

## Background

Students graduating from UK universities this year will be entering one of the toughest job markets in decades. The financial crisis has meant that the number of graduate jobs on offer has fallen dramatically. Companies in the banking, IT, construction, and accountancy sectors have made the most dramatic cuts to graduate positions. Having believed that a university degree was the ticket to a great job, it's little wonder that many graduates now feel cheated. Not only that, but the latest generation of graduates had to pay top-up fees, so are saddled with a heavier debt burden.

So what advice is being given to students who **are about to** finish their degrees? John Sturgess, a university Careers Advisor suggests that students need to lower their expectations. 'They should take whatever job they can get. Even if that means working in a supermarket, or doing bar work – any job is better than no job. Failing that, voluntary work can be a good idea – anything that will fill a gap on the CV and provide some form of work experience. The days of being able to pick and choose from a wealth of high-salaried graduate positions at top companies are over – competition for the small number of these jobs that still exist is immense.'

Bar work was not what most students had in mind when they began their degrees. Parents and students alike believed that a degree would result in a greater earning potential. Indeed the government actively encouraged as many young people as possible to go to university. Now the government is aiming to introduce internship schemes to help graduates gain valuable work experience. They are also offering grants to students who want to do post-graduate qualifications. This will keep some off the job market, but will further study actually solve the problem? According to Rebecca Ingram, a leading recruitment expert, it depends on the subject that students choose.

'Qualifications in science, engineering, teaching, or law are likely to be worthwhile, but those who choose the social sciences or arts subjects could be making matters worse for themselves – students with degrees in these subjects are really struggling at the moment.' The choice of university can also be an issue. With prospective employers able to pick and choose, graduates from less prestigious universities are at a clear disadvantage.

Suzanne Warwick, 22, graduated in 2009 from Swansea University with a 2:1 in History. She initially had a job working in HR for a property development company, but was made redundant two months ago. 'I was the newest member of staff – I'd only been there for three months, so it was a "last in, first out" policy. Since then I've applied for loads of different jobs, but I'm getting nowhere. Even temping agencies aren't an option. They've got so many people on their books that if you haven't got a year's experience, they're not interested.' And it doesn't look as though the situation is going to improve soon. The number of unemployed in the UK is continuing to grow. **It's soon to** reach three million, with around a third of those under the age of 25.

Despite the problems faced by graduates, applications to university are at a record high at a time when cuts to government-based funding mean that fewer places are available. Robert Berkeley from the National Union of Students maintains that young people should still aim to go to university. 'A degree is still the best way to improve your life prospects in the long-term. The people facing the biggest problems will be those without any qualifications. If graduates are prepared to relocate or take low-skilled jobs, it will be the unskilled who are left without work.' So although the current atmosphere on university campuses is one of panic and pessimism, competition for university places **is set to** increase.

## Exercises

### 1 Work with a partner and discuss these questions.

- 1 Did you find it easy to get your first job after school / university? Why? / Why not?
- 2 Was your first job exactly what you wanted? Why? / Why not?
- 3 How easy is it for recent graduates to get a job in your company?

### 2 Read the text quickly and choose the best title for the article from 1–3.

- 1 Companies hit by credit crunch cut recruitment schemes
- 2 Supermarket jobs are on the increase
- 3 Poor job-prospects for UK graduates

### 3 Read the text again and decide if the following statements are true (T) or false (F) or if it doesn't say (D).

- 1 UK students graduating now have more debts than students in the past.
- 2 Graduates are being advised to choose voluntary work rather than bar work.
- 3 A supermarket job can quickly lead to managerial opportunities for graduates.
- 4 According to Rebecca Ingram, students with a qualification in engineering will find it extremely difficult to get a job.
- 5 More students are now applying for science courses.

### 4 Read the text again and answer questions 1–4 in your own words.

- 1 Why does John Sturgess think that any job is better than no job?
- 2 What is the UK government doing about the problem?
- 3 Why did Suzanne Warwick lose her job in HR?
- 4 According to Robert Berkeley, which people are likely to suffer the most?

### 5 Work with a partner. Look at the phrases with *be* in bold in the text and answer the following questions.

- 1 Do the phrases refer to the past, the present, or the future?
- 2 Match the phrases to the following definitions.
  - a likely to happen
  - b will happen in the near future
  - c will happen in the very near future
- 3 Write three new sentences using the phrases.

### 6 Match phrases 1–7 from the text to definitions a–g. Refer to the text to help you if necessary.

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1 it's little wonder that      | a to have a problem / responsibility that is very difficult to deal with   |
| 2 to feel cheated              | b have an intention  |
| 3 to be saddled with something | c be willing / happy to do something   |
| 4 failing that                 | d it's not really surprising   |
| 5 be able to pick and choose   | e to have a free choice from a large selection of something  |
| 6 to have (something) in mind  | f to perceive that you have been unfairly prevented from achieving / obtaining something that should belong to you |
| 7 to be prepared to            | g if that is not possible  |

### 7 Work with a partner. Discuss these questions.

- 1 Are university graduates in your country facing a similar situation? If so, what is your government doing to help them?
- 2 Do you agree that any job is better than no job for UK graduates at the moment?
- 3 Which subjects do you think are most likely to help students get a job?
- 4 If you were about to leave school now, would you apply for a place at university? Why? / Why not?