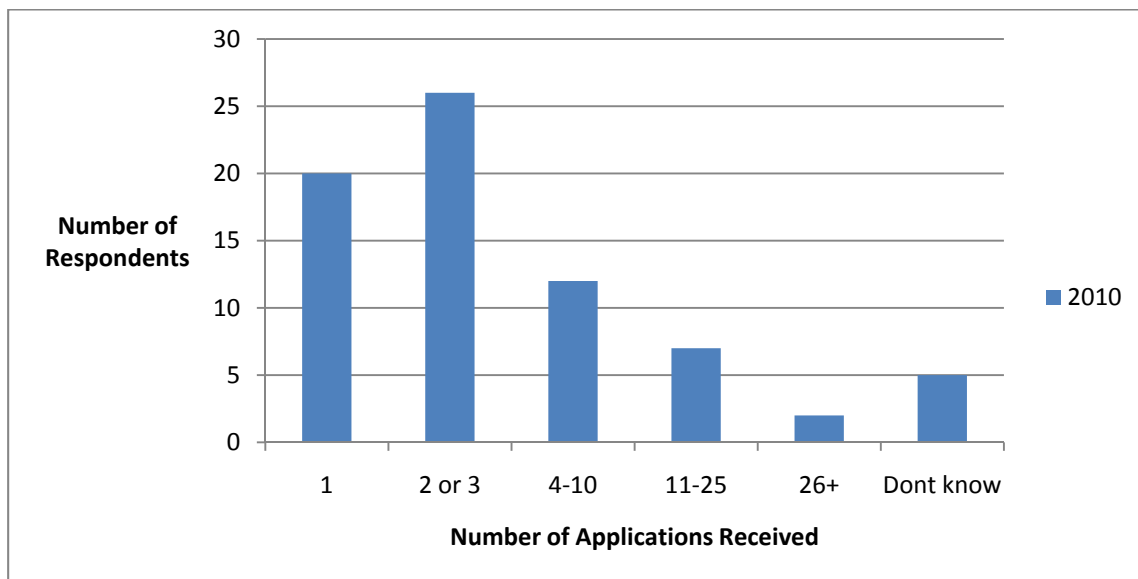


5. Graduates Employed

5.1. Numbers of Newcastle University applicants employed by respondents

Of the 85 respondents to the 2010 survey who had received applications from graduates of Newcastle University in the last three years, 70% had employed at least one graduate. This is an increase of around 6% from 2008 numbers. As seen in Figure 8, over a quarter of those who had received applications had employed either two or three graduates of the University in the last 3 years; while over 20% had employed 4 or more graduates. These figures are comparable with the 2008 survey.

Figure 8 – Number of Newcastle University applicants employed by respondents

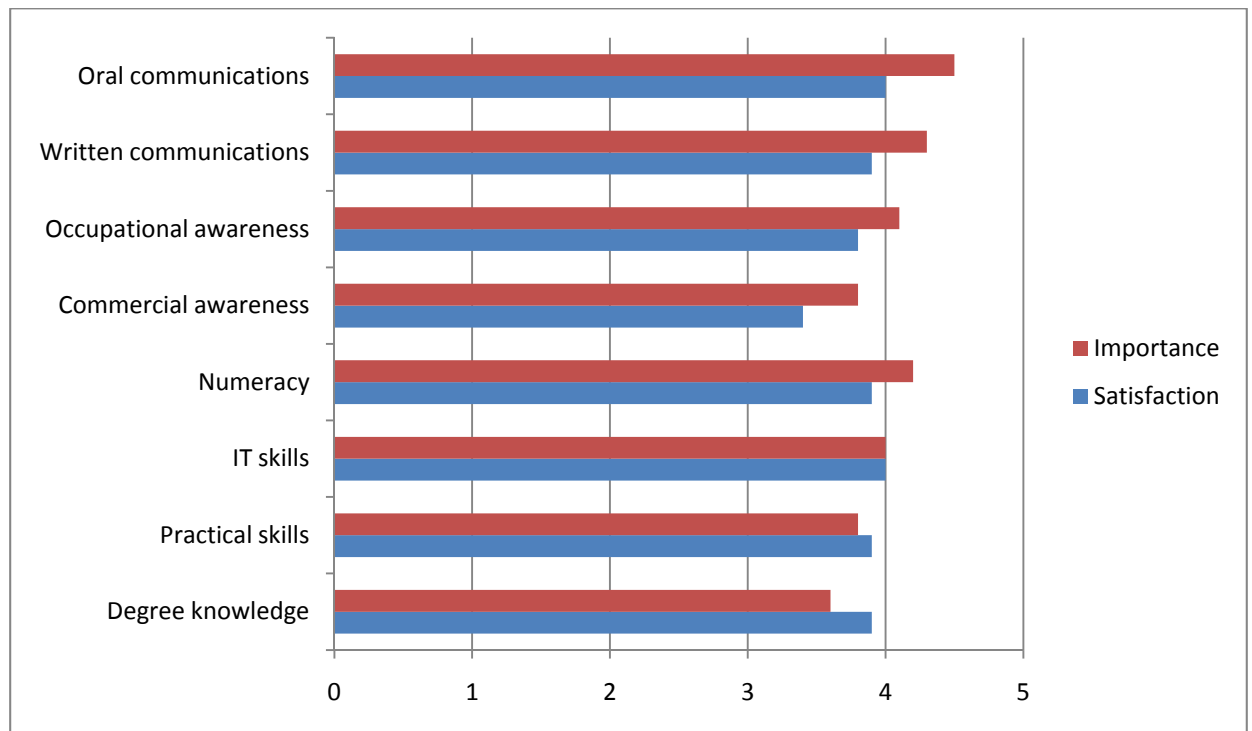


5.2. Levels of satisfaction with the skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees

Having already rated how important it was to their organisation that graduates had particular skills, and how satisfied they were that graduate applicants from Newcastle University displayed those skills, those respondents who had actually employed a graduate from Newcastle University (72 of the 100 who had received applications) were asked to indicate their satisfaction again, this time with the Newcastle University graduates that they had employed.

Figure 9 below compares the levels of satisfaction with the skills displayed by Newcastle University graduates, with the levels of importance that these same respondents had earlier attached to those skills.

Figure 9 – Importance attached to skills and levels of satisfaction that those skills were displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees



As might be predicted, levels of satisfaction with the skills of Newcastle University graduate employees tended to be higher than the equivalent ratings for all Newcastle University graduate applicants.

As a result, the difference between importance and satisfaction was, for every skill listed, noticeably smaller in relation to Newcastle University graduate employees than it was for Newcastle University graduate applicants. In a significant turnaround to the 2008 results, satisfaction levels matched, and in fact exceeded, the importance attached to a skill in three areas; degree subject knowledge, practical skills and IT skills.

A comparison of satisfaction levels between the two surveys shows that, similar to the situation with graduate applicants, the levels have risen for those skills that have relatively the least importance attached to them and worsened for those skills with relatively the most.

Figure 10 – Comparison of differences between importance and satisfaction with skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees in 2008 and 2010

	2010	Change from 2008
Oral Communication	0.5	↓ 0.3 from 0.8
Written Communication	0.4	↓ 0.3 from 0.7
Occupational Awareness	0.3	↓ 0.4 from 0.7
Degree Knowledge	+0.3	Increased from +0.1

There has been an improvement to these figures in all except one, which remained unchanged, of the skills areas. A similar pattern to the comparison of differences between importance and satisfaction for graduate applicants can be noted in the above figures. The same three skill areas continue to have the largest premium between importance and satisfaction however there has been a more positive change from 2008 in the premiums for these figures than for those of the graduate applicants.

5.3. Levels of satisfaction with additional skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees²

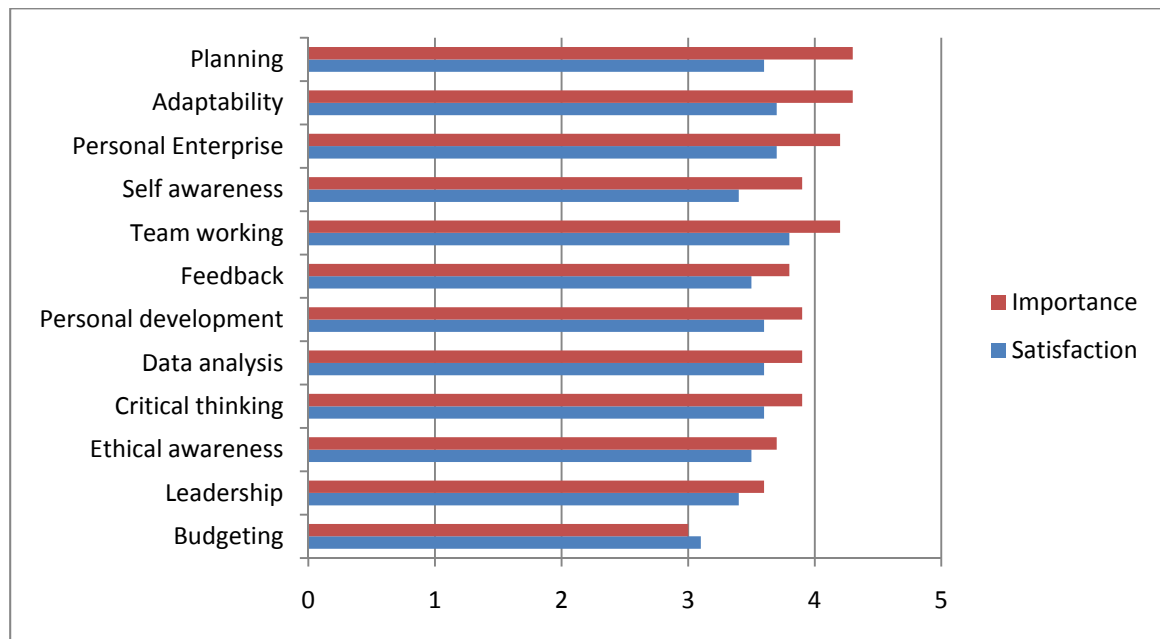
The survey presented those respondents who had employed a Newcastle University graduate with a second list of skills, and again asked them to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 how important it was to their organisation that graduates they had employed demonstrated each skill.

Respondents were then also asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how satisfied they were that the Newcastle University graduate(s) they had employed displayed each skill.

As with the earlier list of skills, the levels of importance attached by respondents to each skill were generally greater than their levels of satisfaction.

² This second list of skills was evaluated solely for graduate employees as it was felt that those skills could not be easily evaluated from the application process alone, as was the case for the first set of skills.

Figure 11 – Importance attached to additional skills and levels of satisfaction that those skills were displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees



The four skills rated as most important by respondents were **planning and time management** and **adaptability** (both 4.3) and **personal enterprise** and **team working and relationship building** (both 4.2). These four skill areas also showed the most significant differences in scoring between levels of importance and levels of satisfaction. Once again, levels of satisfaction outscored levels of importance in only one skill area, budgeting, to which respondents also attached relatively the least importance as a skill for their graduate employees.

A comparison of importance levels in each skill area has, as with the first set of skills, shown a drop across the board by up to 0.4. However, in both surveys, participating organisations are generally attaching the most importance to the same areas. Satisfaction levels are also down across each skill area.

Figure 12 - Comparison of differences between importance and satisfaction with additional skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees in 2008 and 2010

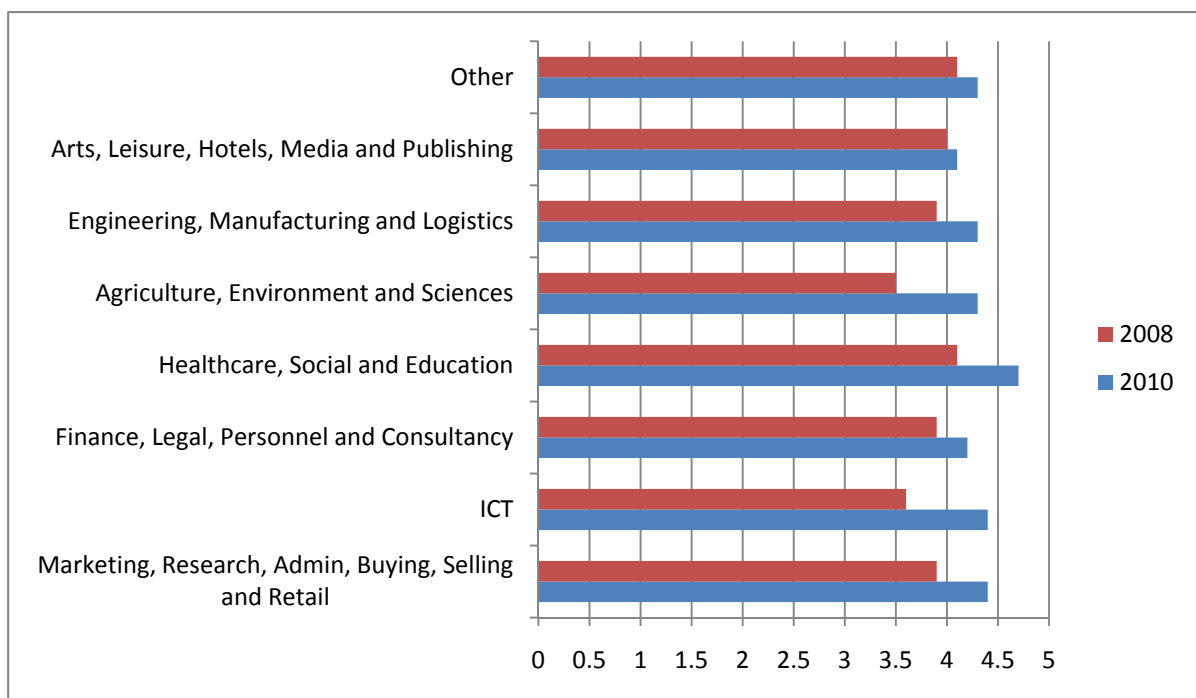
	2010	Change from 2008
Self awareness and reflection	0.5	↑ 0.2 from 0.3
Team working and relationship building	0.4	↑ 0.1 from 0.3
Ethical, social and legal awareness	0.1	↑ 0.1 from matching

The skill areas above do not represent the skills with the largest premiums between importance and satisfaction but all three premiums have worsened from the previous survey. Those skills with the largest differences between importance and satisfaction (Planning and time management 0.7; Adaptability 0.6; and Personal Enterprise 0.5) have all remained unchanged.

5.4. Overall satisfaction with the standard of Newcastle University graduates the organisation has employed

The survey required respondents to rate their level of overall satisfaction, on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being 'very satisfied', with the standard of Newcastle University graduates they had employed. An improvement was noted in all categories between the 2008 and 2010 results. **Overall, satisfaction levels have increased from an average of 3.9 to 4.3.**

Figure 13 – Overall satisfaction with the standard of employed Newcastle University graduates by sector in 2008 compared to 2010



6. Skills in need of improvement

Respondents who had employed Newcastle University graduates were asked to independently identify other 'important' graduate skills.

“As a general rule a lot of current graduates need to have an appreciation of the **level of work/hours they will be required to put in** when moving into the commercial sector. **Adapting to work life** can be a big change and is something we find a lot of graduates struggle with.” ***This comment regarding adaptability was repeated by 8 other employers.***

“**Industry specific knowledge** and team-working skills.” ***This comment regarding industry-specific knowledge was repeated by 14 other employers.***

“**Verbal communication skills**, specifically concise. **Listening skills**: answer the question and be specific. This is a theme I am seeing consistently this year, not just from Newcastle.” ***This comment regarding communication skills was repeated by 13 other employers.***

“Main areas would be to understand the roles they are applying for and what they entail and gaining **practical and relevant work experience** wherever possible prior to application.” ***This comment was repeated by 5 other employers.***

“We need to see a **wide range of extra-curricular activity** and a willingness to take on responsibility and leadership roles within university clubs and societies.” ***This comment was repeated by 6 other employers.***

“The graduates within the company from Newcastle always arrive with excellent theoretical engineering knowledge. It would be very beneficial for grads to **increase their commercial awareness** regarding broader business.” ***This comment was repeated by 16 other employers.***

“**CV writing and interview techniques.**” ***This comment was repeated by 9 other employers.***

7. Final comments from respondents

“The standard of Newcastle graduates improves year on year and we have been fortunate to develop a strong relationship with the School of Computing Science and the careers service in order to allow us to recruit these Graduates.” *Nationwide IT and business consultancy firm.*

“In general the graduates I have worked with and employed have all been of a high calibre, being well prepared and able to convey the skills they have during interview which in part is, I feel, down to the additional activities on the courses and the work done by the tutors and careers service.” *International marine engineering firm.*

“They lack commitment and are really only looking for a stop-gap until a job they really want comes along. This is unacceptable to a small organisation as we expend a lot of time and energy training these people for them just to leave at will.” *Small regional recruitment agency.*

“On the whole I find Newcastle graduates to be very down to earth and hard working people.” *International legal services provider.*

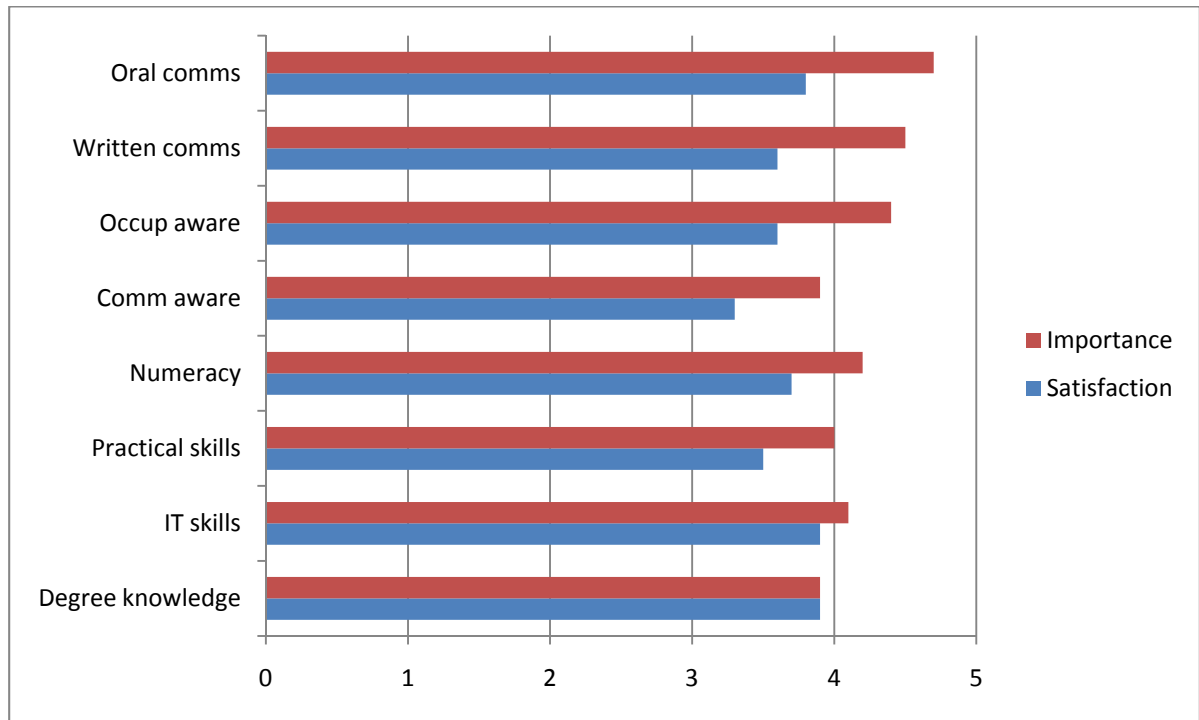
“Not enough of them apply! Unfortunately we don't get to visit every university, so I imagine our profile is limited at Newcastle. But usually the people we take are the ones who took the time to seek out the companies that others hadn't heard of. It would be great to see more applications from your graduates.” *Multinational natural gas provider.*

8. Summary of Key Findings

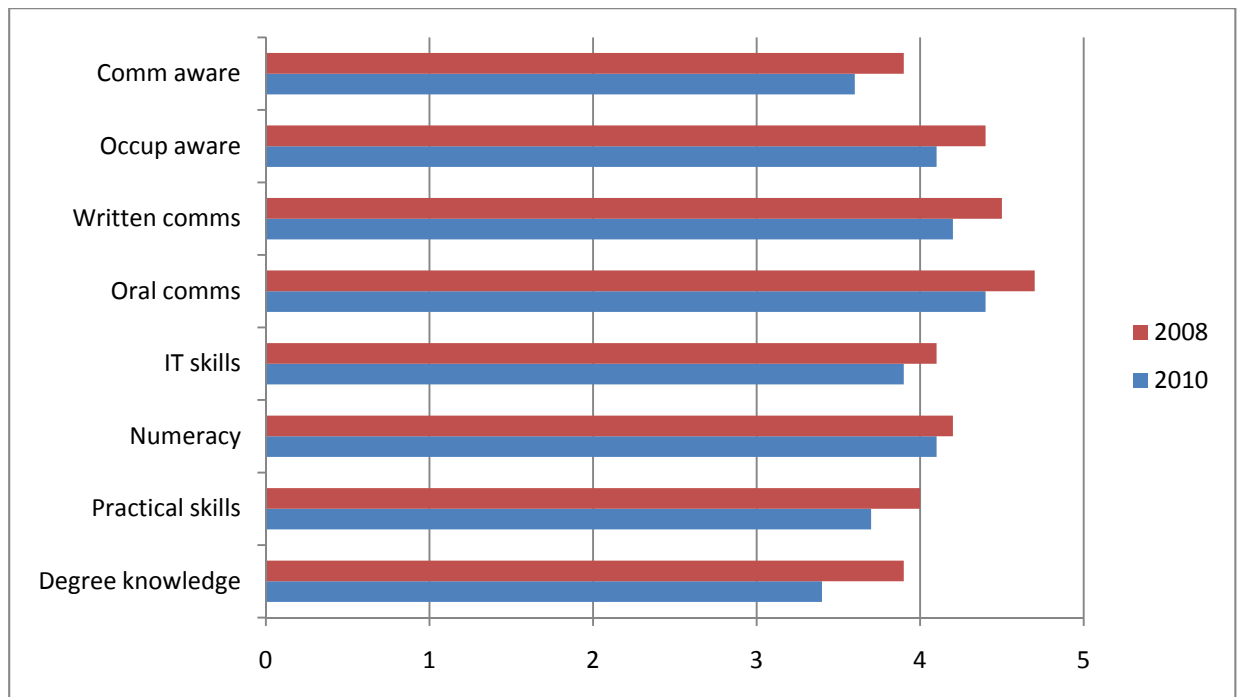
- Overall, satisfaction levels with the standard of employed Newcastle University graduates have risen from an average of 3.9 to 4.3 in the 2010 survey.
- The satisfaction attached to subject knowledge, IT and practical skills areas exceeded the importance in Newcastle University graduate employees.
- The margin of difference in the premium of importance over satisfaction was most improved in written communication followed by oral communication. Once again respondents suggested that occupational awareness was more important than commercial awareness in their graduate employees.
- Levels of satisfaction outscored levels of importance in only one skill area, budgeting, to which respondents also attached relatively the least importance as a skill in their graduate employees.
- The four skills rated as most important by respondents in their graduate employees were oral and written communication skills, planning and time management and adaptability. Interestingly, these four skill areas showed the most significant differences in scoring between levels of importance and levels of satisfaction.
- Leadership and negotiation together with ethical, social and legal awareness were felt to be less important, with a smaller gap between importance and satisfaction in graduate employees.
- The margin of difference in the premium of importance over satisfaction in graduate applications, in almost all skills mentioned was higher. Occupational awareness, oral and written communication each showing the highest premium of importance over satisfaction.
- Satisfaction levels exceeded the importance in graduate applications in only one skill area, degree subject area.

9. Appendix of Figures

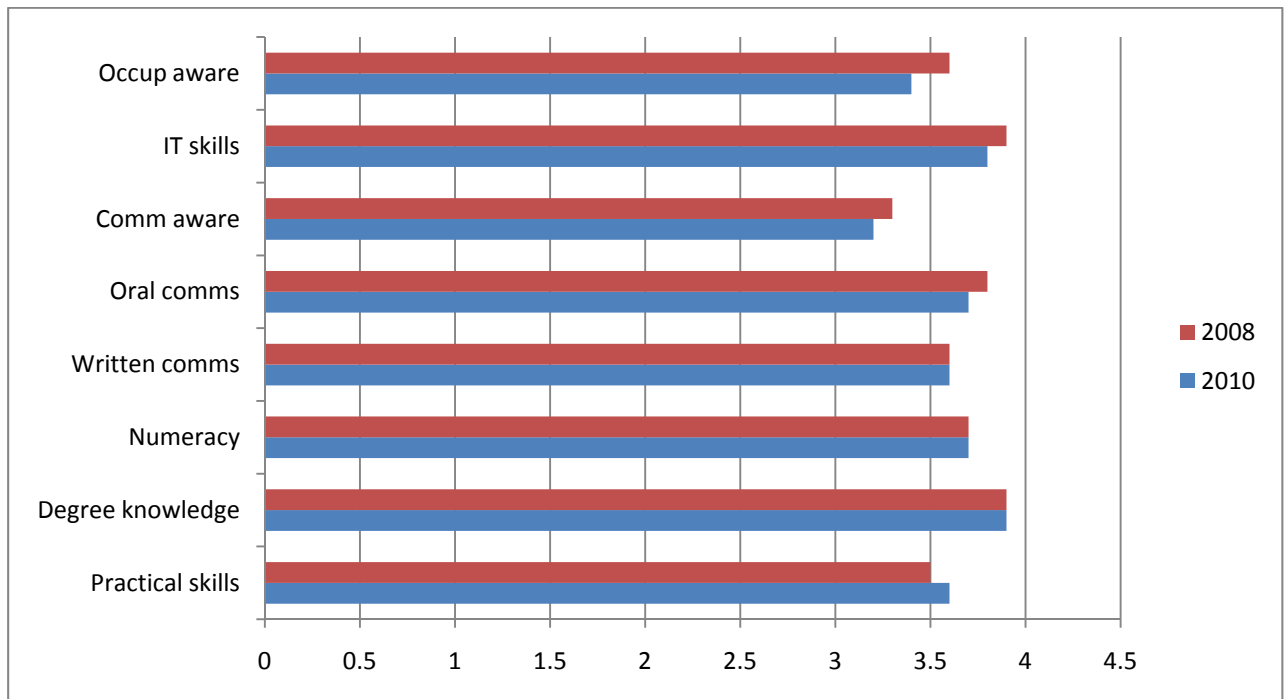
1. For comparison with Figure 5, 2008 graph for Importance attached to skills and levels of satisfaction that those skills were displayed by Newcastle University graduate applicants



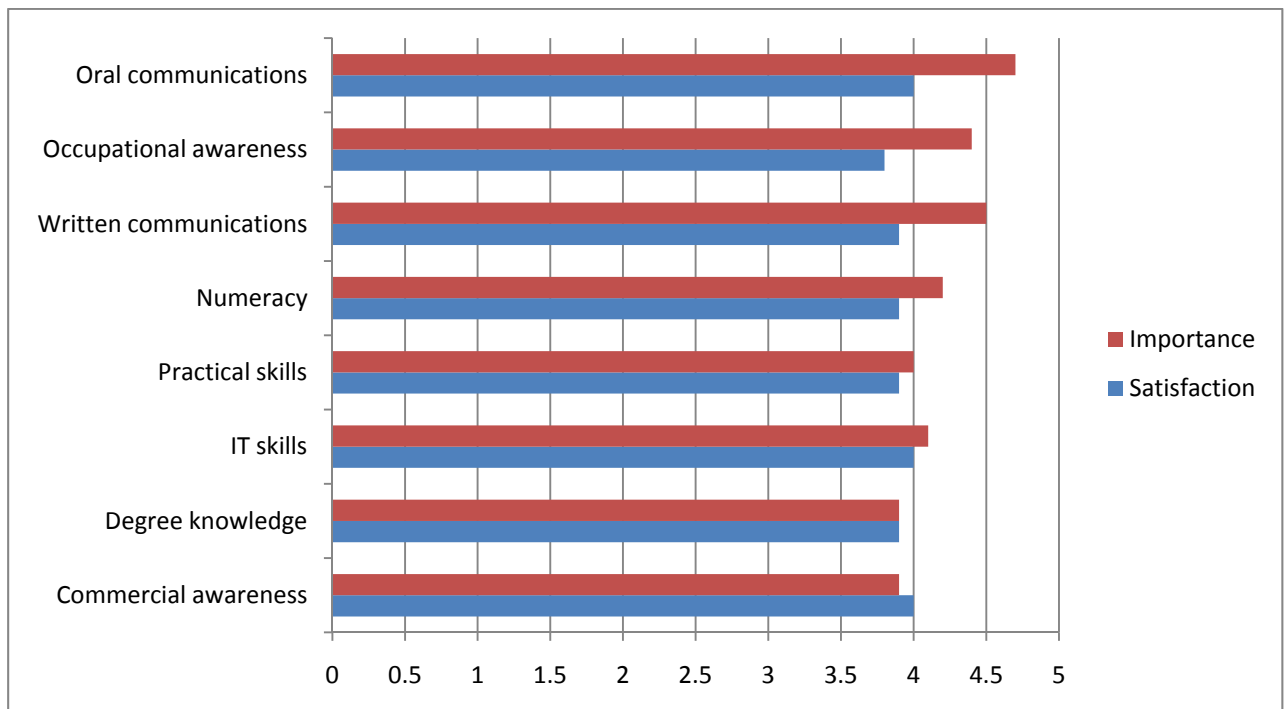
2. Comparison of the importance attached to skills displayed by Newcastle University graduate applicants by participating organisations in 2008 vs. 2010



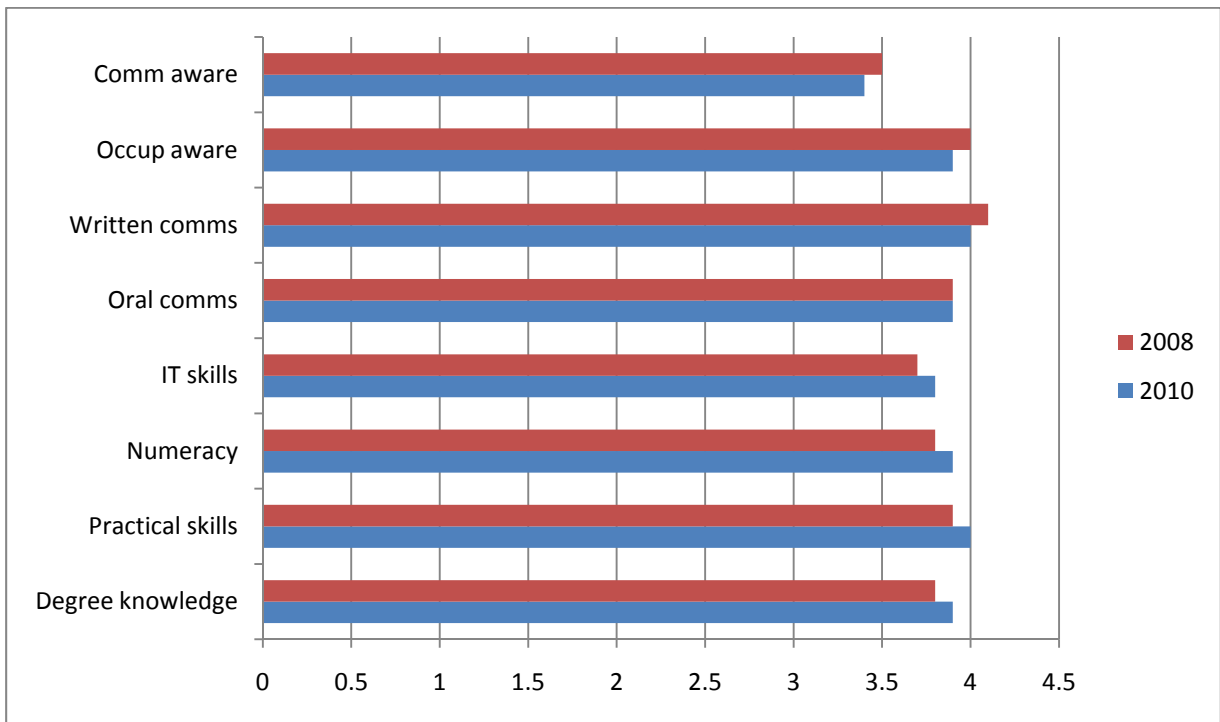
3. Comparison of participating organisations' satisfaction levels with skills shown by Newcastle University graduate applicants in 2008 vs. 2010



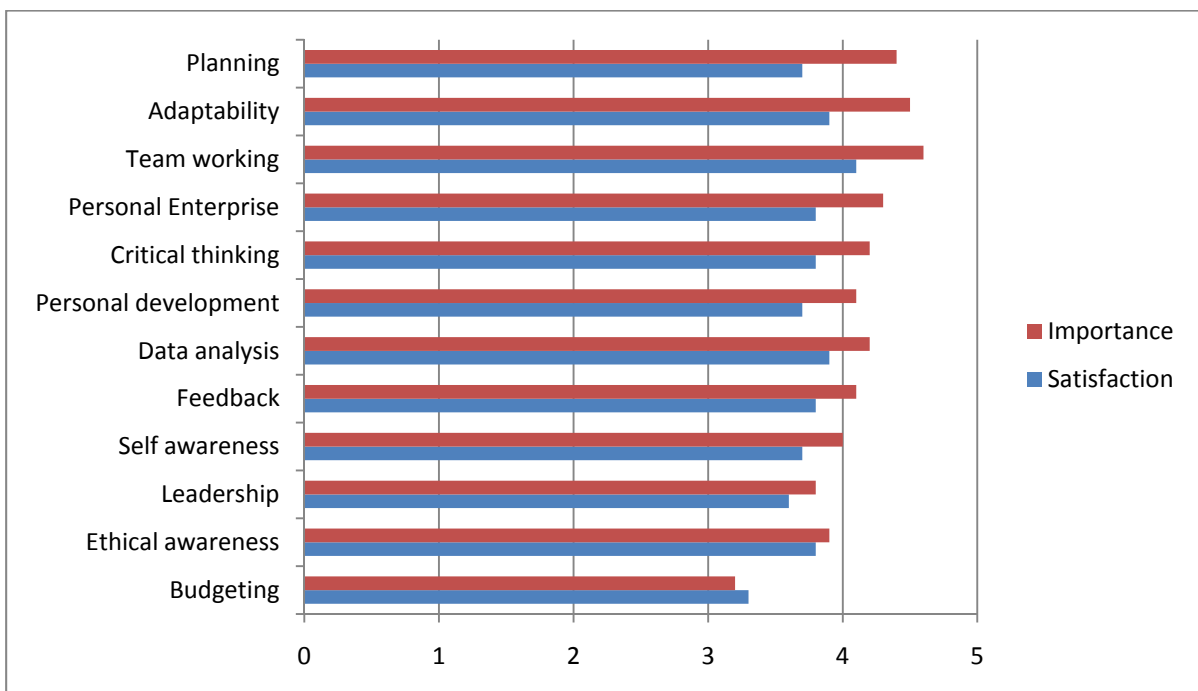
4. For comparison with Figure 9, 2008 graph for importance attached to skills and levels of satisfaction that those skills were displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees



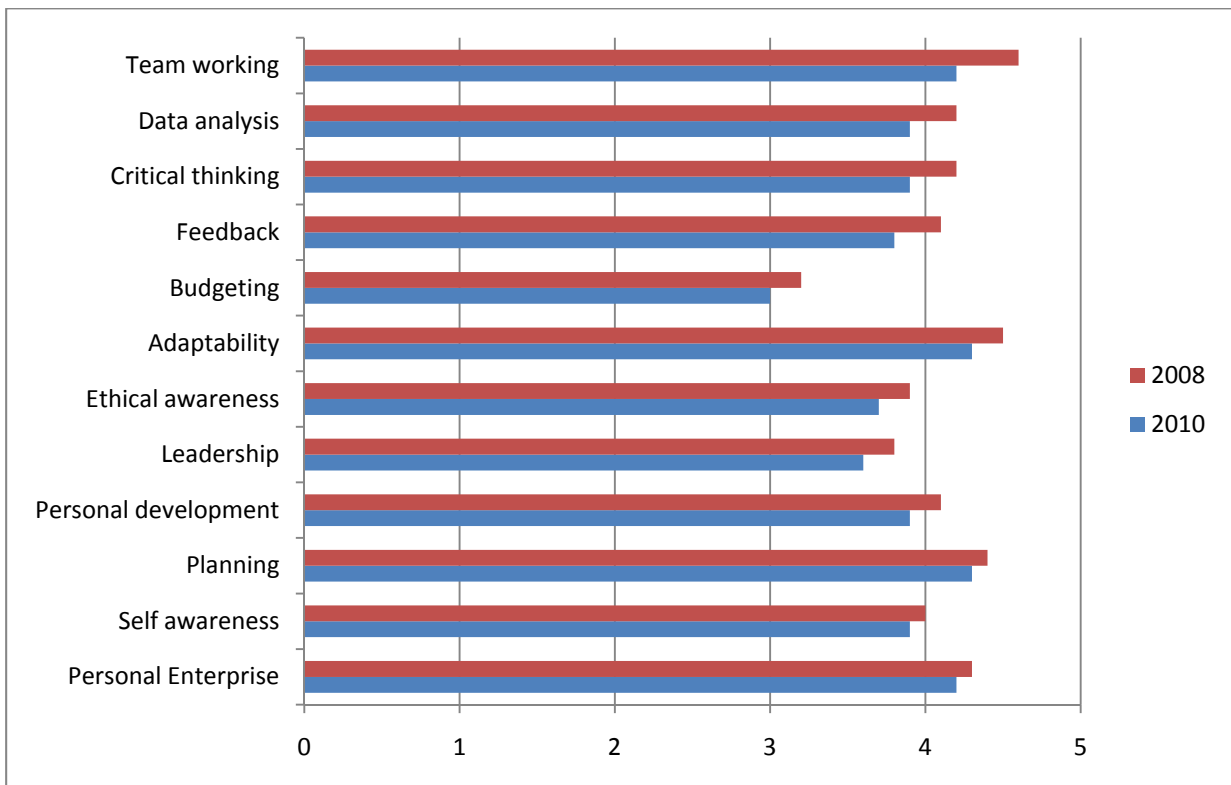
5. Comparison of participating organisations' satisfaction levels with skills shown by Newcastle University graduate employees in 2008 vs. 2010



6. For comparison with Figure 11, Importance attached to additional skills and levels of satisfaction that those skills were displayed by Newcastle University graduate employees in 2008



7. Comparison of the importance attached to additional skills shown by Newcastle University graduate employees by participating organisations in 2008 and 2010



8. Comparison of participating organisations' satisfaction levels with additional skills shown by Newcastle University graduate employees in 2008 and 2010

