

*Final Report*

# **Tracer Study of Graduates of Universities in Bangladesh**

*Submitted to*

**Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP)  
University Grants Commission of Bangladesh  
Ministry of Education**

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*Submitted by*



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## List of Abbreviation

AIF	:	Academic Innovation Fund
AUST	:	Ahsanullah University of Science & Technology
BAU	:	Bangladesh Agricultural University
BDT	:	Bangladeshi Taka
BIDS	:	Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies
BNCC	:	Bangladesh National Cadet Core
BRACU	:	BRAC University
BRU	:	Begum Rokeya University
BSMMU	:	Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University
BSMRAL	:	Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University
BUET	:	Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology
BUP	:	Bangladesh University of Professionals
CGPA	:	Cumulative Grade Point Average
ComU	:	Comilla University
CU	:	Chittagong University
CUET	:	Chattagram University of Engineering and Technology
CVASU	:	Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Science University
DU	:	Dhaka University
DUET	:	Dhaka University of Engineering Technology
EWU	:	East-West University
FGD	:	Focus Group Discussions
GPA	:	Grade point Average
GU	:	Gana University
HEQEP	:	Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project

HSC	:	Higher Secondary Certificate
HSTU	:	Haji Danesh Science and Technology University
ICT	:	Information and Communications Technology
IIUC	:	International Islamic University of Chittagong
IUB	:	Independent University of Bangladesh
JKKNIU	:	Jatiyo Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University
JnU	:	Jagannath University
JSTU	:	Jessore University of Science & Technology
JU	:	Jahangir Nagar university
KU	:	Khulna University
KUET	:	Khulna University of Engineering and Technology
MBSEU	:	Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University
NGO	:	Non-governmental Organizations
NSTU	:	Noakhali Science and Technology University
NSU	:	North-South University
PSTU	:	Patuakhali Science and Technology Institute
RU	:	Rajshahi University
RUET	:	Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology
SAU	:	Sylhet Agricultural University
SBAU	:	Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University
SD	:	Standard Deviation
SSC	:	Secondary School Certificate
SUST	:	Shahjalal University of Science & Technology
TOR	:	Terms of Reference
UGC	:	University Grants Commission



## Executive Summary

“Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP),” the flagship project of the Ministry of Education, works with the aim to improve the quality of teaching and learning of the tertiary education institutions of the country. The students of these institutes are supposed to be the ultimate beneficiaries of the various activities undertaken through this project. To gain broader knowledge about the employability of the students of the beneficiary departments the project authority aimed to carry out two rounds of ‘tracer study’ of university students and graduates, with a special focus on the impact of AIF<sup>1</sup> support.

The broad objectives of this particular tracer study (round two) are: to analyze the current economic and labor market outcomes of university graduates and relevance of university education to the requirements of the labor market in Bangladesh.

The study analysis is largely based on quantitative research techniques. The study sample consists of AIF receiving universities and departments. To know the current employment status of graduates and assess their competencies from various perspectives we conduct surveys among current students, the most recent graduates, institute or departmental heads, and employers of the graduates of these universities. The survey approach includes structured questionnaires, and focus group discussions (FGDs) of selected current students. The objective of FGDs is to document detailed observations, opinions, and suggestions of students to supplement the findings of the quantitative data.

The study draws a sample of academic departments/institutes from the list of 40 AIF receiving (all rounds) public and private universities of Bangladesh. Out of these 40, 36 universities are selected as the sampling frame of this study.<sup>2</sup> Of the 36 universities, the included numbers of public and private universities are 27 and 9, respectively. We select 82 departments using both purposive and random sampling technique. The basic stratification criteria are based on the following academic disciplines: (1) Humanities and Arts, Social Science, (2) Business; (3) Science & Engineering; (4) Agriculture, Biotechnology and Health, and (5) Others. For the student survey, all the students currently at the semester 6 and 8 (the third and fourth year) of the sampled department who were present at the day of data collection have been interviewed using self-administered questionnaire under close supervision of the research team members. A total of 1,574 students were interviewed. For the graduate survey, randomly selected graduates (who graduated during the 2015-2016 academic year have been traced out and surveyed. We end up surveying 975 graduates. We include five categories of graduates in our survey in terms of their employment status. They include employed, unemployed, not in labor force, full time and part

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<sup>1</sup> Academic Innovation Fund (AIF) is regarded as the cornerstone of the HEQEP. The key objective of AIF is to improve the quality and standard of the teaching-learning and research environment in higher education institutions implementing innovative ideas of the universities. The AIF has supported cutting-edge research and new innovations in many subject areas through over 300 sub-projects across several public and private universities.

<sup>2</sup>We exclude Open University, National University, BSMMU and BUP as per the Terms of Reference of the study.

time study and self-employed graduates. We also collected information from 82 department heads of these universities. To know the perceptions of the demand side we interviewed 154 employers of a sample of surveyed graduates.

Questions for all four types of respondents were recorded as (i) categorical responses using Likert scale, (ii) Multiple choice questions, (iii) Dichotomous questions (i.e. yes/no responses) and (iv) Open-ended questions. In the case of categorical response questions, respondents answer to what extent they agree to a statement/question using a five-point Likert scale from fully agree to fully disagree. We also ask how much importance respondents would attach to certain criteria related to job searching, the relevance of certain training provided by the university, relevance of university degree to potential employers, etc.

The data analyses comprise of summary of descriptive statistics of all the respondents- students, graduates, and employers those we interview. Summary statistics of all variables related to teaching, learning, job searching facilities, relevance of university degree to potential employers and post-employment training facilities including many others have been documented. Using simple t distribution, we make an attempt to compare the mean of responses between different groups and provide disaggregated analysis wherever appropriate.

In interview with current students, we asked why they selected their respective universities; the factor which was the most relevant (average 2.66, on a 4 point scale) to them was its relevance to the labor market. The students were also asked about the reasons for selecting their particular subject of study. The most relevant factor for choosing a subject was the relevance of the subject to individuals' earlier education (3.36 on a 4-point scale), and the least relevant factor in deciding which subject to choose is the influence of someone else. When the same question was asked to FGD participants, most of the students said that they were admitted in this subject by the merit position of admission test. Some said that they got admitted in this particular subject influenced by their elders and relatives.

The students were also asked regarding the relevance of their undergraduate education for development of some selected skills. They rated the relevance of his university's training on ICT skill for developing computer-related skills, with the least mean level of agreement among others. The finding show that students are involved in various part-time works such as tuition, different social organizations and different types of clubs while they are least involved in student politics. However, public university students are more involved in student politics and tuition than private university students.

The five most important skills for labor market, according the opinion of the students, are work ethics (3.66), ability to communicate in English (3.64), time management (3.63), fundamental computer skill (3.60) and ability of working under pressure (3.59). On the other hand, the 5 skill categories they possess with which they are most satisfied are courteousness (3.30), positive attitude (3.24), work ethics (3.22), teamwork (3.05) and professionalism (2.92). They said that

the most effective medium for job searching is surfing through different websites. On the issue of required job markets skills and skills acquired through the programs, the students said that there is a gap between them. The students do not acquire satisfactory skills required for the jobs through their university education.

When we asked the students about their perception of the extent of effectiveness of their universities' job search support services, about 34 (37) percent of the 260 respondents replied that it is effective (somewhat effective) and 21 percent answered that it is very effective. Only 8 percent of students replied that the service is not effective at all.

In interview with 975<sup>3</sup> university graduates of Bangladesh, we found unemployment rate among university graduates in Bangladesh is 38.6 percent. Thirty-four percent of the graduates get a job within 2 to 3 years of their graduation. Only 5.77 percent of the graduates choose to be self-employed. Rate of self-employment is relatively higher among male graduates than among female graduates. About 14 percent female graduates do not enter labor market soon after graduation. Such a high rate (as compared to male) of female graduates moving out of the labor market after graduation may be explained by either pure economic factor (i.e. educated females find it worth to remain in the household activities in order to maximize their family wellbeing) or, social and cultural factors; that force them to go out of the labor market. Employability varies by the type of university. Rate of employment is higher (44 percent) among private university graduates than public university graduates (32 percent). More male graduates of private universities are found to be self-employed than public universities.

Interestingly, more than 50 percent of the self-employed graduates said that they wanted to be an entrepreneur to begin with. However, 15 percent said that they have set up own business as an alternative to "good job." It seems that once someone decides to be an entrepreneur, he/she wishes to continue (80 percent of them) it in the future. About 15 percent of university graduates pursue further academic degrees either on a full or part time basis. About two third of the full/part time students do part time income earning activities (i.e. tuition, own business etc.). About 7 percent of the graduates are out of the labor market. Thirty-seven percent of them have decided to study more and have not entered the labor market by choice. Another 28 percent of them have received and rejected a job offer and went out of the job market because of low pay offer. 17 percent of them got married (most are females) and stopped searching for the job. As a huge pool of graduates out of the labor force is those who wish to continue study, it can be inferred that they will join the market in a near future, after completing further education and/or training. Another finding is that about 70 percent of the graduates out of labor market think that a proper training is needed in order for improving their job market skills.

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<sup>3</sup> We collect graduate data in two different stages. First, we collect information of 903 graduates through in-person interviews using a structured questionnaire. Second, in order to increase the sample size, we approached around 150 graduates through e-mail and phone to fill-out questionnaire online or over phone. Finally, 72 of them completed our questionnaire, resulting in 975 graduates for our analysis.

The rate of unemployment is higher for science graduates compared to humanities and business graduates. Although the rate of employment is also higher for science graduates (honors) than other disciplines (i.e. humanities and business), rate of employment for science postgraduates is pretty low compared to the other disciplines like humanities and/or business. Business graduates opt for further study more than science and humanities graduates do. Business students are more likely to be out of the labor force than their humanities and science counterparts.

Interestingly, there is a strong correlation between parents' education and graduate employability in Bangladesh. More than 40 percent of the graduates whose parents have completed master's degree got a job after completing their university education, whereas this rate is almost half (21.9 percent) in the case of the graduates whose parents do not have any formal education. Likewise, the rate of unemployment is inversely related to the parental education in Bangladesh. Fifty-six percent of the graduates whose fathers have no formal education are unemployed and only 27.8 percent of the graduates whose fathers have completed master's degree are unemployed.

Majority of the employed graduates in our sample serve in the multinational sector (about 60 percent). Among others, government and autonomous sector jobs are dominant. Only 2.7 percent of the employed graduates went for informal sector jobs. Private university graduates get more multinational sector jobs than the public university graduates. In contrast, public university graduates get more government sector jobs than private university graduates.

Monthly nominal salary for the graduates at the entry level varies between 28,000 BDT to 30,000 BDT. Although the average monthly nominal salary does not vary much over the type of job, it varies over the terminal university degree a graduate holds. For instance, a business post-graduate earns on average 42,240 BDT per month, whereas an arts post-graduate earns on average 33,000 BDT. We also observe that having a postgraduate/master's degree substantially increases average monthly pay, an increase by 100 percent in some occasion (i.e. business honors vs. business masters).

We looked at the reasons for graduates to choose their current job. Thirty-five percent of the employed graduates said that the reason for choosing their current job is that it was the best fit with their respective educational background. Another 30 percent said that they have chosen this job due to a "good pay." Among other reasons, working conditions, reputation of the institute, good location etc. played role in graduates' job selection decision.

With regard to skill, according to the graduates, communication in English, work Ethics, and basic computer skills are three most important skills among a set of 22 job-market relevant skills which are crucial for getting jobs. We interviewed 154 employers of the graduates who we traced out through our graduate surveys. Approximately 93 percent of the employers in our survey reported that they were specifically looking for a university graduate while recruiting for a position. This means employers try to hire university graduates as their employee with a belief

that university graduates are well prepared for jobs, in terms of skills, compared to other graduates.

The employers said that overall education qualification and cognitive skills were two key factors in hiring decision of existing graduate employees. Academic degree (non-technical), personality, level of technical skills (demonstrated skill), communication skill and academic GPA are the top five skills that influence an employer to hire a new graduate.

The mean value of graduate's skill and knowledge level, evaluated by graduates' themselves shows that the mean values of the graduate's skill level required for the jobs are over 3.5 or close to 4, indicating all categories of skills are very important for jobs. The highly evaluated skills categories are time management, basic computer skill, skill in verbal communication, interested to learn new issues and ability to take decisions. The skills which need further upgradation in order to succeed in professional life are training on ICT (66.67 percent) and training on communication skills (35 percent). In order to be able to prioritize the areas of improvement, we asked employers to highlight the issues where focus needs to be put on by universities. In this case, we see highest percentage of employers (77.63 percent of the cases) putting greater emphasis on communication skills, followed by the skills of use of ICT.

We observe that roughly 65 percent of the employers provide some sort of training for the newly hired staffs. The length of the training courses varies depending on the nature of the job but on average the length of the training courses are 24 days. We find that 64 percent of the employers report that the trainings are provided as an orientation so that the new employees get to know about the administrative process of the establishment.

The statistics show that graduates mainly use the internet (online web portal) and newspaper to search for a job. About 79 and 64 percent of the total graduates mentioned they use these two instruments respectively for searching a job. Only 15.09 percent of graduates said that they used employment support service of the university. This indicates the job support service of the university is not yet an effective instrument for searching jobs. The job support service in private universities is better than public universities based on the responses provided by the graduates. Of the total graduates receiving job support service from the university, about 37.4 percent said they receive support in the form of counseling. There is still a plenty of scope for the improvement of this job support service since only about 5 to 7 percent of employed graduates found their job through university job support service.

Majority of the fresh graduates may not have right information about the labor market. They start looking for jobs haphazardly without having idea about the sectors to target where the employers have demand for graduates like them. This may ultimately result in a mismatch of demand and supply of skills. Though both the employers and the universities are aware of the importance and benefits of university-industry collaboration, we found serious lack of this sort of collaboration taking place in reality. Only 40 percent (62 out of 154 respondents) of the employers were found

to maintain some kind of collaboration with universities, and only 33.12 percent of them maintained such partnership on a “sustained” way. On the other hand, majority of the departments (almost 65 per cent) mentioned about maintaining some kind of relationship with industries. The private universities were found more active in maintaining industry linkage compared to public universities. The extent of collaboration also varies depending on which faculty the department belongs to.

From the university side, the mostly mentioned collaboration channels were reviewing and updating curriculum (71 per cent arrangement of internship for students (67.3 per cent) and opportunity to visit the workplace (58.2%). For employers the key ways of collaboration comes in the form of “professional network with teachers” (69.4%) followed by “recruitment of new employees (67.7 %). Students expressed concerns about the mismatch between the up to date technologies used in the industries and the lagging behind curriculum followed in the education system.

The effectiveness of AIF in improving the quality of education (e.g., skills), and employability (e.g., job search) of graduates was also scrutinized. Among 1,437 of the current student respondents, 42 percent replied that AIF facilities are very effective, 51 percent said somewhat effective and only 7 percent told that these are not effective at all. Of the total 302 surveyed employed graduates, 41 percent said that AIF facilities are very effective, 50 percent said it is somewhat effective in improving skills and job search, and 9.6 percent graduates did not find the AIF effective in improving their skill.

The mean level of the effectiveness of the AIF facilities that help to improve skills and to get a job is either close to 3 or a little over 3, implying all the facilities that have been provided through AIF are effective in improving skills and obtaining jobs. The three key facilities as responded by all employed graduates are the establishment of multimedia, facilities for effective teaching, and classroom renovation. The results also show that about 36.6 percent of the department/institute heads said the AIF supported facilities in improving institutional quality are very effective. Twenty-eight percent of the department heads said the AIF supported facilities are effective in improving skill and employability of students.

One of the goals of university education is to produce quality graduates ready to enter the job market. A graduate tracer study is a comprehensive, objective, and evaluative method to know the current employment status of graduates and assess competencies of graduates from various perspectives—from the view point of the institutions the graduates have passed from, their employers, and assessment by the graduates themselves and also from the students who will graduate soon. By identifying the current status of the graduates this endeavor will not only evaluate the performances of universities’ but also identify possible scope of improvement of their educational program, which will serve as a basis for future planning of activities of AIF.