

# International and Transnational Learning in Higher Education

## *A Study of Students' Career Development in China*

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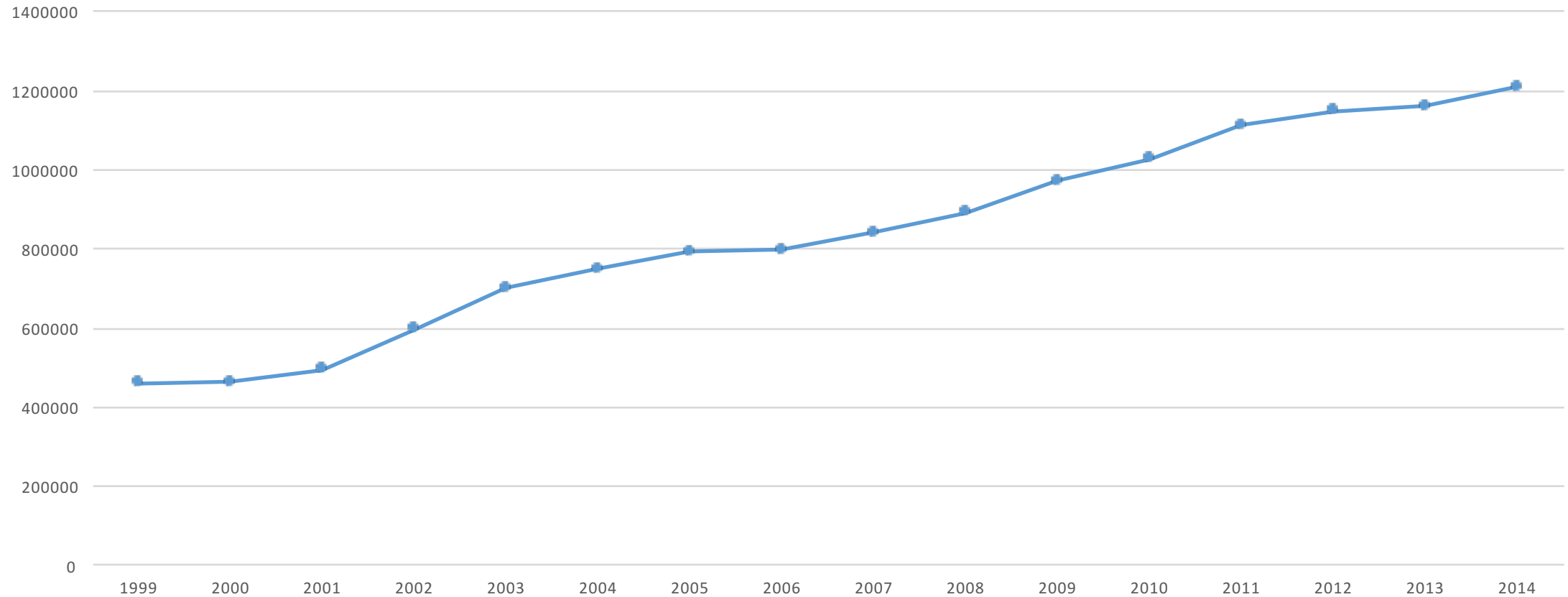
# Research Programme 1.5

## UK International Students and Graduates from East Asia:

### *Careers, Earnings, Jobs and Mobility*

# Research Background:

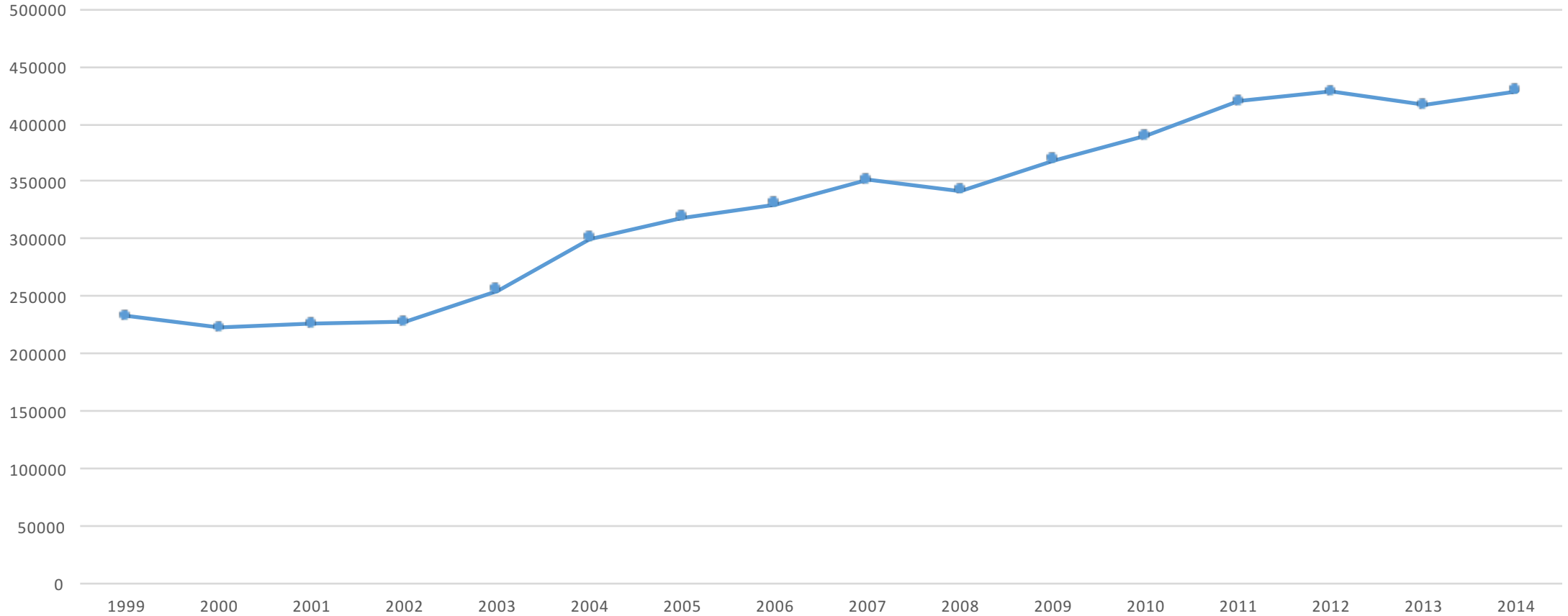
## The increasing international mobility of students in East Asia and Pacific Region



Source: UNESCO Database, retrieved from <http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=172>.

# Research Background:

## The increasing international students in the UK



Source: UNESCO Database, retrieved from <http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=172>.

# Research Background: Literature Review

- Diverse views of employers on graduates' international learning experience
  - Positive:
    - Europe in general, the research on the impact of Erasmus (+) reveals that participants value highly of their international experience in gaining their first job (Teichler & Janson, 2007). The employers' perception further confirms this point as over 30% of them employed the study experience as one recruitment standard and considered the mobile students as more competent performers (Bracht et al., 2006);
    - The UK in particular, the benefits are self-evident, with the lower unemployment of mobile undergraduate students (5% to 7%) and higher annual salary (£21,349 to £20,519, six months after graduation) compared with their local-trained peers (UK Higher Education International Unit, 2016);
    - Australia: the evidence proved that graduates who have studied overseas have been placed in a privileged career promotion path (Lawrence, 2006; Crossman & Clarke, 2010);
    - The US: the clear trend is employers in general and "some classes of employers in particular, place significant value on studying abroad" (Trooboff et al., 2008, p. 29), reinforced by the survey that two thirds of IES (Institute for International Education of Students, a consortium of 200 US colleges/ universities running study abroad programs) Abroad alumina acquired their first job within two months, 89% within six months (Preston, 2012; see also IES official website).
    - The outputs of Orahood et al (2004) in America (exchange program), Fielden et al (2007) in the UK (including both the exchange program and degree pursuit), Tiechler and Janson (2007) in Europe, King et al (2010) in the UK have generated the same promising results in mobile students employment possibility. The abovementioned information explains why IIE makes the conclusion that **"Study abroad is essential to future employability, earnings potential, and the economic well-being of students and communities,"** (IIE, 2014).

# Research Background:

## Literature Review

- Negative:
- The Norwegian graduates with foreign diplomas could obtain higher economic rewards a few years after graduation, they have encountered more difficulties in entering the national labor market. (Wiers-Jenssen & Try, 2005). Similar situations are found in other Nordic countries such as Denmark, Finland and Iceland (Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen 2010).
- The online survey results complete by 304 American employers also reveals while the international experiences was indeed rated and ranked highly by recruiters, particularly the long-term, the American experiences show that studying abroad only constitutes one aspect when recruiters assess individual candidates' competencies (Tuross, 2010).
- Pietro (2015), through the exploration of short-term exchange program in Italy, identifies an insignificant positive correlation between studying abroad and the subsequent employment rate while Cammeli (2001, cited from Peitro, 2015) reached the conclusion of no effect occurred.

# Research Background:

## Literature Review

- Based upon the above literature review, what matters may not be international study alone but what kinds of skills / experiences earned through the process of study abroad
- Employable skills

# Employability: Conceptual notes

- The reformulation from “employment” to “employability”
  - The responsibility transfer from the state and the employers and HEIs (consumerism principle and individualization of social problem) (Sin and Amaral, 2016);
  - The relationship change from relational to transactional between the employers and employees (Clarke, 2008).
- The two dimensions of employability
  - Absolute employability (individual characteristics)
  - Relative employability (contextual factors) (Brown et al., 2003)
  - Graduates may be “employable but not employed” (ibid, p. 122)



# The Pilot Study

## ■ Purpose of our pilot study:

- Deeper understanding of Chinese overseas and transnational graduates in job searching;
- Further refine the on-line questionnaire and in-depth interview outline for actual research in the UK;
- Develop a conceptual framework for international graduates' employability discourse (in process)

## ■ Questions for the preliminary study

- Whether international experience has enhanced the graduates' employment rates, employability skills and social mobility (for the later two items, the results are self-reported)?
- How other contextual factors influence graduates employment outcome? (the current report tentatively focuses on social capital gained through international learning experience)
- How students evaluate the career services they received from their universities?

# Research Methods

- On-line surveys
- Individual interviews
- Focus group discussion
- Purposive and snow ball sampling methods
- Targeting participants:
  - *graduates completing their education overseas returning to China*
  - *graduates completing their education through transnational HE programme in China, some of them having PG education overseas + returning to China (Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University (XJLU) ) in China*

# Research Project: Update

- Recruiting Research Associate for the project (Dr Han Xiao);
- Bringing in additional Research Staff (Dr Jin Jiang) for strengthening the research project;
- **Conducting Pilot in China** (just completed)
- **On-line survey: 106 participants** reflecting upon their career searches and job hunting experiences (*graduates completing their education overseas returning to China*)
- **On-line survey: 317 participants** reflecting upon their career searches and job hunting experiences (*graduates completing their education through transnational HE programme in China (80), some of them having PG education overseas + returning to China (237)*)

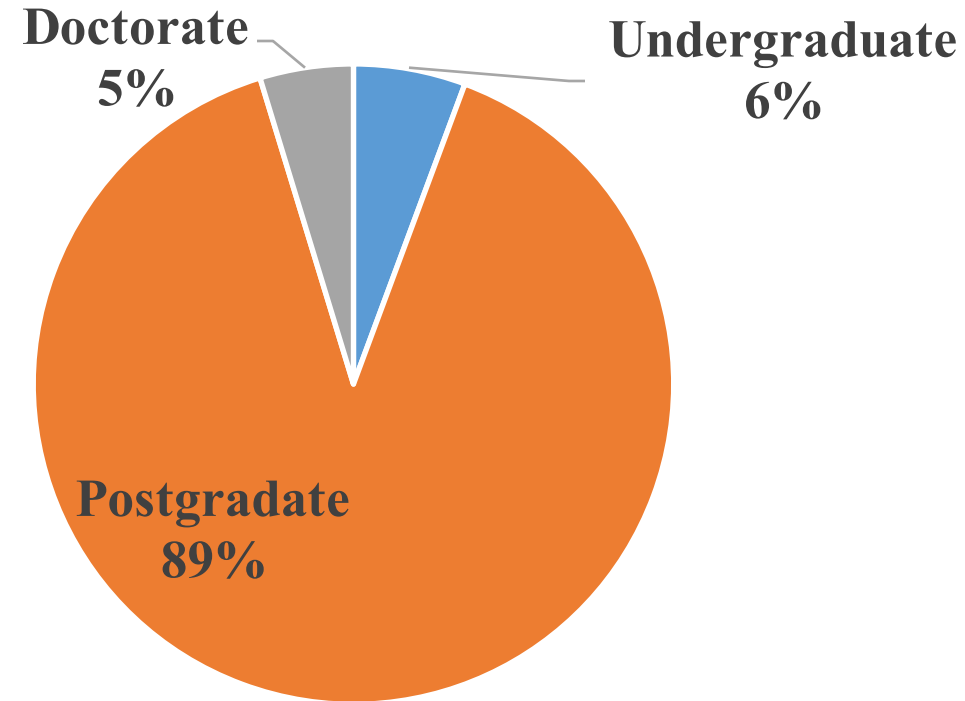
# Research Project: Update

- Conducted individual interviews with 20 participants;
- Following up interviews with graduates from XJLU in China **SOON**
- Drafting reports and working papers discussing the findings
- Refining the questionnaires for UK institutions
- Contacted and securing around 10 universities in the UK for assisting the research project

Preliminary findings of the pilot  
online survey (completed in January 2017)  
*for graduates completing their  
education overseas returning to China*

# Description of the sample

- 106 respondents from mainland China:
  - 50% male
  - 50% female
- Highest degree attained from the UK



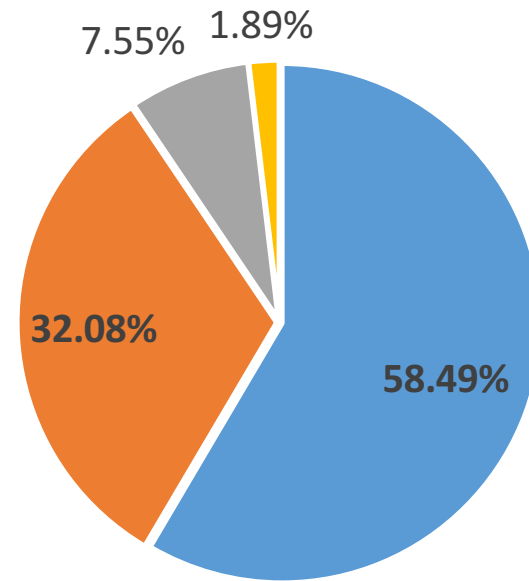
# Description of the sample

Major	Num.	Percent
Business & Finance	61	57.55%
Arts & Humanities	20	18.87%
Social Sciences	12	11.32%
Mathematical, Physical & Life Sciences	8	7.55%
Engineering	4	3.77%
Medical Sciences	1	0.94%
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>100%</b>

Graduation year	Num.	Num.	
2006-2012	2006	2	10 (9%)
	2009	1	
	2010	1	
	2011	4	
	2012	2	
Recent 5 years (2013-2017)	2013	7	86 (82%)
	2014	21	
	2015	40	
	2016	16	
	2017	2	
missing	10	10 (9%)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>		

# Graduates Employment Outcomes

- How long did you spend for finding the first job? ( $N=106$ )



■ within 3 months   ■ 3~6 months   ■ 6 months ~ 1 year   ■ 1 year and above



# International learning experience & graduates' employability

- Do you agree the experience of studying abroad has facilitated your career development?

	Num.	Percent
Strongly agree	38	35.85%
Agree	58	54.72%
Neither agree nor disagree	9	8.49%
Disagree	1	0.94%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	

# International learning experience & graduates' employability

- The experience of studying abroad improved employable skills & soft skills:

Employable skills	Score
Tolerance of Ambiguity (acceptance of other people's culture and attitudes and adaptability)	4.93
Confidence (trust in own competence)	3.65
Vigor (ability to solve problems)	3.61
Curiosity (openness to new experiences)	3.21
Decisiveness (ability to make decisions)	2.92
Serenity (awareness of own strengths and weaknesses)	2.67

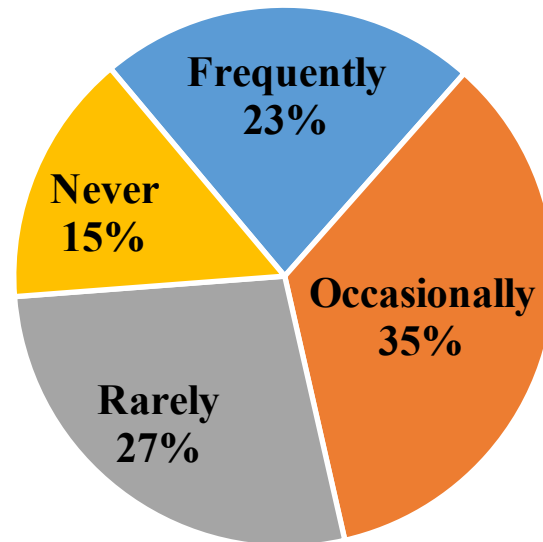
Soft skills	Score
Knowledge of other countries	4.43
Foreign language proficiency	4.34
Communication skills	4.08
Creativity	4.01
Critical thinking and analysis	3.07

Note: Higher score means more improvement in a certain skill.

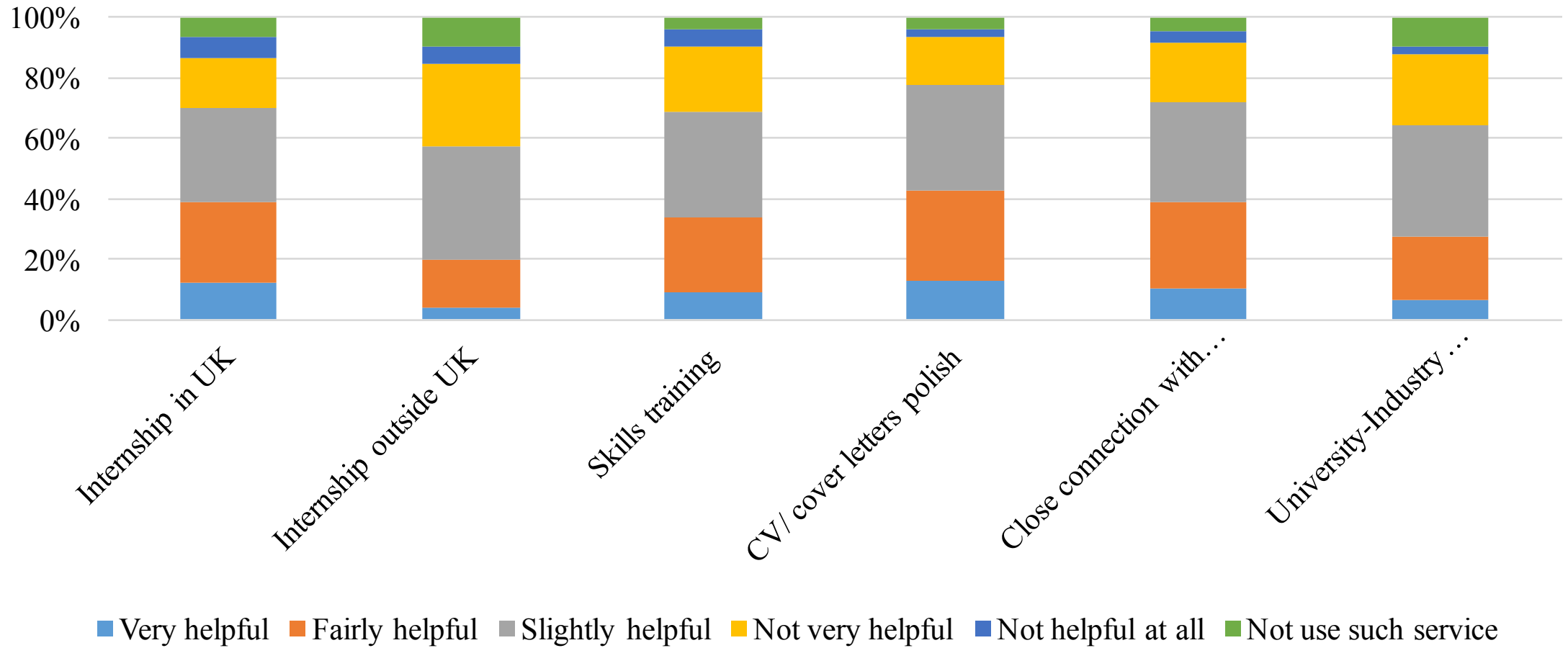
The score is measured by the equation:  $(\sum \text{frequency} \times \text{weights}) / \text{num. of respondents}$ , where frequency is num. of the option is selected; weights indicate the ranking of the option, ranging from 6 to 1, indicating most improvement to least improvement.

# Career service of the universities in UK

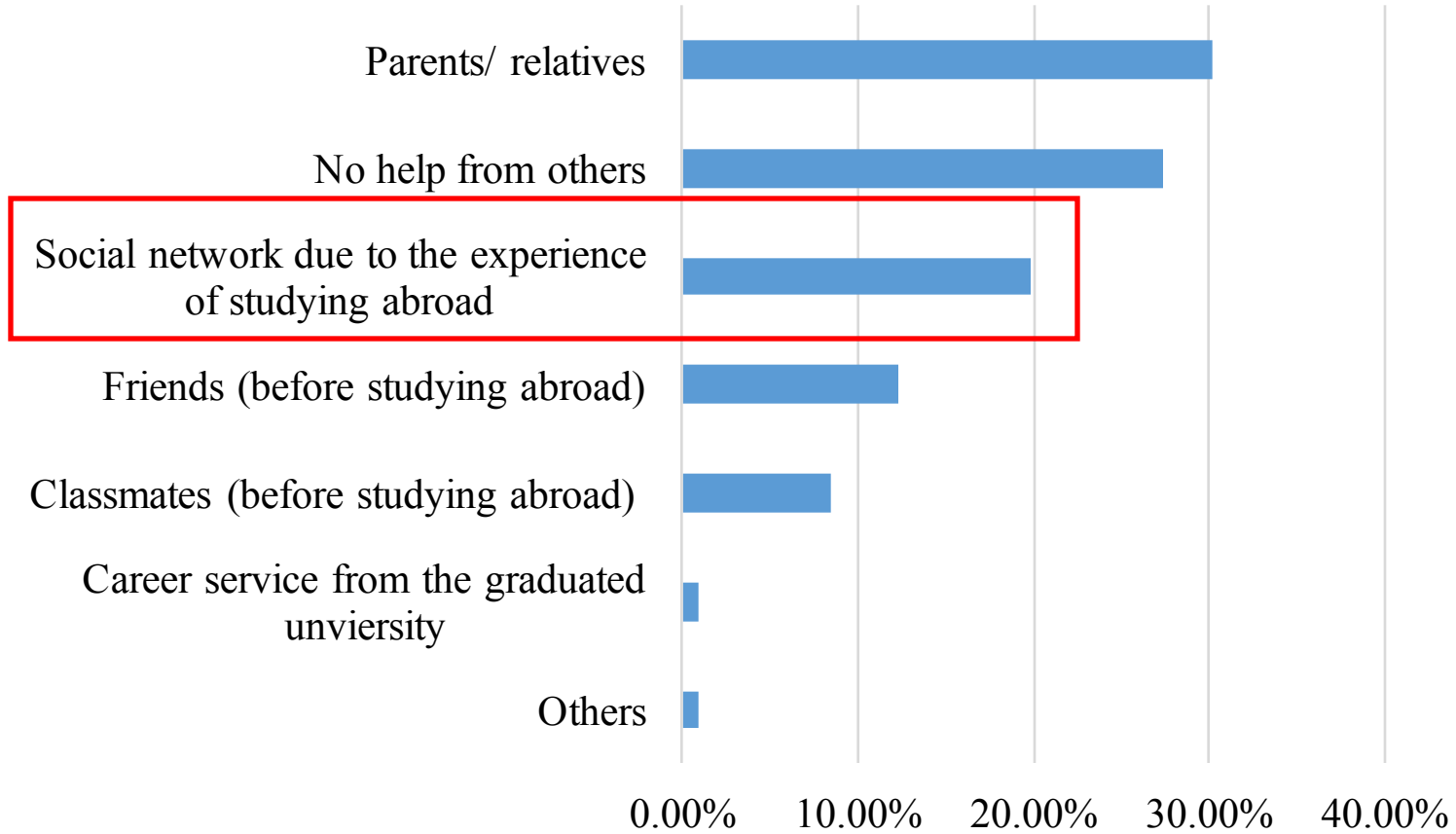
- How often did you use the Career Service in your graduated university in the UK? ( $N=106$ )



# Evaluations of the career service for employment (N=106)



# Main help for attaining the first job (N=106)



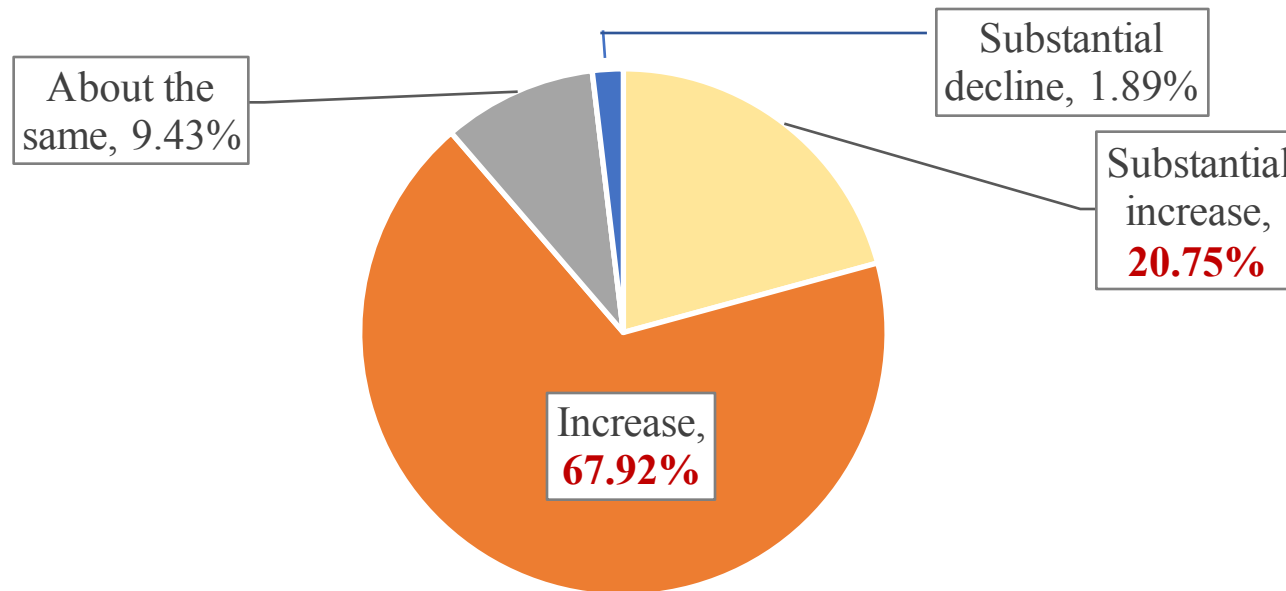
# Perceived social mobility: Channels for **upward** mobility becomes **narrower**

- “For international higher education graduates return your home countries, **the channels for them to have upward social mobility are becoming narrower than before**”, do you agree with this statement?

		Percent
Strongly agree	28.30	<b>68.87</b>
Agree	40.57	
Neither agree nor disagree	16.98	16.98
Disagree	12.26	<b>14.15</b>
Strongly disagree	1.89	
Total (N=106)	100	100

# Perceived social mobility: Remain **positive**

- How do you expect the changes of your social economic status three year later? (N=106)



# Recap of the pilot study

- Online Survey for Chinese young people graduating from UK and working in mainland China: 106 respondents.
- Preliminary findings:
  1. **International learning experience on their employment outcomes and employability skills**
    - Over 90% of the respondents suggest their experience of studying abroad facilitated their career development.
    - The experience of studying abroad improved employable skills & soft skills
  2. **Career service of the universities in UK**
    - Around 60% of the respondents used the Career Service in their university in the UK
    - 50-60% of the respondents evaluated different kinds of Career Service were helpful for their employment
    - In addition, around 20% of the respondents received main help from their social network due to the experience of studying abroad to get their first job.
  3. **Perceived social mobility**
    - Around 70% of the respondents suggest the channels for them to have upward social mobility are becoming narrower than before.
    - Around 90% of the respondents remain positive about their future social mobility. They expect the changes of their social economic status will increase three year later.



# Plan for the actual survey

- We have secured support from the following universities in UK

No.	University	Office
1	Bath Spa University	Office of the Provost
2	Kings College London	Supporter Operations
3	Lancaster University	Alumni and Friends Engagement
4	Sheffield Hallam University	International Development
5	University of Bristol	Careers Service
6	University College London	Office of the Vice-Provost (Development)
7	University of Nottingham	Careers and Employability
8	University of Sheffield	Development Services, Development, Alumni Relations & Events

# Plan for the actual survey

- Modify the questionnaire of the pilot survey
- Conduct an online survey with the support of the universities in UK (in particular the offices of career service, and alumni relations)
- Target respondents:

International graduates from UK universities returning to East Asia, specifically, mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia.

# Proposed Outputs

- Conceptual paper on the changing relationship among the state, labor market and HEIs as a whole, and between employers-employees as individuals, from the perspective of international education (within Chinese social and economic background)
- Conceptual paper to synthesize the influencing factors of international mobile students employability (from the theoretical lens of social/ cultural/ economic capital, Bourdieu, various years; human capital-country-specific skills and general skills, Jenssen and Try, 2005; signally effect, Spence, 1973; “hot” and “cold” knowledge, Ball and Vincent, 1998, etc);
- A paper comparing different job searches and career development across international students, local-trained students and transnational graduates;
- A paper comparing graduate employment for those having overseas learning experiences across Asian countries with particular reference to broader social/ economic/ political backgrounds.

Thank you

*Look forward to collaborating with you!*