

Success and Struggle

Employment and Career Prospects for Former Students supported by the **Rural Education Access Programme**



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Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation
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Our Vision

Our Vision is to see hundreds of young rural South Africans equipped with the skills, qualifications, values and motivation necessary to effectively lead and serve their communities.

Our Mission

Our Mission is to offer talented and motivated young South Africans from marginalised rural schools the chance to study at high quality tertiary institutions and provide them with the support and guidance they need to graduate, sustain themselves and become the principled leaders of tomorrow.

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1. Introduction: Study Background

Over the last 16 years, the Rural Education Access Programme (REAP) has gained much experience in its primary work of supporting disadvantaged rural South Africans to gain access to tertiary institutions and successfully negotiate the many challenges they face during their studies. While REAP has been very successful in this work,¹ it has, like most other tertiary bursary programmes, to date been unable to concentrate much on assisting its alumni to bridge a second gap; that of negotiating access to and success in the workplace.²

By 2015, feedback from REAP's alumni had, however, indicated that although the attaining of a tertiary qualification (especially a university degree) significantly enhances a rural young person's chances of gaining employment, there remain barriers to both entry at an appropriate level and advancement, particularly for those wanting to access the corporate sector. Such barriers were thought to include the lack of any family culture of higher education or professional employment (few role models); inadequate job search skills, CV writing and interview technique; minimal career guidance and very limited sense of the possible options; poor written and verbal communication skills in English; lack of structured work experience; and minimal exposure to the corporate world and the expected (often unspoken) behavioural norms and organisational culture. REAP suspected that these challenges are more acute in certain disciplines/sectors than others, especially where there was limited workplace experience as part of the study programme.

REAP therefore, with funding from the JP Morgan Chase Foundation, initiated the "Bridging the Gap between Higher Education and the Workplace" project, and sought to partner with other organisations in this project for the purposes of producing the best possible approach and outcomes, not only for the project, but for organisations working in the education sector in general and for policy makers. One aspect of this project was to produce comprehensive research on the above dynamics of the working world as experienced by rural graduates and diplomates. REAP therefore approached Dr Andrew Hartnack to explore a partnership aimed at the production of focussed and comprehensive research exploring the employment dynamics faced by REAP alumni.

This research project therefore sought to provide a much clearer picture, gained by the production and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, of these challenges and dynamics experienced by REAP alumni (all rural graduates from a disadvantaged background) in a range of geographically and professionally diverse post-study settings. It sought primarily

¹ See the 2011 tracking study: Hartnack, A. (2011). *Humble Beginnings, Bright Future: A Tracking Study of the First Full Intake of Students on the Rural Education Access Programme a Decade on*. Cape Town: REAP. See also REAP Annual Reports from the last 15 years.

² See Hartnack, A. (2012). *DG Murray Trust-supported Bursary Programmes: A Comparative Review of Models and Impacts*.

to identify what, if any, are the enduring barriers to graduates from previously disadvantaged backgrounds securing appropriate and sustainable employment, with the potential of upward mobility. The research questions thus focussed on the following aspects of the REAP alumni experience and workplace situation:

- Their family background and study histories/choices, and the pre-existing challenges they faced before embarking on their career path;
- Their employment/un-employment histories and the journeys they experienced between graduation/leaving their studies and finding their current employment;
- Their experiences in trying to secure employment and the challenges they faced in identifying and accessing suitable employment;
- Their experiences, challenges, and barriers within the workplace;
- Metrics around salary, full/part-time employment, length of time securing employment, retention/mobility;
- Their suggestions as to how they could have been better prepared.

Apart from the alumni, the research team also sought to engage a range of HR practitioners at key relevant employers to solicit their observations regarding the recruitment and performance of graduates from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly from rural areas. Questions of interest for this cohort included:

- Quality of written applications, CVs, interview performance;
- Identification of deficits at time of recruitment;
- Assessments of how graduates perform once in the workplace and identification of deficits in preparation that could be addressed pre-graduation.

The terms of reference for the research were consequently to:

- Identify a suitable sample of REAP alumni (selected from the REAP database of roughly 350 individuals), making sure to include recent and less recent alumni and ensure that they are representative of relevant disciplines/employment types, gender, and the different geographical areas in South Africa where alumni now find employment.
- Identify employers in both large urban centres (Cape Town, Gauteng, Durban) and rural areas/small centres for inclusion in the research process.
- Develop research protocols, including questionnaires, focus-group discussion guides, and qualitative interview guides, for use during the data-gathering phase of the research.
- Conduct qualitative and quantitative research with the identified cohort of alumni and employers through a combination of telephonic interviews, face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions.
- Analyse the data and produce a detailed report (to be shared widely in the sector) which clearly identifies graduates' various experiences and the barriers they have faced in attaining appropriate employment and enjoying successful careers in their chosen fields

(and the ways they have transcended barriers). The report should also discuss the experiences of employers in their employment of rural graduates and how they feel programmes like REAP could assist in developing job-seekers before graduation.

- Make recommendations, based on the research findings, as to how REAP and other bursary/higher learning institutions might address these challenges and barriers.
- Present the draft findings and recommendations to REAP upon completion and input feedback into the final report.

2. Study Approach & Methods

Research team

The research was led by Andrew Hartnack, who designed the research tools and managed the research process, including fieldwork, data capturing, data analysis and report writing.

Anthony Muteti conducted many of the telephonic and face-to-face interviews, and was responsible for data capturing.

Lisa Menyane (a REAP alumni herself) also conducted many of the telephonic interviews.

Nathi Tshabalala conducted some telephonic and face-to-face interviews.

Approach and Sampling

The approach adopted for this research was to gather both quantitative and qualitative data from a sample of REAP alumni and human resources professionals. The REAP alumni database by the end of 2015 included some 350 individuals who had by then signed up to be part of the alumni association. Most of these individuals had been supported by REAP for multiple years and gone on to obtain their degrees or diplomas. The approach thus differed from a tracking study of a cohort of REAP students from a particular year because the alumni database is more likely to contain the successful students who did not drop out and lose contact with REAP. Indeed, less than five students eventually included in the sample had failed to complete their tertiary courses. This approach also included a range of tertiaries; from those going back more than a decade to those who completed in 2015.³ Students from different years experienced slightly different approaches to workplace preparation from REAP, whose approach has solidified in the last few years. More recent students thus had better training in things such as CV compilation and interview technique. Starting from this baseline, of students

³ In this study, for the sake of clarity, I adopt a precise definition of the notion of a tertiary “graduate”. As pointed out by van Broekhuizen and van der Berg (2013), many studies of “graduate unemployment” have used a rather fuzzy definition of what constitutes a “graduate”. These studies have tended to put all students who have studied at tertiary level into the category of “graduates”. This has had the effect of skewing calculations of “graduate” unemployment. As suggested by these authors, it is more accurate to refer to those who obtained a bachelors degree as a “graduate”, while those who obtained a diploma should be referred to as a “diplomate”. This is important because the two categories have sometimes starkly different employment experiences. In this study, I thus refer to the broader category containing all of the students once supported by REAP as “tertiaries” (as suggested by the above authors), while I refer to those who obtained bachelor degrees as “graduates” and those who obtained National Diplomas as “diplomates”.

who had largely succeeded in their tertiary studies, the goal was to investigate whether this success could reach its full potential after graduation.

The aim was to include as many of the tertiaries on the database as possible, with the targeted number being 300. Consequently, the researchers contacted every possible individual of those whose contact details were recorded on the database by email and telephone in December 2015/January 2016. This was a painstaking process. Only around 50 individuals responded to the initial interview requesting their participation. Some declined to participate. Telephone calls were thus used to contact the majority of REAP tertiaries. The first round of calls involved introducing the research and its aims to each alumnus and tried to establish whether each was willing to participate. This often involved making numerous calls to the same number in order to speak to the owner of the line. Some individuals were not reachable, despite multiple attempts, while a few others refused to participate. In order to obtain 300 participants, the research team included some former REAP students not yet included on the alumni database, such as those from a survey of the 2009 cohort, others from the tracking study of the 2002 cohort, and a few who were referred to the team by those who had already agreed to participate. By mid-February 2016, 300 former REAP students had agreed to participate in the study.

Unfortunately, having agreed, some participants dropped out or subsequently became unreachable. Given that these 300 REAP alumni/tertiaries were scattered all over South Africa, telephonic interviews were to be used for two thirds of the interviews. It was hoped, however, that 90 face-to-face interviews could be conducted in Cape Town, Gauteng and Durban (30 in each metro). While obtaining permission to interview potential participants was difficult because of challenges in getting hold of people, calling to set up interviews and, later, to conduct interviews was even more difficult due to participants being busy or unresponsive. This again, required up to 10 phone calls per person before an interview was finally conducted. In general, alumni were very willing to participate, but the practicalities of calling at the appropriate time or meeting up with them provided the major challenge. Despite the team's best efforts, and literally thousands of phone calls (overall) to set up and conduct interviews, the final sample was 276-strong. Who was included in the final study sample was therefore determined largely by who was available, willing to participate and able to give half an hour to 45 minutes of their time to be interviewed. The characteristics of this sample are discussed in the findings section.

Methods employed

Questionnaire development: A comprehensive questionnaire tool for former REAP students was developed, covering all of the issues listed in the previous section (see Appendix A). This sought to capture both quantitative data and qualitative insight about participants' job-seeking and career-related experiences. The questionnaire contained 40 questions and was five and a half pages in length.

This questionnaire was piloted with some Cape Town-based REAP alumni, one of whom was then recruited into the team of interviewers. Some minor adaptations were made before further interviews commenced.

Interview protocols were also developed for potential focus group discussions with participants and for the human resources professional interviews.

Telephonic interviews: Most interviews (196) were conducted by telephone. Participants were called at a time of their convenience and interviewed for between 30 and 45 minutes depending on how much time they had available and how much detail they chose to provide.

Face-to-face interviews: Face-to-face interviews were conducted in Cape Town (15), Johannesburg/Pretoria (40) and Durban/Pietermaritzburg (25). Meeting REAP tertiary in person allowed the team to spend more time with them, understand their contexts and issues more fully, and discuss their working lives at more length than was often possible over the telephone. It must be noted, however, that many of the most detailed and interesting interviews were conducted over the phone. The quality of each interview was largely determined by how willing a participant was to share their experiences and what those experiences were. In other words, some face-to-face interviews were quite mundane, while some telephonic interviews were profound.

Focus group discussions: Although the original aim was to conduct focus group discussions (FGDs) in all three major cities that were visited, this did not prove practically possible. One FGD was held with some alumni in Johannesburg on a Saturday morning. Only three participants attended, however, despite 10 confirming that they would be there. The lives of these young people was simply too busy and unpredictable to allow for large numbers to get together at one time.

Interviews/correspondence with HR professionals: The original aim was to conduct a number of interviews with HR professionals from a variety of sectors. While this was achieved, the original number of interviews hoped for proved more difficult than envisaged. More than 30 companies/state entities at which REAP tertiary had worked were identified. The aim was to obtain a general idea of how rural tertiary fared, rather than to discuss one particular REAP tertiary working/formerly working at these companies.

The challenge was in identifying and getting hold of the appropriate person within each organisation so as to interview them. Cold calling these companies proved largely unsuccessful. In most cases, receptionists would put the interviewer (Hartnack) through to the HR department, but people within that department would pass the call around between them, seemingly unwilling to discuss the issue. Where a name of the best person to speak to was eventually given, that person's extension often went unanswered, and messages left were never returned. In some cases, we were told point-blank that the company did not participate in research or discuss matters to do with human resources with outsiders. Thus, even setting up interviews proved extremely difficult. In a three cases, this approach was successful, and some very productive interviews were held over the phone.

Needing to canvass a few more HR professionals, REAP provided an introduction to 10 HR professionals they had been liaising with about their alumni programme. But even with this introduction, only three persons responded, despite several attempts to contact them. The three who responded were provided with questions to answer over email, and all three provided very insightful and detailed responses. In all, the information received from the six HR professionals who participated was very useful in understanding the issues faced in the sectors of law, banking and accounting, in particular. Although government HR departments were similarly inaccessible, many of the REAP tertiary who held senior positions in government departments were able to provide much insight into their experiences and those of fellow rural tertiary. While it is disappointing that more HR professionals did not participate, those who did participate provided enough useful insight into the questions we sought to answer.

3. Study Findings

Sample Characteristics

Demographic Profile of Study Participants

The study sample of 276 REAP alumni and tertiaries included 143 men (52%) and 133 women (48%). This gender breakdown closely mirrors REAP's historical student intake, in which slightly more male students have been supported than females.⁴ Given the significance of gender as a factor in job-seeking and workplace experience, the largely balanced nature of the sample is important to ensure that the study results are not skewed towards the experiences of one gender. The average age of the sample is 26, with ages ranging from younger tertiaries in their early twenties to those who graduated a decade or more ago, now in their mid-thirties.

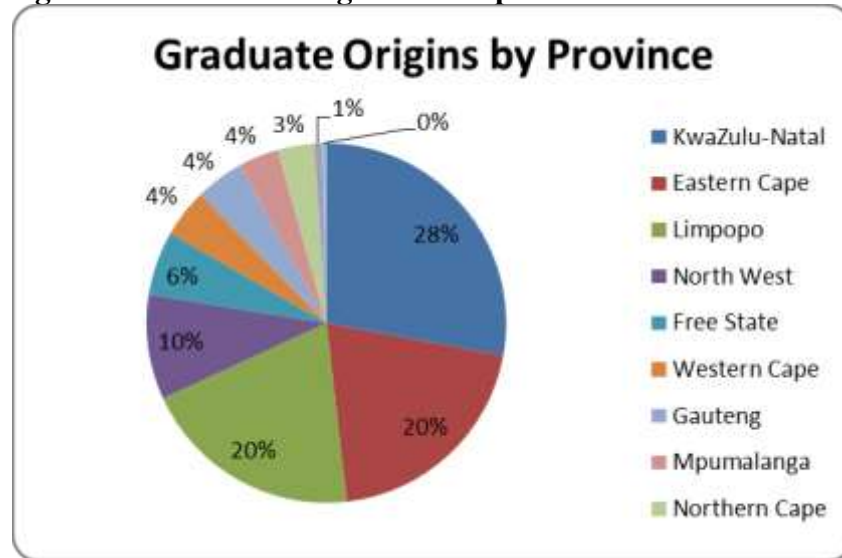
Black African tertiaries make up the overwhelming majority of study participants. There are 265 black participants (96%), 10 coloured participants (3.6%) and one Indian participant (0.4%). Coloured tertiaries are slightly under-represented in the sample, given that REAP has traditionally supported around 10 per cent of coloured students per year (with the other 90 per cent being black). The research team found it particularly difficult to get hold of coloured alumni/tertiaries for inclusion in the study, which explains why so few were included. It is not known why coloured tertiaries were more difficult to contact than others.

In terms of the provincial origins of the sampled tertiaries, 78 per cent come from KwaZulu-Natal (28%), the Eastern Cape (20%), Limpopo (20%) and North West Province (10%). REAP's historical intake is similar, with between 70 – 75 percent coming from these four provinces annually. The Western Cape, the Eastern Cape, the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal are slightly under-represented in this study sample compared to the proportion of students historically supported by REAP, while Limpopo and the North West are slightly over-represented. This has to do with which tertiaries were contactable and willing to be involved in the study.

The majority of tertiaries come from villages or small rural towns, for example Mtubatuba in northern KwaZulu-Natal, or Tzaneen in Limpopo. Others come from peri-urban township areas close to medium-sized towns such as Kimberly, in the Northern Cape, or Polokwane in Limpopo.

⁴ See REAP annual reports for the last few years which record that the male:female student ratio has been 51:49 for the last two years, and 52:48 previously.

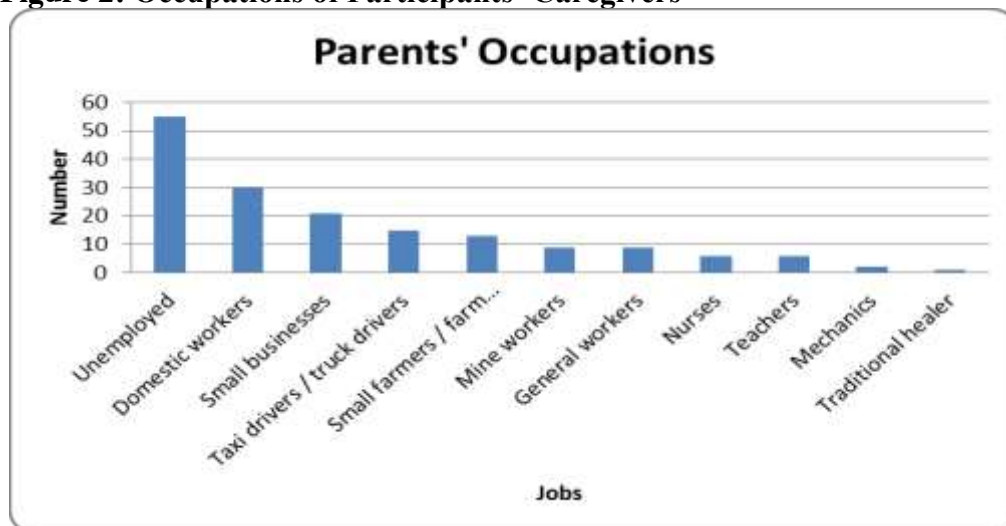
Figure 1: Provincial Origins of Sample



Graduate Backgrounds and Early Aspirations

The vast majority of study participants come from families which would not normally afford to pay for their children to attend a tertiary institution. Of the 233 individuals who provided clear information on what their parents' occupations were when they were young, the highest proportion (23.6%) said their parents were unemployed.⁵ In these cases, it is likely that social grants – supplemented by occasional piece jobs, assistance from relatives and, in some cases, subsistence agriculture – were the major income source. Among those who could name longer-term occupations, domestic work was common (30 individuals), while others' care-givers ran small retail outlets or, more commonly, hawked small consumable goods to the passing traffic in the settlements in which they lived (21 individuals). Male breadwinners were typically taxi or truck drivers, mine workers, general workers or farm workers.

Figure 2: Occupations of Participants' Caregivers

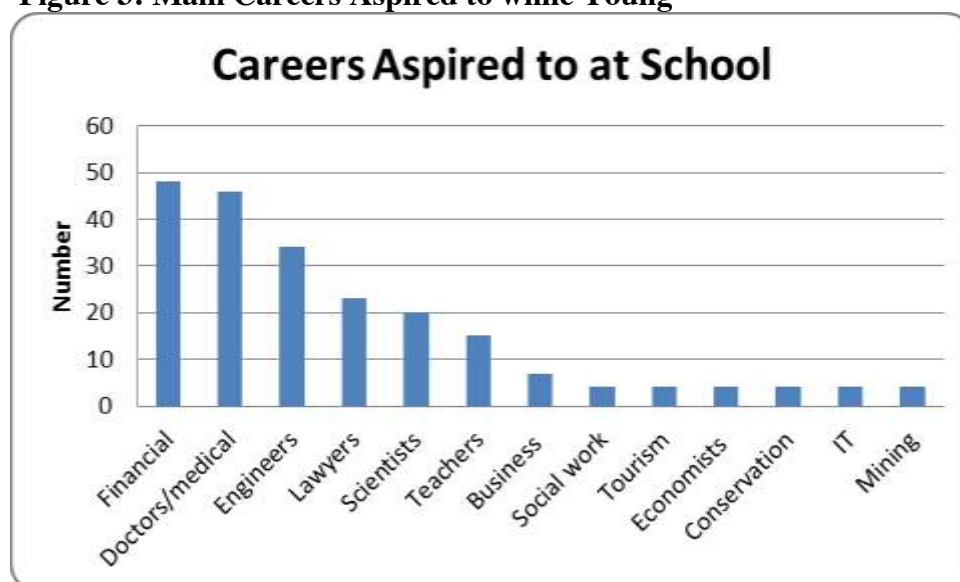


⁵ There were 44 respondents who did not give a clear answer of what their parents did for a living while they were growing up. In some cases, this was because they had died or divorced, in other cases, this was because they never really performed any meaningful long-term work, or performed work which the respondents were embarrassed to reveal. The majority of these breadwinners were likely relying on social grants, along with a combination of peasant farming activities and/or occasional piece jobs in rural or urban areas.

In a very small number of cases (less than 20) there are tertiaries whose parents were much better placed, with at least one parent occupied in a professional career. Six individuals had parents who were teachers, while another six were nurses. In other cases, parents were reportedly working as a human resources manager, a financial officer, a mining engineer, a pharmacist, and a book keeper. The key finding from this line of questioning, however, was that very few – less than 10 per cent – of tertiaries grew up around parents or relatives who performed the kinds of professional work that they themselves were now doing, or aspiring to do. Over 90 per cent of the tertiaries therefore lacked role-models in their families who could advise, model, or influence them with regard to study or career choices, job-seeking methods or professional workplace comportment. The study participants are therefore very much first-generation professionals negotiating work and the workplace with minimal role-modelling from their home environments.

The absence of professional role-modelling at home did not, however, blunt the aspirations of many of the study participants while they were growing up. Forty-eight individuals (17.3% of the sample) said they had aspired to be accountants or auditors while they were at school. A similar number (46) had dreamed of working in the medical field as doctors or medical specialists. It is interesting to note, given that nursing was one of the only professional careers available to people of the tertiaries' parent's generation, that only three individuals aspired to be nurses: those who chose the medical field seemingly aspired to greater things. Engineering in various fields (mechanical, electrical, mining, chemical) was the aspiration of 34 individuals (12.3%), while 23 tertiaries aspired to be lawyers (8.3%); 20 wanted to become scientists (7.2%); and 15 (5.4%) said that had hoped to become teachers when they were growing up. Among other careers aspired to, small numbers of study participants (less than 5 in each case) wanted to go into tourism, social work, business, conservation, information technology, mining and academia (especially economics). Even smaller numbers of participants wanted to become pilots, police officers, property developers, radio presenters, politicians, and in one case, the president.

Figure 3: Main Careers Aspired to while Young



Such aspirations reveal that for this cohort – who were at or completing high school from the turn of the century onwards – their expectations for their working lives were not constrained, as those of previous generations of black (rural) South Africans were. It is also striking that not a single individual (save perhaps aspirant electrical engineers) listed a trade or artisanal

profession (plumbing, brick-laying, carpentry, boiler-making, auto-mechanical etc.) as an aspiration. Rather, the majority of tertiaries hoped to find traditionally “white collar” professions in which to build a career, and a lifestyle superior to what they had experienced growing up. The majority of aspirations were therefore premised on the assumption that obtaining an appropriate tertiary education was possible – despite the fact that respondents came from families where even affording high school could be a challenge.

Some, nevertheless, were perhaps more realistic about their chances, or possibly recalled better the barriers they still would have had to overcome in moving, in one generation, from rural families predominantly just scraping by, into middle-class security. One young man, whose parents were sugarcane cutters, shared the following: *"You don't dream beyond where you are. The farm environment I grew up in was limiting. So I wanted to be a farm manager when I grew up."* Similarly, a young woman said: *"I wanted to be a health worker. There was nobody at home to inspire us as my father abandoned us."* Other tertiaries gave the following answers:

"I was clueless!"

"Career aspiration? I did not have one!"

"I did not have any specific career in mind, but I just wanted to be a successful person."

"I had no inspiration."

"I wanted to be in business, but I had no idea what type."

"I was clueless on what career to follow, although science was my favourite subject."

"I wasn't sure if I would be able to go to university."

Tertiary Education Histories & Dynamics

Institutions Attended for Undergraduate Study

Having achieved National Senior Certificate (NSC) results which qualified them for either bachelor or diploma-level studies, the study participants found places at 21 tertiary institutions (15 universities and 6 universities of technology),⁶ around the country (see Figure 4). Just which institutions and particular courses these potential students were eventually accepted for depended mainly on the quality of their NSC passes in particular subjects, the availability of places, and their ability to raise adequate financial support. After obtaining financial support from REAP and, in most cases, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), the students in this cohort commenced their tertiary studies.

As some freely acknowledged, without the financial support of REAP from the outset, tertiary studies – notwithstanding the lofty ambitions of many – were by no means guaranteed. One 30 year-old graduate who took a National Diploma in metallurgical engineering at the University

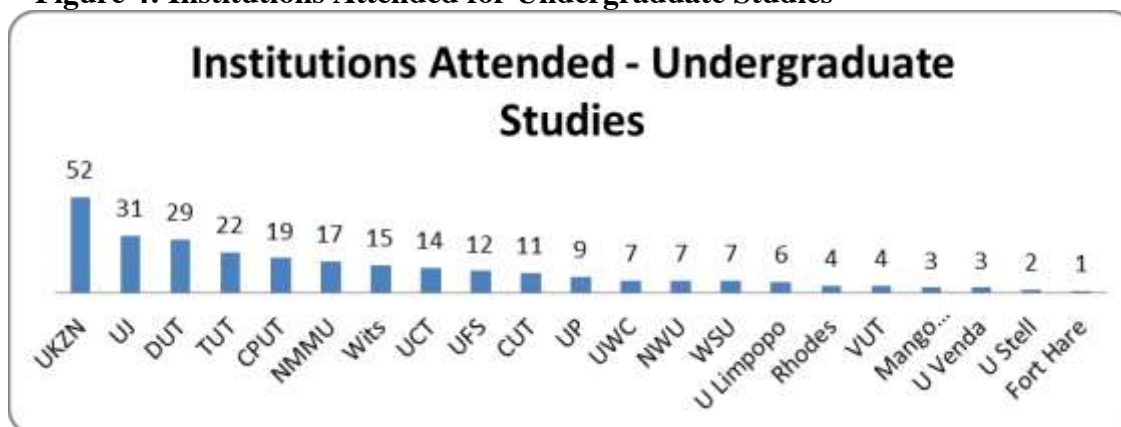
⁶ Students who were registered before 2005 commenced their studies at a number of institutions which were later amalgamated into the universities and universities of technology we know today. For example, Witwatersrand Technikon was later, along with the Rand Afrikaans University, included in the new University of Johannesburg, while Border Technikon, the University of the Tanskei and the East Cape Technikon, were amalgamated to form Walter Sisulu University.

of Johannesburg (UJ), and who now works as a technician for a company in Pretoria, put it thus:

"Without REAP, I wouldn't be where I am today. They picked me from the dusty townships of Limpopo where I would have been exposed to the harsh realities of poverty."

Figure 4 shows the institutions attended by tertiaries participating in this study. As with overall patterns of REAP support, by far the most number of students (19%) attended the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), with high numbers also at UJ, Durban University of Technology (DUT), Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) the Cape Peninsular University of Technology (CPUT) and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). Far fewer attended universities such as the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), the University of Cape Town (UCT), the University of Pretoria (UP) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Other institutions, such as Rhodes University and Stellenbosch University were attended by less than five individuals in this study's sample.

Figure 4: Institutions Attended for Undergraduate Studies

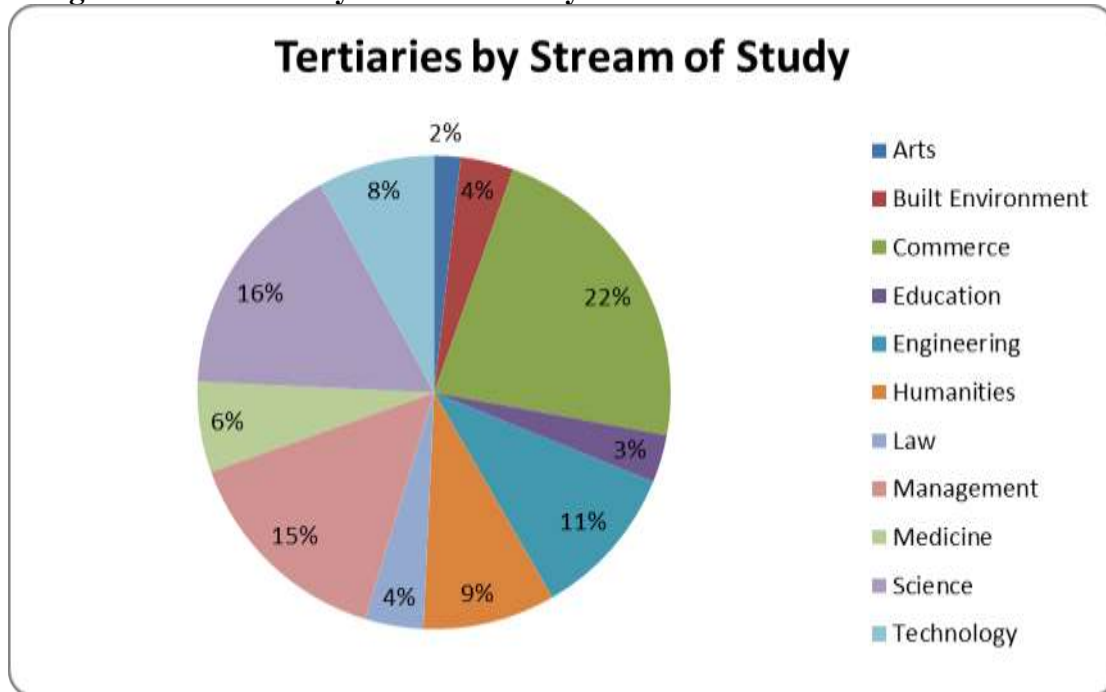


Undergraduate Courses Taken

Study participants were asked what undergraduate qualifications they had eventually obtained rather than what courses they were initially registered for. This was not only because some students changed their courses during the first year or two of their studies, but also because the eventual qualification is of more importance when considering later career paths. One hundred and fifty two (55%) tertiaries obtained bachelor degrees in various fields of study, while 124 (45%) obtained National Diplomas of various kinds.⁷ Figure 6 shows the streams of study in which participants graduated. As can be observed, the highest proportion studied commerce (22%), while science (16%), management (15%) and engineering (11%) qualifications were also common. Other students took courses in the humanities (9%), technology (8%) and in the broad field of medicine (6%). Far less common were students studying law, the built environment (both 4%), education (3%) or the arts (2%).

⁷ In a very small number of cases (4), individuals had not completed their undergraduate studies at the date of the interview. In these cases, they had suspended their studies for financial reasons. I nevertheless refer to the larger group as REAP "tertiaries" for the sake of simplicity. It is also true that the vast majority of study participants had obtained their undergraduate qualifications (98.6%).

Figure 5: Tertiaries by Stream of Study

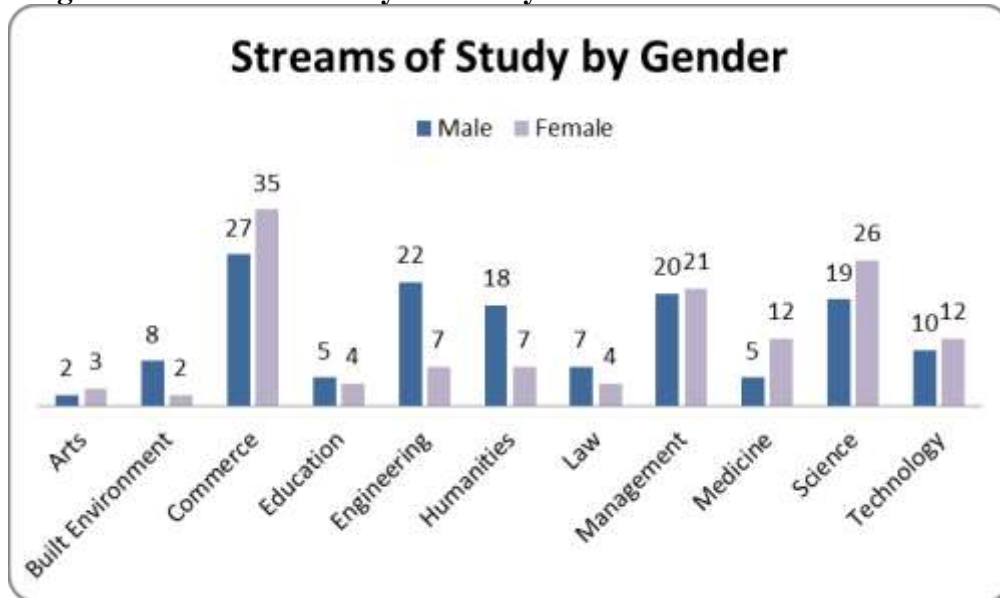


It is interesting to consider the eventual streams of study in relation to the tertiaries' teenage aspirations (see Figure 3). A person-by-person breakdown is not possible within the confines of this study, but an analysis of the broader data shows that commercial subjects (the career of aspiration for 17.3%) were indeed studied by a large proportion of students (22%). On the other hand, engineering seems to have been slightly harder to access for the 12.3 per cent who hoped to become engineers, since only 11 per cent ended up studying engineering. Most striking of all, however, is that so many of those who stated that becoming medical practitioners was their dream (17%) seem to have had to change plans, since only 6 per cent of the sample ended up studying in the field of medicine. Law, too, proved unrealistic for many since only 4 per cent of the sample studied law, compared to 8.3 per cent who said they had hoped to study law. Many were thus channelled into other fields, such as management studies, technology, or the more general sciences and humanities (see next section).

It is also important, considering future employment potential, to consider whether certain streams of study were chosen along gender lines. Figure 6 shows that indeed, some areas of study are dominated by one gender or the other. Qualifications in the arts, education the field of technology are evenly balanced between men and women. However, other streams are heavily dominated by men. Of those studying subjects to do with the built environment, 80 per cent are men, while 76 per cent of those studying engineering courses are men.

Men also dominate in the fields of the humanities (72% men) and law (64%). Women are also predominant, however, in three study streams. Seventy-one per cent of the 17 individuals who studied in the medical field are women, while 58 per cent of the 45 individuals who studied science are women, and 56 per cent of the 62 individuals who took commerce subjects are women.

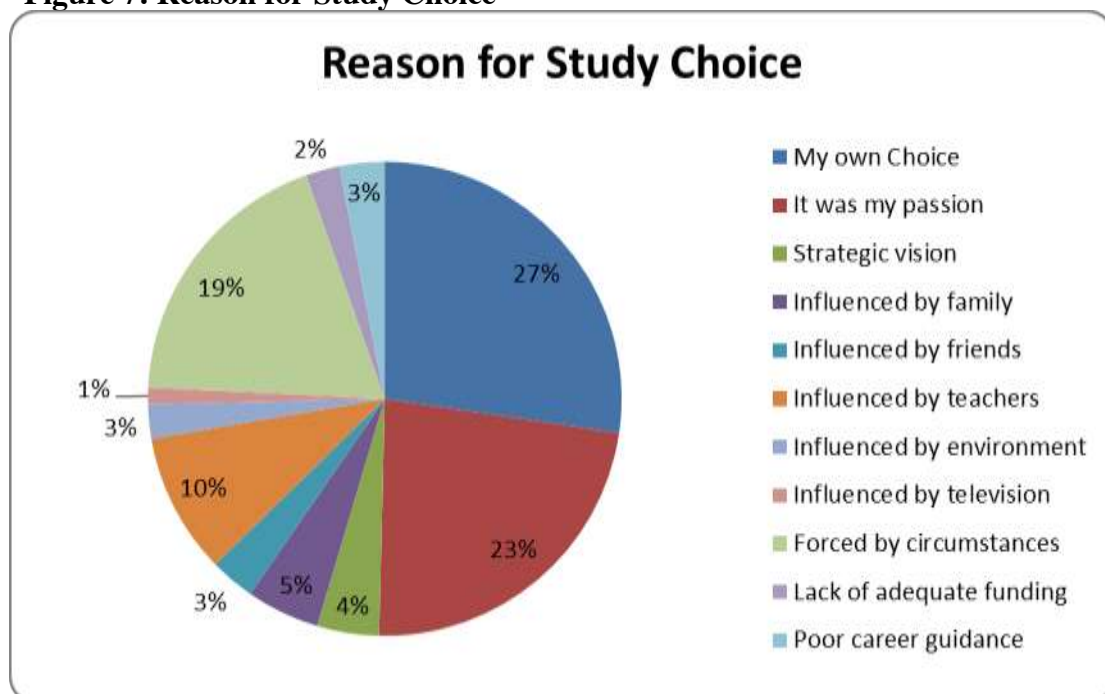
Figure 6: Streams of Study chosen by Gender



Reasons for Choices and Perceptions of Qualifications

Study participants were asked why they studied the courses in which they eventually graduated. Figure 7 shows their responses. Over a quarter (27%) felt that the study programme they had picked was their own free choice, with another 23 per cent saying that they chose their courses specifically to fulfil a passion (e.g. engineering, mechanics, anatomy, geology, accounting). A small number (4%) said they chose their courses as a strategic step towards a life goal such as getting a job quickly, earning a good salary or achieving a particular position in society.

Figure 7: Reason for Study Choice



Another 22 per cent of respondents said their study choices were influenced by various people, including family members (5%), friends (3%), teachers/school careers days (10%), or by the environment they grew up in (3%). A further small number (1%) said that their choice was influenced by programmes they had seen on the television.

Almost a quarter (24%), however, said that circumstances beyond their control had forced them into study choices which were not their first preference. A small number said that had mistakenly chosen their courses due to poor career guidance (3%). A similar number resorted to studying courses which were more affordable than their first preferences (e.g. medicine was often out of reach). Many more (19%) faced difficulties in being accepted into their first choices of study, and resorted to undertaking study programmes which they would not have chosen otherwise. The following statements are examples of this scenario:

"I couldn't get into medicine because my results were poor."

"I did not have maths and accounts at matric."

"I didn't qualify for chemical engineering."

"I failed to make the grade for LLB."

"I failed genetics at UCT."

"I failed to qualify for the paramedic course because of my height being too short."

"I went to a rural school that did not academically prepare me for medicine: we had poor maths and science exposure."

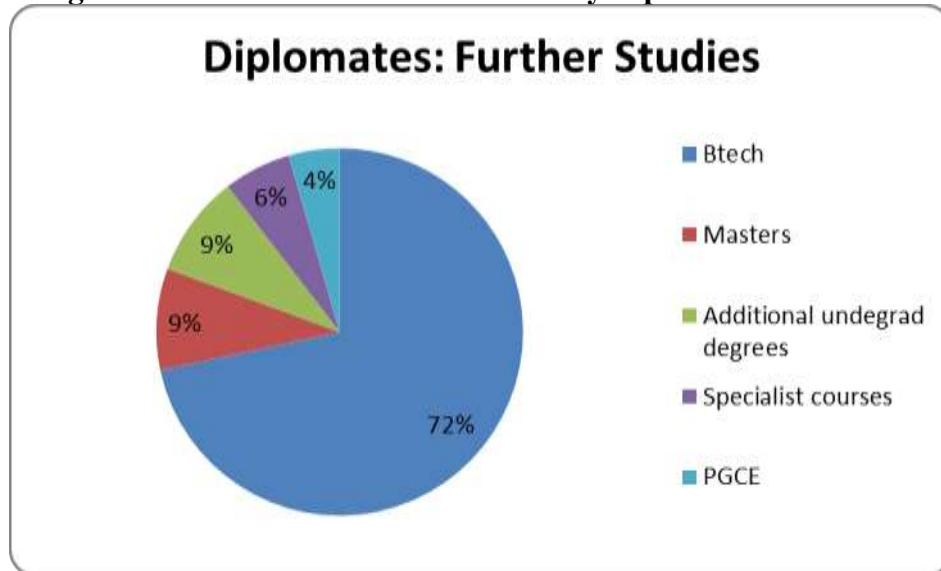
"I failed the enrolment test for physiotherapy because of poor English."

When asked whether their study choices had allowed them to achieve their career goals so far, 199 individuals (72% of the sample) said "yes", they felt that their choice had allowed them to get onto a path which was allowing them to achieve their goals. Interestingly, of the 39 unemployed study participants, 24 (61.5%) felt that despite their current unfavourable employment status, achieving a tertiary qualification had allowed them to reach a position where they felt they could access a successful career in time. As one said, *"Yes, this is now my field so in time I will get a job."* Fourteen individuals (5%) felt that their studies had partially allowed them to achieve their goals; while a further 24 (9%) felt that they had not yet been able to achieve their goals, but were still on the pathway towards this eventuality. Many of the latter were still studying, job seeking, or interning at the time of their interviews. However, 39 individuals (14%) said "no", their study choice had not allowed them to reach their goals. Among these were 6 unemployed tertiaries, and those who felt they were underemployed or in a job which did not suit them or had poor career growth potential in South Africa. For example, several of those working as school teachers felt they had had to settle for a second-rate job on account of not finding work in the fields of science, mining or engineering.

Postgraduate Studies

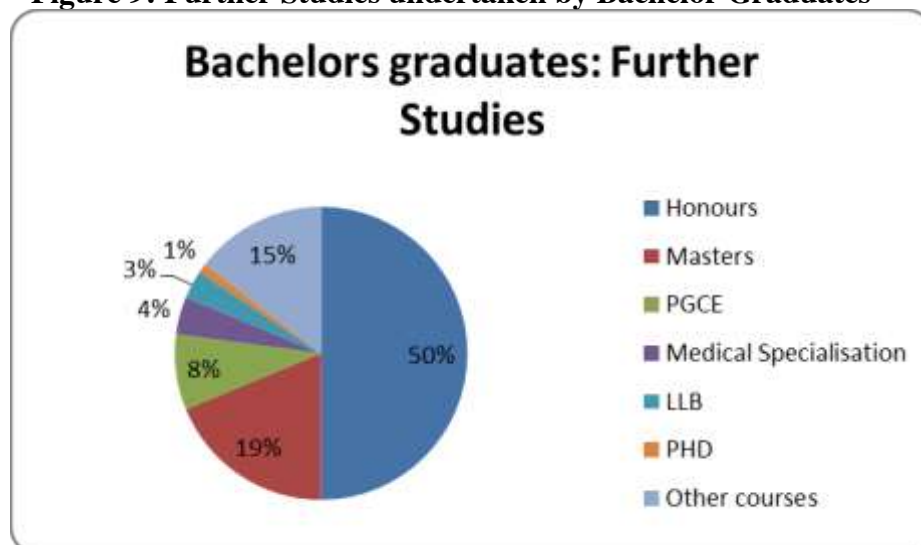
Rather than rely on their initial undergraduate qualifications alone, many of the study participants had done, or were doing, further studies in order to improve their marketability and career prospects. Overall, 163 (59%) of the participants had studied further. Of those 124 who obtained National Diploma qualifications, 67 (54%) had studied further. As Figure 8 shows, of these 124 individuals, the largest proportion (72%) had effectively converted their diplomas into a bachelor qualification by undertaking a BTech. Meanwhile, 6 (9%) had studied additional undergraduate courses (mostly bachelors degrees), and the same number had studied masters degrees. A small number had taken a range of courses related to their field, while 3 had done a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

Figure 8: Further Studies Undertaken by Diplomates



A slightly higher proportion of the 152 bachelors degree graduates (63%) had undertaken postgraduate studies (96 individuals) (see Figure 9). Of these, half had gained an honours degree, while 18 (19%) had studied for a masters degree. A further 15 per cent of such graduates had done courses related to their field of study and employment (e.g. accounting articles, engineering certificates etc.). Eight individuals had also done a PGCE in order to be able to teach at primary or high school level. Only one person was studying towards a PhD, having obtained undergraduate qualifications in the field of development studies from the University of the North West.

Figure 9: Further Studies undertaken by Bachelor Graduates



Preparation for the Workplace

Work Placement & Attachment

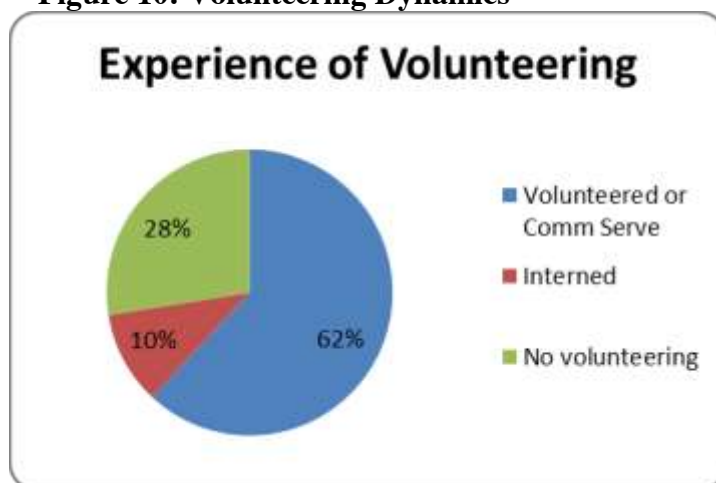
An important aspect of undergraduate study which has relevance to future career chances and choices is whether the course includes any workplace experience/work attachment or not. The

45 per cent of tertiaries who took National Diplomas would all have been expected to fulfil workplace attachments as part of their third year of study, while it was much less likely that those doing bachelor degrees would have benefitted from this experience. In all, 51 per cent of those interviewed said that work experience or placement had formed some part of their undergraduate studies. In a number of fields, such as mechanical and electrical engineering, mining and technology, those who had received such experience as part of their National Diploma courses felt that they had a significant advantage over those who had chosen more theoretical courses in the more academic bachelor studies programmes.

Volunteering or 'Holiday Job' Experience

Performing some form of voluntary work during or shortly after studying, and in this way obtaining both some working/life experience and the chance to build the curriculum vitae, is a very important strategy for young people. Study participants were consequently asked if they had ever volunteered and if this was a useful experience for them and their careers. As Figure 10 shows, 171 individuals (62%) said that they had performed some form of volunteering or community service work during or after their studies. For many, this work was done while they were studying, often as part of the expectations REAP had of them to perform community service work during their vacations. Others said they performed this work as part of community groups in their home towns, or at their schools or tertiary institutions. Only 4 of the individuals who had volunteered felt that this experience had not been worth their while, while the vast majority described such experience as "highly valuable".

Figure 10: Volunteering Dynamics



The following quotes provide an idea of the kinds of valuable experiences or lessons tertiaries got out of volunteering:

"I volunteered at the ambulance centre's help desk. It was a stressful environment but it prepared me well for the workplace challenges."

"At PKF during holidays, and it paved the way for employment."

"I volunteered at church. It was very helpful: I learnt to manage people and also organise big events."

"At a hospital. It was really fulfilling because we helped the sick. It re-awakened my medicine dream."

"My volunteering at the Tourism Office exposed me to a different field."

"I volunteered at Capricorn College. It was very valuable, as I gained a lot of skills assisting students with registration."

Given that this is an expectation of REAP for their students to volunteer, it is not clear why or how 76 individuals (28%) did not recall any experience of volunteering in their lives. It is possible that some did not count the community service they had performed as genuine volunteering, or that it had been fairly insignificant for them and too long ago to recall clearly. A further 29 (10%) said their only volunteer-style experience came from undertaking internships. Some of these respondents were still employed in this capacity. All save one found these experiences very valuable for them and their career prospects.

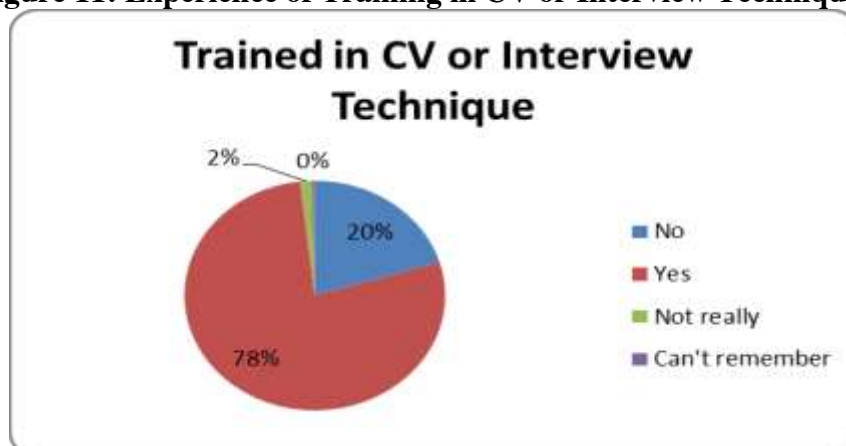
Study participants were also asked if they had ever – before, during or after studying – worked in a job that was not in their field of study. This question was asked to ascertain whether participants had had broader working experience not necessarily related to their careers. The majority (159 – 57.6%) had not ever worked in a job that was not in their field, while 117 (42.3%) had worked in such a job. Many of these were part-time or holiday jobs performed while studying and therefore not really counted by study participants as their genuine first “real” jobs. Such jobs included working in supermarkets and retail outlets; working in restaurants; tutoring or teaching; marketing perfumes and cosmetics; working in construction; working in call centres; administrative work for tertiary institutions, clerical work for the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC); and even menial jobs such as gardening or care-taking.

Thus, in terms of experience of the workplace or life outside school and university, over half of study participants had gained some experience from performing voluntary work prior to embarking on a career, and almost half had worked in short-term, part-time jobs – mostly while studying. In 81 cases (29%), participants had both volunteered and worked in a job not related to their studies – gaining additional experience from having done both of these activities. Such experiences should have assisted those who gained such experience in their endeavours to find and progress in careers aligned to their studies and ambitions.

Training in CV Writing and Interview Technique

A large majority of study participants (78%) said they had received some form of training in compiling curriculum vitae and in how to approach job interviews. Only 20 per cent had not (see Figure 11). Of those who had been trained, only 77 (36%) said that the training had come through REAP. This is not surprising given that REAP has only introduced this focus in recent years.

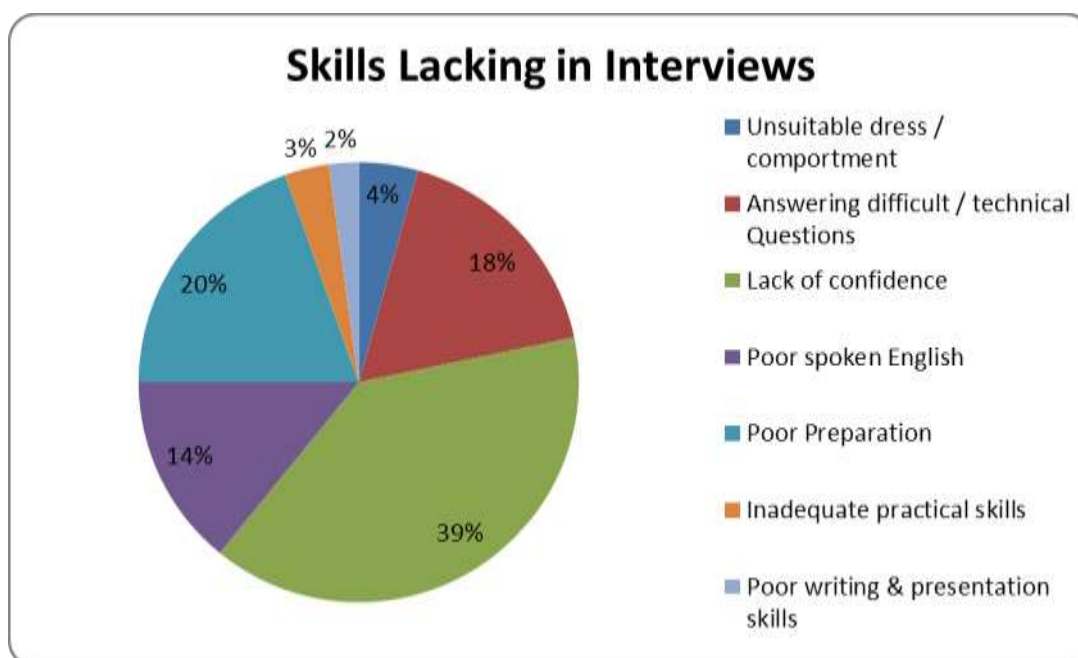
Figure 11: Experience of Training in CV or Interview Technique



Performance in Interviews

When asked whether they felt they had adequate skills to perform in job interviews, just over half (51%) felt that they did have the requisite skills. Ten per cent of respondents had yet to attend a job interview, while the remaining 39 per cent said that they had lacked key skills in interviews. A further analysis of those who said they struggled in interviews reveals that 40 per cent of those who had received interview training still said they lacked interview skills, whereas 57 per cent of those who had never received training said they lacked skills. The relatively high proportion of those saying they lacked skills despite training seems to confirm that such training was inadequate, but the fact that a far higher proportion of those never trained said they struggled shows that the training did make a difference for some participants. As Figure 12 shows (see below), the main reasons why tertiaries struggled in job interviews were a lack of confidence (39%), difficulty in answering questions relating to the job or area of work (18%), inadequate preparations in terms of researching the company or job requirements (20%), poor spoken English (16%) and other mistakes such as wearing unsuitable clothes, and being unable to perform practical or written tasks in the interview.

Figure 12: Skills lacked in Interviews



The following quotes illustrate further the struggles faced by some in job interviews:

“I was wrongly dressed for the interview.”

“Writing skills: I had to write a one page article in the interview. My writing skills were very poor. I failed.”

“My English was poor, and I had to ask them to repeat questions. And I had no work skills.”

“I struggled with communication skills and confidence. My English was very poor, so I had to think in vernacular to answer interview questions.”

“I knew nothing about the work environment and the worst part was that my first interview was with the police, so it makes one feel more uncomfortable!”

“Judgement skills were lacking. Some interviews make you relax and drop the ball.”

“I couldn’t get the right words for answers that I knew well. I could explain better in my own siPedi, not English.”

“I was nervous and unsettled, and lacked confidence.”

“I did not know how to answer questions. Some questions are just too technical and require a certain level of understanding to answer them.”

“I lacked practical experience: the interview was more practical.”

“My interview involved interpreting pictorial issues. I had never had the exposure to that kind of stuff.”

“I am naturally quiet and shy. It would have been a disaster facing a panel.”

“I almost walked out of the interview in Pietermaritzburg because I couldn’t answer most of the questions. I was NOT prepared.”

“The taxi was delayed and I was already in a panic mode. The interview went horribly wrong because of that.”

Human resources (HR) professionals interviewed for this research also raised some issues they had noticed with young graduate job-seekers from disadvantaged backgrounds.

An HR professional at a large auditing firm stated the following:

“CV compiling skills are generally not too bad if the candidates are coming from Varsity. They generally have a good idea of what is needed here. In terms of interview skills – I always remind them that the interview is also an opportunity for them to ask the firm questions. They are interviewing us just as much as we interview them, to see if they would potentially be happy in the firm’s culture for the next 3-5 years and so on. Also, ALWAYS be on time! Showing up late (even if just a few minutes) leaves a bitter taste in a recruiter’s mouth (especially when they have scheduled back to back interviews with students and tardiness thus results in a snowball effect).”

Although this respondent framed their response in fairly positive terms, it suggests that there has been an experience of late-coming from interview candidates, and that candidates have not always had the confidence or knowledge to ask questions about the organisation they are applying to for employment.

Another HR professional, in a respected law firm, noted the following:

“This doesn’t really apply to us as we have an online application system which ensures that they provide the information we require. However, I do notice if I receive an email then very often they don’t introduce themselves effectively, simply saying ‘I would like to apply for articles. See CV attached.’ I would prefer some detail around what year they want to commence articles, and I would also like a covering letter (which motivates specifically why they’ve chosen us rather than just a generic letter), as well as their academic results.”

This response points to the need for tertiaries to receive more training on how to communicate with, and sell themselves to, potential employers through effective covering letters. While job-seekers might be sending out a number of CVs or applications, they still need to be able to tailor each CV and each application to each specific company and potential job. This also indicates to potential employers that they have done some research and can see how and where they would fit in at the firm in question.

An HR professional in the banking field, meanwhile, felt that both CVs and interview comportment could be improved:

“CV formats of students in South Africa regardless of background need work. They download a basic format off the internet and its long, contains a lot of unnecessary information and is arduous for any recruiter to read. Templates for US style résumés are far more appropriate. In interviews the disadvantaged students are sometimes more nervous (they have more to lose) and often haven’t been in many formal settings (suits, firm handshakes rather than the rural South African greeting, confidence, eye contact, etc.) That said, this is completely understandable and we are always cognisant and respectful of background.”

It is worth noting, as illustrated in the above quote, that some of these issues are faced by all tertiaries, regardless of background or training. A recruiter working in the tourism field who was engaged with during the course of the research noted that many candidates – including those from white middle class backgrounds who had studied at top-ranked institutions – could have poorly formatted CVs and that it was common for them to come late or try to reschedule interviews at the last minute. Many also did not really know much about the company or the job they were applying for. He noted, however, that tertiaries from a disadvantaged background were often more respectful and eager to please and prove that they could work hard and be a good employee, while some middle-class candidates demonstrated a sense of entitlement and complacency.

Perceptions of REAP Support and Training

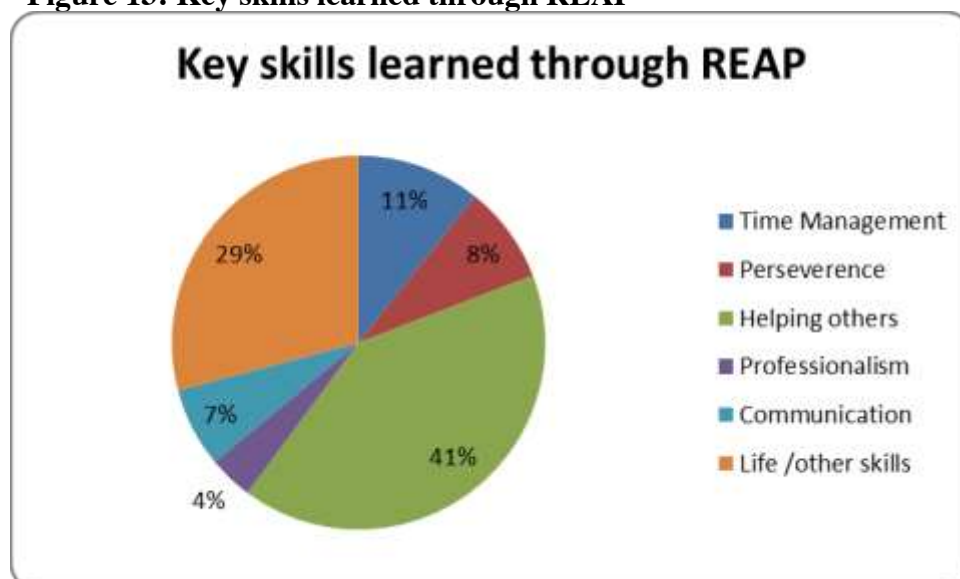
Study participants were asked to rate how valuable REAP’s contribution to training them for the workplace was. Although most REAP tertiaries had not received specific training in CV writing or interview technique through REAP itself, the large majority of them felt that REAP’s general support and mentorship had taught them many things which they could put to use in the workplace. Indeed, 82 per cent of participants (227 individuals) felt that REAP’s support had been “very good” in terms of preparing them for the workplace. Nine percent described the support (through mentors, workshops etc.) as “good” or “average”, and only 16 individuals (6%) described this support as “poor”. A very small number (8) could not remember the details of this support. It must be noted that most of the study respondents included the financial support they received as a key element in their workplace preparation rather than only the skills they learnt. Thus, questions of how thorough REAP’s workplace preparation had been were somewhat clouded by most respondents’ gratefulness for the more general support they had received.

Nevertheless, as shown in Figure 13, REAP tertiaries felt they learnt several key lessons or skills through their mentors, workshops and community service while they were REAP students. The most-cited lesson (mentioned by 41%) was helping others – particularly less fortunate members of their communities. Although this is not really a workplace-related lesson, for many, it helped them to remain humble, to value working in teams and to be willing to be selfless. These are very important values and attitudes to hold in the workplace. Seventy-six

individuals (29%) mentioned learning a range of life-skills and other important skills through REAP, which they still find valuable today in their careers. These included honesty, leadership, personal financial management and budgeting, a good work ethic and conflict management.

Eleven per cent (28 individuals) said that time management was something they particularly valued learning through their REAP involvement. Communication, professionalism (dressing and acting correctly) and perseverance were also cited as important lessons learnt by a much smaller proportion of tertiaries (7%, 4% and 8% respectively). These are also very important skills and attitudes to carry into the workplace. It would thus seem that the major lesson of value for most REAP tertiaries was around helping their home communities, while skills and values more directly related to workplace, such as time management, communication and professionalism, were only learnt by much smaller numbers of former REAP students. This suggests that REAP could build on what it has been doing to date in terms of workplace preparations so that more of its students learn key skills for the workplace before they embark on their careers.

Figure 13: Key skills learned through REAP



Having explored the journey of these rural tertiaries and their preparation for the workplace, we now turn to where such preparation left them as they sought to build livelihoods and careers after their tertiary studies.

Post-study Lives, Occupations & Career Dynamics

Finding Information about Potential Jobs

For most REAP tertiaries in this study (57%), finding information about potential jobs was not a problem. Just over a third (38%), however, said they had faced difficulties finding information about employment opportunities (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Difficulties Accessing Employment Information

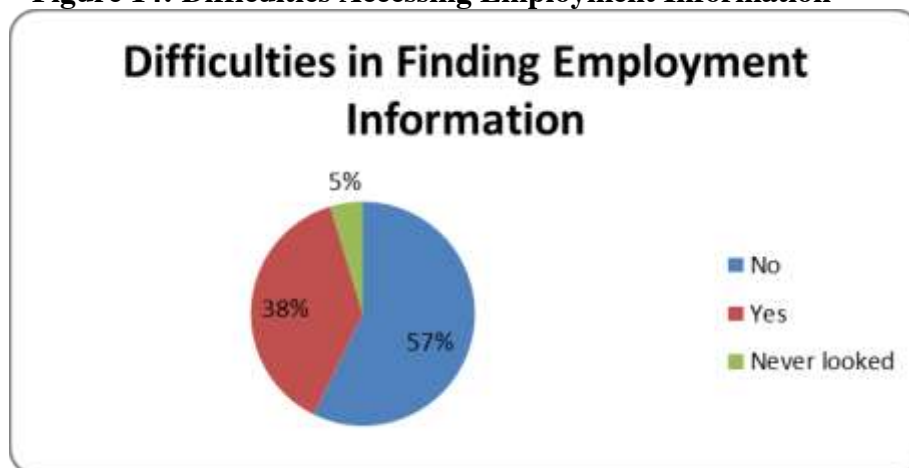
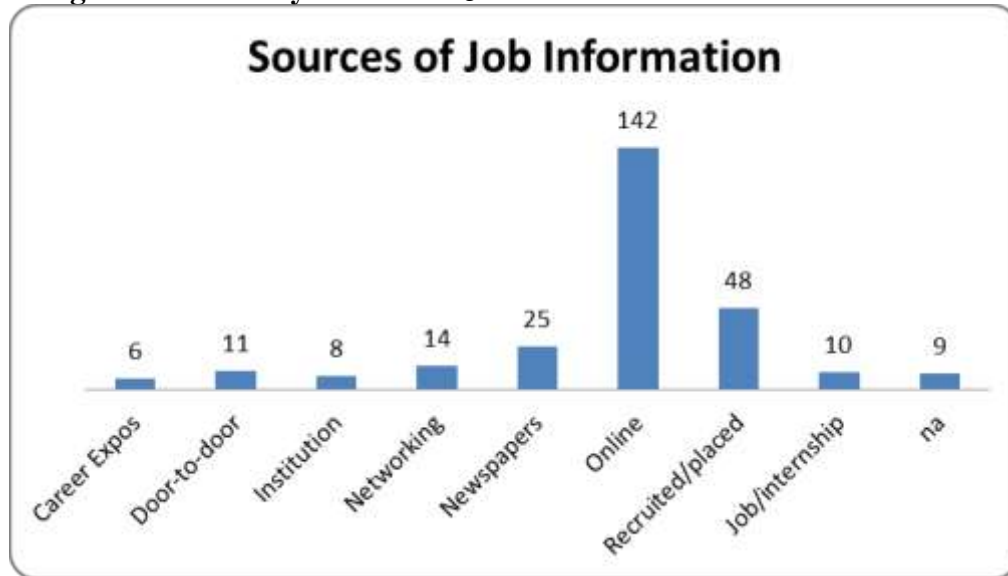


Figure 15 (below) shows the primary ways in which tertiaries found out about employment opportunities. An examination of these techniques reveals why some individuals seemingly struggled more than others to find relevant information about job opportunities. Forty-eight study participants (17%) had not had to worry too much about looking for job opportunities because they were placed with or recruited by employers (many of whom were sponsoring their studies) shortly before concluding their study programmes. A further nine tertiaries (3.2%) had never sought work before because they were still studying.

Of those who had actively sought information on available jobs, the most common primary method of obtaining such information was online, on the internet. Just over half (51.4%) of the tertiaries used the internet as their primary source of job information. Most tertiaries obtained information from a combination of sources, including the internet, newspapers, word-of-mouth and physical visits to the offices of potential employers. However, the importance of the internet as a key source of information is underlined not only by how many cited it as their primary source, but also by the fact that many of those who struggled to find relevant information complained that access to internet was their major challenge. Looking for job advertisements in newspapers may not have been as popular as it was before the advent of the internet, but it was still favoured by 25 individuals (9%). Several of those who said they struggled to find job information said they could not afford to buy newspapers. Others thus chose to find out primarily through networking with their friends or classmates (5%), or through going door-to-door to drop off their CVs at different companies (4%).

Figure 15: Primary Sources of Job Information



It is interesting to note that tertiary institutions played such a limited role in supplying information on employment opportunities to their students. Only 3.8 per cent of participants had used their institutions as the primary way of obtaining job information. A further 2 per cent had found this information at career expos held at their campuses. Granted, many of those who were placed in jobs or internships heard about such opportunities through their institutions, but for others, institutions – and lecturers and student support offices – proved to be of limited value for job seeking. Finally, a small number of tertiaries heard about further jobs through internships or junior positions they had secured soon after studying.

Access to information was clearly something that was more of a challenge for tertiaries who lived in rural areas or in places far away from internet cafes, shopping centres, libraries and university campuses. Access to relevant information seems to have been a key factor in the ability to secure a job. Indeed, 26 out of the 39 unemployed tertiaries (66.6%) had experienced difficulties in accessing employment information. For these individuals, access to the internet was a particular concern. The following comments from tertiaries illustrate some of these struggles:

“I was in the rural areas where internet access is a headache.”

“It was not easy to find information, and I had to stay close to UCT after graduating just for the WiFi.”

“The internet would be down, and newspapers are expensive.”

“I had to squat at a friend's room on campus to ensure that I was close to the internet and job opportunities.”

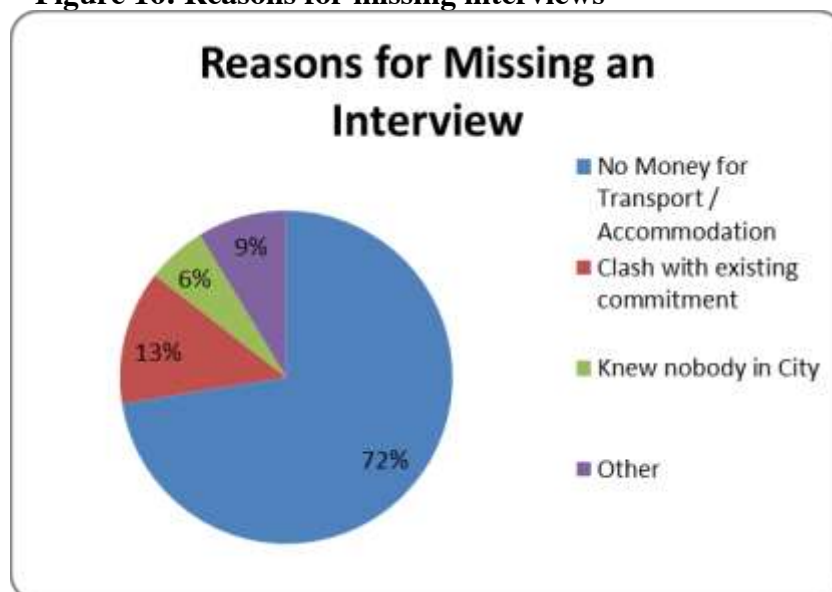
“For me, the challenge was in delivering the applications as I had no transport.”

Obtaining and Attending Interviews

Of the study sample, 96 per cent of tertiaries had attended at least one interview by the time of the research. The overwhelming majority had managed to attend these interviews, while only 26% (72 individuals) had missed an interview. Figure 16 shows the main reasons these

tertiaries had for being unable to attend interviews. The main reason by far (72% of cases) was that they did not have the money for transport to or accommodation in the place in which the interview was scheduled. This was often because the interviews were in distant cities which were expensive to travel to, and which required an overnight stay. Six percent of those who missed interviews said the main reason was because they knew nobody in the centres where the interviews were held, implying that they, too, lacked money and networks to assist to get them to these interviews. A slightly larger proportion already had existing work or family commitments to attend to, while others missed interviews because of other factors such as their bus breaking down, or because on consideration they decided the offer did not suit them.

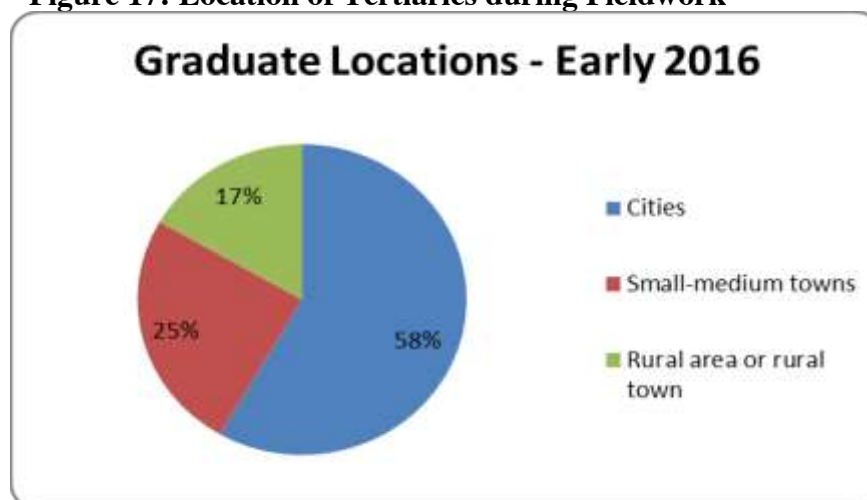
Figure 16: Reasons for missing interviews



Current Locations of Tertiaries

It was apparent during the fieldwork for this study that many of the younger, more recent, tertiaries were not necessarily tied too securely to one place. This was particularly the case for those who completed their studies at the end of 2015. In early 2016, they were often moving between rural areas, towns and cities in response to opportunities for employment, internships or further studies.

Figure 17: Location of Tertiaries during Fieldwork



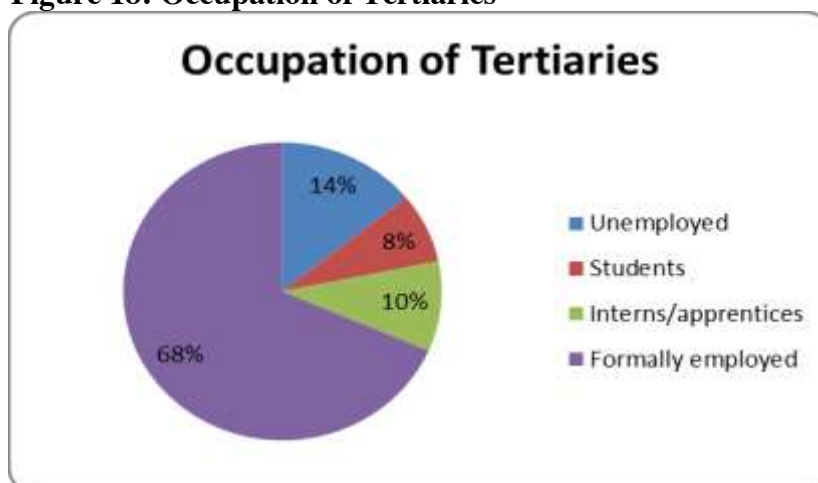
It was common for the research team to first make contact with a potential interviewee in their rural home, only to finally interview them two months or so later in an urban centre, where they had subsequently moved to find employment. Figure 17 shows the locations of study participants at their time of interview.

As can be observed, over half (58%) were living in large cities such as Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban, Cape Town or Bloemfontein. This is not surprising given that most career opportunities for tertiary tertiaries are to be found in the larger urban centres. Johannesburg, Durban and Pretoria were the cities where the most number of study participants were located. A quarter of the sample was living in small to medium towns around the country. Examples include Mthatha, Queenstown, Lydenburg, Witbank, Polokwane, Potchefstroom, Rustenburg, Newcastle and Kimberly. Many of these individuals were working for mining houses or for municipalities or other branches of local or provincial government. Seventeen per cent were living in rural areas or small rural towns, either close to where they grew up, or where they had subsequently found work. A number, for example, were living or working in Mtubatuba, where the Isimangaliso Wetlands Park offers many employment opportunities.

Occupations of Tertiaries

Among the REAP-supported tertiaries, 189 (68%) were formally employed in the first half of 2016 (see Figure 18). A further 27 (10%) were working as interns or in some cases apprentices, bringing the employed category up to 78 per cent of the sample. Eight per cent (21 individuals) were studying further, while 39 individuals (14%) were unemployed at the time of their interviews. The latter category contained a few (less than five) tertiaries who said they were commencing work or an internship shortly after we engaged with them and it was clear that many of those who were unemployed at the time were actively seeking employment opportunities. The unemployment rate for REAP tertiaries, at 14 per cent, is likely to be similar to the unemployment rate among black tertiaries countrywide. In 2012, it was estimated that the unemployment rate for tertiaries (of all races) was 12.5 per cent.⁸ Given that black graduate unemployment had risen by 3 per cent (from 6% to 9%) since then (see below), 14 per cent unemployment for black tertiaries in 2016 seems feasible, if not a little low.

Figure 18: Occupation of Tertiaries



⁸ Hendrik van Broekhuizen and Servaas van der Berg (2013). "How high is graduate unemployment in South Africa? A much-needed update." Econ 3x3 research paper (www.econ3x3.org). See also Antony Altbeker and Evelien Storme (2013). *Graduate unemployment in South Africa: a much exaggerated problem*. Johannesburg: Centre for Development and Enterprise.

Occupation by Qualification Type and Field of Study

Tables 1 and 2 show the occupations of graduates and diplomates by their respective fields of study.

Table 1: Occupation of Graduates

Degrees	Employed	Interning	Student	Unemployed	Total
BA	14	7	4	6	31
BComm	28	1	2	2	33
BSc	44	3	6	8	61
BEd	9	0	0	0	9
BPub Adm	1	1	0	0	2
BSoc Sci	2	0	0	0	2
LLB	5	1	1	1	8
BAgric Mgmt	1	0	0	0	1
MBCHB	1	0	1	0	2
BPharm	1	0	0	0	1
BSoc Work	1	0	0	0	1
B Comm Dev	0	0	0	1	1
Total:	107	13	14	18	152

The overall employment rate of graduates (those with Bachelors qualifications) is 70.3 per cent. If interns are included, the total proportion of graduates who were employed at the time of our interviews was 78 per cent. Only 9.2 per cent were studying in early 2016, while the unemployment rate for graduates was 11.8 per cent. It has been estimated that in 2015, the black graduate (i.e. those with degrees) unemployment rate was about 9 per cent.⁹ REAP's graduates thus appear to be a little worse off than graduates in general when it comes to unemployment. However, it must be noted that a number of the unemployed REAP graduates were waiting for jobs to commence at the time of their interviews. In the next section, we discuss the dynamics of unemployment further.

In terms of degrees, all except Bachelor of Community Development (only one instance) had a reasonably high success rate when it came to graduates being employed. Among the five qualifications in which most students graduated, Bachelors of Education had the highest employment rate (100%), followed by Bachelor of Commerce (87.8%), Bachelor of Science (77%), LLB (75%), and Bachelor of Arts (67.7%).

For those who studied National Diplomas, 66.1 per cent are in the employed category, but if the 13 who were interning are included, the overall employment rate is 76 per cent. This is only marginally lower than the graduates. The unemployment rate of diplomates, however, is

⁹ Nick Spaull. 13 May 2016. "Black graduate numbers are up." *M&G Online*. Found at <http://mg.co.za/article/2016-05-17-black-graduate-numbers-are-up> (Accessed 7 August 2016).

markedly higher, at 16.9 per cent. This is not surprising given that the unemployment rate for diplomates countrywide is higher. It was estimated that in 2012 the unemployment rate for diplomates in South Africa was 16 per cent, which is likely to be higher now given that general unemployment has risen since then.¹⁰ The REAP diplomates are likely to mirror this national pattern. Fewer of the diplomates were studying (6.4%) than the graduates.

Table 2: Occupation of Diplomates

Diplomas	Employed	Interning	Student	Unemployed	Total
Financial field (accounting, auditing, tax etc.)	8	5	0	5	18
Human resources	5	1	0	2	8
Marketing	1	1	1	1	4
Information Technology	5	1	0	0	6
Office Management	0	0	0	2	2
Management/Public Admin	3	0	0	3	6
Retail/Logistics Management	4	0	0	2	6
Tourism/Hospitality Management	8	3	1	1	13
Environmental field	3	1	0	0	4
Chemistry/Chemical Engineering	4	0	2	1	7
Biochemical Technology	3	0	2	1	6
Medical field	4	0	0	0	4
Engineering (civil; industrial, metallurgy)	10	0	0	1	11
Electrical Engineering	10	0	0	0	10
Mechanical Engineering	6	1	2	1	10
Construction field	3	0	0	0	3
Town Planning	2	0	0	0	2
Arts/music	2	0	0	0	2
Graphic Design	1	0	0	0	1
Traffic Control	0	0	0	1	1
Total:	82	13	8	21	124

¹⁰ van Broekhuizen and van der Berg (2013: 4). The unemployment rate among all job-seekers was 24.2% in 2011, increasing to 26.6 percent by mid-2016.

As with the degrees, certain diplomas led to a much higher likelihood of employment. All six information technology diplomates were employed, while all 10 electrical engineering diplomates were also employed. Similarly, all four REAP alumni holding diplomas in the medical field were employed. Other fields in which employment rates were high include civil/industrial/metallurgical engineering (90.9%), tourism/hospitality (84.6%), and human resources (75%).

Unemployment

Before embarking on further analysis of the employment situations and dynamics of the majority of REAP tertiaries, who are employed, it is necessary to discuss the 14 per cent who are unemployed, to gain an idea of who they are and how they compare to those who are working.

The first thing to note is that the unemployed persons are younger than the average age of the sample. Unemployed individuals were, on average, 24 years old compared to the overall average age (26); the average age of employed persons (26.8); the average age of students (25); and even the average age of interns (24.4). Thus, it was mainly those who had quite recently graduated and were yet to get a proper “foot in the door” that were unemployed. In a couple of cases, naïveté and inexperience were the reason for the individuals being unemployed or failing to get that foot in the door. For example, one young female LLB graduate in Durban had been sitting unemployed for over 6 months because she had turned down the chance of an internship shortly after graduating. She felt that the stipend was too low and she had expected to find a much better position soon after graduating. After spending so many months doing nothing, however, she conceded that she should have taken this opportunity to get some experience and give herself a better chance to land the position she desired.

The second notable point is that the unemployed tertiaries were largely women. Of the 39 unemployed persons, 28 (72%) were female and only 11 (28%) were male. In only just over a quarter of cases (28.5%) did these unemployed women have babies or small children to look after, which was perhaps a significant contributory factor to their unemployed status. Most, however (64%) were young single women who had not yet had any children. It thus appears that most young female tertiaries have found it particularly difficult to find work in the current economic and labour-market climate.

Thirdly, unemployed individuals were more likely to be located in rural areas than their employed counterparts. Fifty-nine per cent of unemployed persons were in small towns or rural areas, compared to 42 per cent of the overall sample. And only 42 per cent were in large cities, compared to 60 per cent of employed persons. Given the above gender dynamics of the unemployed cohort, this perhaps speaks to the fact that young rural women are less able (for cultural or socio-economic reasons) than men to move to or stay (largely by themselves) in large cities long enough to access employment opportunities. They either remain in rural areas, where finding employment is difficult, or move back home upon failing to secure a decent employment opportunity straight after their studies. The example of one young unemployed man illustrates this point. Upon failing to find a job or internship opportunity in rural KwaZulu-Natal with several municipalities (he held a ND in internal auditing), he moved to Soweto to squat in his brother’s migrant hostel room while seeking employment. It is less likely that such an option would be possible for a young rural woman.

Lastly, the type of qualification obtained appeared to play a role in whether a person was employed or not. Seventy-two per cent of the 39 unemployed individuals (28) had studied in just seven of the 32 possible fields of study (BSC, BA, or ND in the fields of finance (tax,

accounting, auditing), office management, human resources, management/public administration or retail/logistics management). Table 3 shows the unemployment levels in each of these seven fields.

Table 3: Unemployment by Field of Study

Qualification	Number Unemployed	Percentage of Total in Field
ND (office management)	2	100%
ND (management/public admin)	3	50%
ND (Retail/logistics management)	2	33.3%
ND (finance)	5	27.7%
ND (human resources)	2	25%
Bachelor of Arts	6	19.3%
Bachelor of Science	8	13.1%

Both diplomates with the qualification of ND (office management and technology) were struggling to find employment. It is difficult to draw conclusions based on only two cases, but this does suggest that this qualification is not particularly saleable. Half of those with diplomas in the field of public management or administration were unemployed, also suggesting that diplomates struggled to sell themselves with this qualification. The other diplomas also saw between a quarter and a third of their diplomates failing to secure internships or employment. Although larger numbers of those holding BA or BSc qualification were also unemployed, as a proportion of the total number of graduates with these qualifications there were only 19.3 per cent and 13.1 per cent unemployed in each respectively. However, compared to other bachelor qualifications, these unemployment rates are higher. For example, 12.5 per cent of LLB-holders were unemployed, but only 6 per cent of BComm-holders were still seeking employment. The only Bachelor of Community Development graduate was unemployed, but it is difficult to draw a firm conclusion from one case.

Employment and Unemployment by Institution

Table 4 shows the current occupations of REAP tertiaries from different institutions. As well as showing how many from each are employed (including interning) and studying, it also shows unemployment levels for tertiaries from each institution. Tertiaries from ten institutions are either working or studying further, with none unemployed. In some cases, the very small number of individual from these institutions (under five in each case) provides a skewed outcome as it is difficult to tell if this pattern would be maintained across a wider number of tertiaries. However, it is clear that in the case of UCT and Wits, in particular, former students have a high chance of being employed.

At the other end of the spectrum, tertiaries holding qualifications from DUT, NMMU and NWU have a much lower likelihood of being employed, according to this study sample. Over a third of DUT diplomates were unemployed at the time of our interviews with them (34.4%). NMMU had a slightly lower unemployment rate (29.4%), while NWU (although small numbers may skew this outcome) had an unemployment rate of 28.5 per cent. In many cases, these were young recently qualified individuals, which was also the case for the 17.3 per cent (9 individuals) from UKZN who were unemployed. The high number of interns from DUT and UKZN also suggest the young age profile of the tertiaries from these institutions.

Table 4: Occupation by Institution

Institutions attended	Employed	Interns	Students	Unemployed	Total	Unemployment rate
UKZN	31	6	6	9	52	17.30%
UJ	24	1	2	4	31	12.90%
DUT	10	8	1	10	29	34.40%
TUT	15	2	2	3	22	13.60%
CPUT	14	1	2	2	19	10.50%
NMMU	10	1	1	5	17	29.40%
Wits	12	1	1	1	15	6.60%
UCT	13	0	1	0	14	0%
UFS	8	4	0	0	12	0%
CUT	10	0	0	1	11	9%
UP	7	2	0	0	9	0%
UWC	5	1	0	1	7	14.20%
NWU	4	0	1	2	7	28.50%
WSU	5	0	1	1	7	14.20%
U Limpopo	3	0	3	0	6	0%
Rhodes	4	0	0	0	4	0%
VUT	4	0	0	0	4	0%
Mango Tech	3	0	0	0	3	0%
U Venda	3	0	0	0	3	0%
U Stell	2	0	0	0	2	0%
Fort Hare	1	0	0	0	1	0%
Unknown	1	0	0	0	1	0%
Total:	189	27	21	39	276	

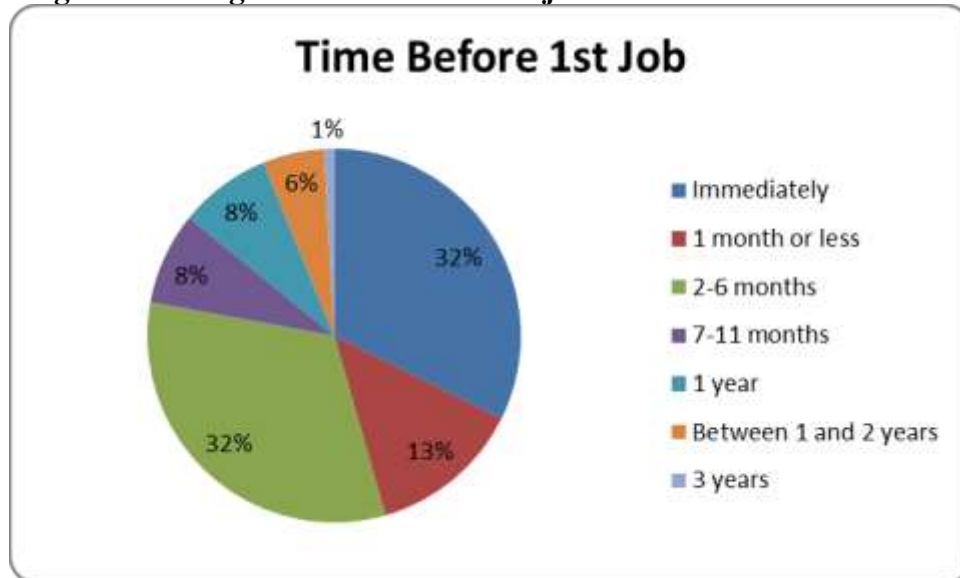
Employment dynamics

Length of Time before First Job

As Figure 19 shows, a high proportion of those REAP tertiaries who have already started working obtained their first job very quickly after completing their studies.¹¹ Almost half (45%) took one month or less to find a job, with 32 per cent starting immediately after their studies. Many of those who started immediately were recruited while still studying, often by companies which had part-funded their bursaries. Another 32 per cent took between 2 and 6 months, effectively meaning that over three-quarters (77%) got their first job within six months of completing their studies. Only 7 per cent took over a year to find their first job.

¹¹ 31 individuals had never had a first job since they were still studying (postgraduate courses) or still awaiting employment.

Figure 19: Length of time before first job



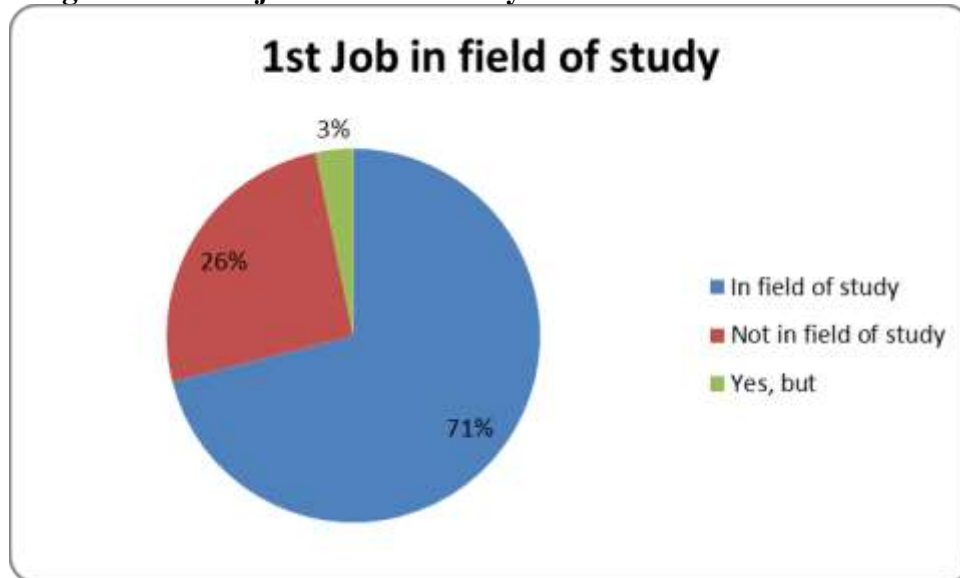
The speed with which REAP tertiaries obtained employment certainly speaks to the fact that higher-level skills are still in great demand in the job market, and that young black tertiaries in most fields of study will find opportunities reasonably quickly if they market themselves correctly. Most of those who were unemployed at the time of our fieldwork (February-April 2016) had been waiting to commence work since finishing their studies at the end of 2015. In a few cases, they had finished their studies at the end of 2014, or had written supplementary exams in 2015 while waiting for opportunities. In the case of one woman in the North-West Province, she had graduated in 2011 and still not found a job by early 2016. Indeed, in two other cases, interviewees became upset during their interviews while discussing their struggles to find a job.

First Job Related to Field of Study

Another encouraging finding is that for 71 per cent of those who have commenced work, their first job was directly related to their field of study. Thus, despite the fact that most started off in junior positions, or even as interns, the work they were doing was work they had been training for at tertiary level. In most cases, therefore, it was not the case that graduates and diplomates were having to find any first job simply to gain entry into the world of work. Their skills were evidently in demand and employers were looking to recruit them as soon as possible after they graduated.

In a quarter of cases (26%), however, REAP tertiaries had found it necessary to take jobs not related to their studies. As will become apparent below, this was not necessarily a bad move as many of these individuals were later able to embark on a career path in their field of study, despite not starting out in a related job. For others, however, jobs such as supermarket packing, working in restaurants, cashiering in shops or working in a call centre were undertaken. A small proportion (3%) were working in a job partially related to their field of study, but not in exactly what they would have hoped for. This applies particularly to those teaching at primary or secondary schools, who studied science, accountancy or engineering degrees/diplomas hoping to work in these fields, but instead found themselves teaching subjects such as life sciences or mathematics. It was apparent that teaching was a major fall-back for tertiaries who had not yet secured their ideal job in their primary fields of study.

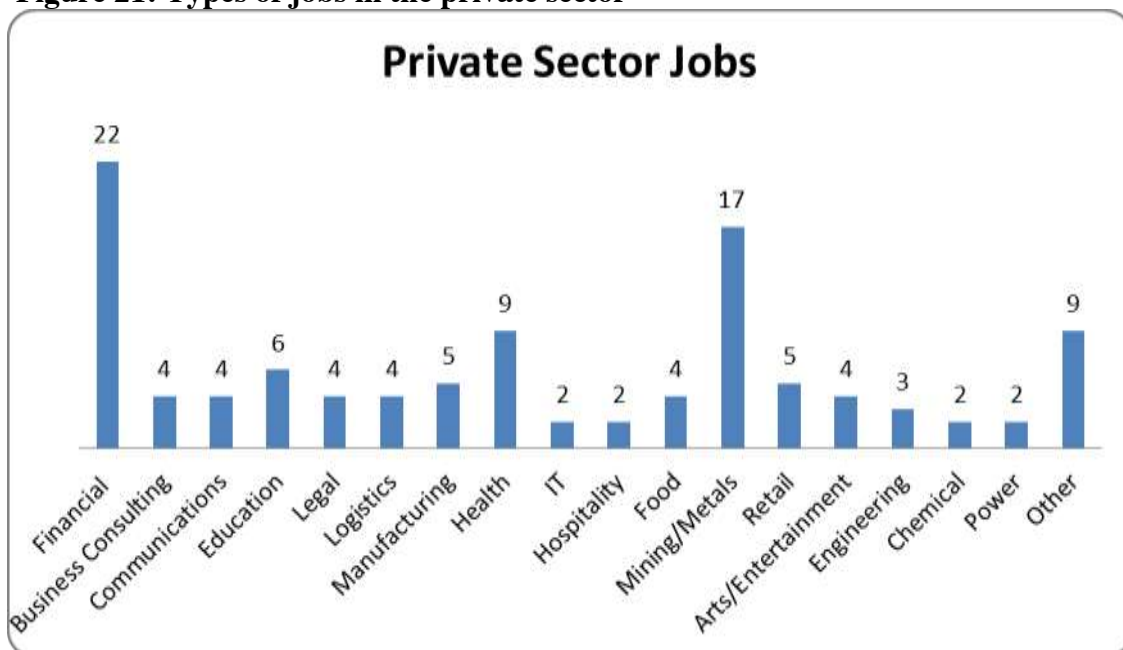
Figure 20: First job in field of study



Working in the Public or Private Sectors

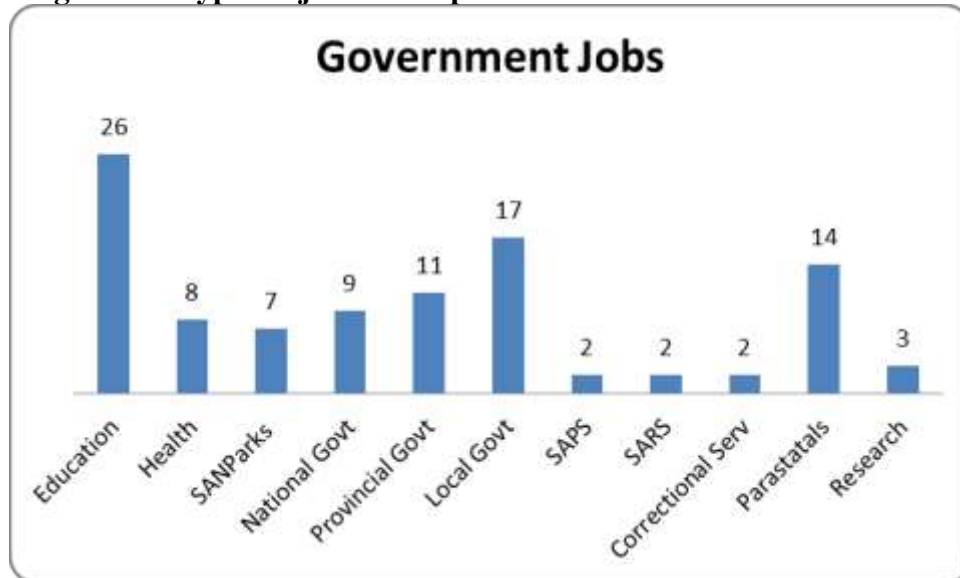
The sectors in which the REAP tertiaries were working is evenly split, with half in the private sector and close to half (47%) working for various arms of government. Only 3 per cent were working for civil society organisations. Figure 20 shows the various kinds of jobs those in the private sector were doing.

Figure 21: Types of jobs in the private sector



Jobs in the financial sector, such as accountancy, auditing, banking and investment were the most common, with 20.3 per cent of alumni in this sector. This was followed by those working in mining or metal processing, such as mining engineers, metallurgists, technicians, scientists and so on (15.7%). Several alumni were health professional of various kinds – most working for private medical laboratories.

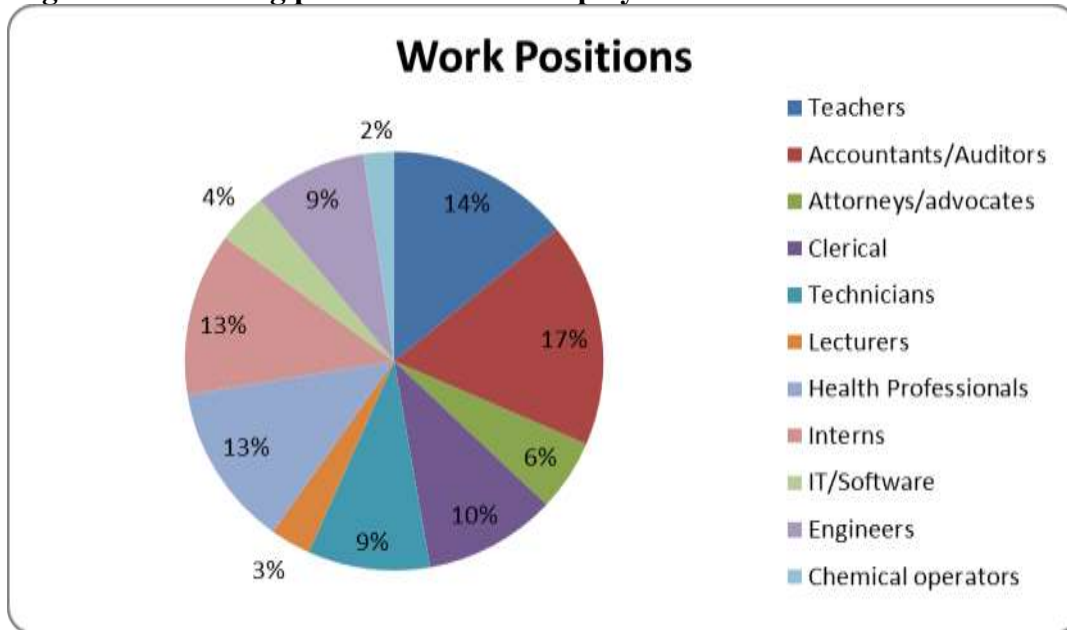
Figure 22: Types of jobs in the public sector



In the public sector, alumni with similar skills to those working in the private sector (e.g. auditing, accounting, medical, management) were applying these skills in national or provincial government departments, municipalities, hospitals, parastatals or other public agencies. The highest proportion (25.7%), were working for the Department of Education, mostly as primary or secondary school educators. As discussed above, many of them were not teaching primarily by choice. The fact that so many were teaching indicates the key role of the education sector in absorbing tertiaries with skills who struggle to find their perfect job straight away. Metropolitan, local and provincial municipalities also employed many REAP alumni (16.8%), as did parastatals such as Eskom, Telkom, Transnet, various water authorities and South African Airways.

Figure 23 shows the specific jobs that REAP tertiaries were working in. The largest proportion (17%) were working as accountants or auditors in both the public and private sectors. Unsurprisingly, the next highest number (14%) were teachers, with health professionals (dieticians, doctors, pharmacists, occupational therapists, nurses) being the third, along with interns (both 13%). Engineers of various sorts were also fairly common (9% of those employed).

Figure 23: Working positions of those employed



Since REAP tertiaries were working in a plethora of different jobs and positions, it is difficult to represent them all in a way that is clear yet also illustrates this diversity. The below word cloud, however, presents an idea of the kinds of job titles held by the cohort.



As can be observed, words such as “intern”, “trainee”, “technician”, “officer” and “educator” stand out, a sign that these were common job titles among REAP tertiaries. Words such as “engineer”, “accountant”, “business”, “analyst” and “administrator” are also fairly bold, indicating the major jobs performed. Slightly less prominent are words indicating that some tertiaries were working in managerial or quite senior positions of responsibility. These include “senior”, “manager”, “coordinator”, “planner” and even “director”. Indeed, despite the young age of these tertiaries (most 35 years old and below), 24 individuals (11% of those employed) already held fairly senior positions, such as deputy directors of government departments, private sector managers or even the owners of their own businesses. In the next section, we discuss the dynamics of the career paths evident among former REAP students.

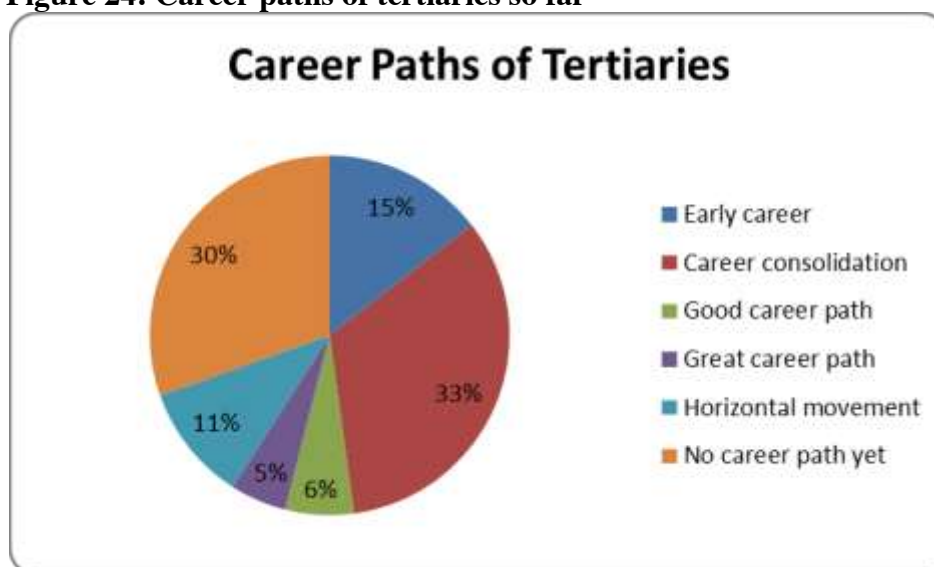
Career Paths

The career paths (to date) of REAP tertiaries were assessed using a number of variables, such as whether the person was working in their field of study; the amount of time they had worked; the number of jobs they had done; the number of promotions they had received; their salary and material wellbeing; their current position and responsibilities; and their impression of how successful they had been. Based on these criteria, it was possible to identify four main career paths: excellent careers which we have called “great”; very promising careers which we have called “good”; “early” careers which tertiaries are in the process of establishing; and careers which are currently being consolidated, growing and showing potential. Of these four paths, the highest proportion of alumni were in the latter “consolidation and growth” category (33%), while 15 per cent were just embarking on discernible “early” careers. A much smaller proportion (5 and 6 per cent respectively) had put together “great” or “good” careers thus far.

Overall, 163 (59%) of the REAP tertiaries were on one of these four discernible career paths. Of these, 91 per cent were working in a field related to their studies, although some were teaching at school level rather than working more directly in their chosen field. It is important to note that there is a glaring gender imbalance when it comes to career paths among the REAP tertiaries. Of those on a career path, 100 were men (61.4%), while only 63 were women (38.6%). Furthermore, out of the 133 women who had worked, 85 (64%) were working/had worked in their field of study, while 102 men out of the 143 who have worked are working/have worked in their field of study (71%). Given that female students sponsored by REAP have traditionally outperformed male students in their tertiary studies, this is fairly significant turnaround.

A further group, consisting of 11 per cent of the tertiaries, had worked for some time, but were showed no signs of being on a fulfilling career path. Instead they were moving horizontally between jobs and showing signs of career stagnation. In many cases, significant deskilling was taking place because these individuals had not been able to gain much experience in their fields of study. Another large proportion (30%) were not on any form of career path yet, due to never having worked before (42% of these had yet to commence work) or working in dead-end first-time jobs unrelated to their studies (see Figure 24).

Figure 24: Career paths of tertiaries so far



We now discuss the dynamics of each of these career scenarios.

1. Early Career

Forty REAP alumni are in their early careers, having recently started out on their career path. Of these, 92.5 per cent are working in their field of study and indications are that they can build a solid platform on which to construct a good career. Five individuals are working as teachers, but as will become apparent below, this can be used as a good foundation for a future move into a job with better prospects.¹² Of these individuals, 42.4 per cent are women and 57.5 per cent are men.

Case 1: Nandi is a 22 year-old woman from KwaZulu-Natal who studied a bachelor of social work degree at UKZN. After graduating, she volunteered with an NGO offering community-building and psycho-social support to refugees. When the NGO was offered a new contract by the UNHCR, Nandi was brought on as an administration and field officer. Although she is not working as a social worker, Nandi feels that her skills are being built with hands-on experience working with a vulnerable population. She looks forward to a good career in the NGO sector.

Case 2: Joyce is a 25 year-old woman from Kimberly who studied a ND (electrical engineering) at CPUT. After completing her studies aged 22 she was “scooped” by a diamond processing company based in her home town, to work in the position of junior engineer. She is very happy in this job and has even turned down offers from other companies. Currently studying mechanical engineering part-time, it is likely that Joyce will be able to move up the ladder in her field of choice and build a solid career.

2. Career Consolidation and Growth

Most REAP tertiaries (92 individuals, 33%) are currently in the process of consolidating their careers, having established them a few years previously. Eighty-nine per cent are working in a job related to their studies (some as teachers). There are some really promising careers developing in this category, but these were not categorised “good” just yet because they did not meet all the criteria, such as a high salary. In this category, the proportion of women is almost identical to the early career group. Thirty-nine (42.3%) are women while 57.6 per cent are men.

Case 1: Mpho is a 26 year-old man from the Eastern Cape who graduated with an ND (town planning) from CPUT. It took Mpho 7 months to find a job after completing his studies, but he finally found a position at the Coega Development Corporation as an intern. He was responsible for geographical information systems (GIS) work during this internship. Thereafter, Mpho landed a job as a technical town planner at the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality. With a good salary and a job in his field of study, Mpho looks forward to building further on his career.

¹² Primary and high school teaching is a vitally important job, and it is not our intention in this report to suggest that it is somehow less important than other career choices. However, in the context of these REAP alumni, many did not set out to become teachers when they chose to study science, engineering or IT, and for them teaching is thus not an ideal career path.

Case 2: Lucy is a 27 year-old woman from the Free State. She studied a BSc in chemical engineering at UCT. Upon completing her studies, Lucy soon found an internship with a water engineering company. Having completed this internship, she was recruited by Umgeni Water, in Pietermaritzburg, where she works as a Process Chemical Engineer. She earns a good salary and hopes to use the experience she is currently gaining to launch her own engineering consultancy in the future.

3. “Good” Careers

Seventeen individuals (6%) have managed to put together a really “good” career, with all working in the field they studied. Over three quarters (76.4%) of such careers are in the private sector. The gender imbalance within this group is even starker than in the previous two categories. Of the 17 individuals, 12 are men (70.6%) and only 5 (29.4%) are women.

Case 1: Andrew is a 26 year-old man from Limpopo. He studied an ND in environmental health, before completing a BTech in the same subject. Towards the end of his studies he was placed in a job with the National Department of Health in Pretoria. He started off in the position of environmental health practitioner and performed well, earning a promotion to the post of senior environmental practitioner. Andrew describes his salary as “very good” and hopes one day to open his own business.

Case 2: Phumelelo is a 33 year-old man from Emalahleni, Mpumalanga. He studied an ND in cost accounting at CUT, before studying risk management at postgraduate level. Phumelelo worked successfully at two different private companies as a risk analyst. He did this for almost a decade before starting his own company, which also specialises in risk analysis.

Case 3: Jane is a 34 year-old woman from Bela Bela, Limpopo. She studied a BSc in dietetics at Wits University and completed a postgraduate course in business management. Having completed her community service at Bela Bela hospital, she was offered a post as a junior dietician with the same hospital. After some time she moved to Tembisa hospital to take up a post as a senior dietician. She then found a better position as a medical delegate in the private sector with a multinational food corporation. She still works for this company after more than five years and has now been promoted to the position of senior medical delegate. Currently living very comfortably, her dream is to own her own farm.

4. “Great” Careers

Many of the careers we have classified as “good” are very impressive indeed. However, in a small number of cases (14), there are truly exceptional careers being enjoyed by REAP tertiaries. All of these individuals are working in their field of studies; they are now occupying fairly senior positions and doing very well financially. The gender discrepancy is even more glaring with this group than any of the previous types of career. Twelve out of 14 “great” career tertiaries are men (85.7%), while only 2 are women (14.3%). Interestingly, 9 out of these 14 individuals (64%) are working in senior positions for the government – all of them men. Unsurprisingly, the average age in this group is quite high compared to the others, at 30.4 years.

Case 1: Noma is a 34 year-old woman from Pietermaritzburg. She attended UKZN, where she graduated with a BComm in business management and an honours degree in marketing. Having been given a full bursary by a multinational hospitality company, she was taken on immediately after graduating as a trainee marketing officer. Over the next decade, she was promoted a number of times; from marketing officer to supervisor, to manager and to her current position of acting head of the department of marketing. The only thing holding her career back, says Noma is the fact that she cannot be transferred to international branches of the company because of her children and family commitments.

Case 2: Sibusiso is a 36 year-old man from the Eastern Cape. He attended Mangosuthu University of Technology, from which he graduated with an ND in cost management and accounting. Sibusiso was not concerned when he could not immediately find a job in his field, taking instead a job as a school teacher. After a while, he was able to find an internship with a municipality, in which he could put his accounting skills to use. Performing well, he then secured another internship at the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Department of Rural Development and Land Restitution. He then began working his way up, becoming the senior accounting officer after a few years. He is currently the assistant director (budget sector). Sibusiso's case shows that a career which starts off in teaching can still become a pathway to a better career. He also shows that being prepared to step down for a while and do internships can be a good way of moving into a position in which there is potential for growth.

Case 3: Barney is a 30 year-old man from Limpopo who studied an ND in logistics and management at VUT, before doing a BTech. He took six months to obtain his first substantive job, which was as a logistics manager with a transport company. After a while, Barney moved across to another transport company to work in a similar position, but with better conditions. Not finding the working environment to his liking, he left this company after a while and established his own transport company. Barney was then fortunate to come across a new opportunity to join a leading investment company. Thirty-five people were taken on as trainee financial advisors, but only he and another were eventually given full-time positions. From there, he has worked his way up to be a leading and award-winning financial advisor in the company.

5. Employed but Moving Horizontally

Another group of REAP tertiaries, consisting of 29 individuals (11%) have been employed over several years, but have tended to move between jobs and positions horizontally, rather than gaining promotion within their lines of work. There are some decent livings being made among this group, but compared to the other career paths identified; there is not (yet) as much evidence of career progress over time. Perhaps for many it is too soon to judge whether their careers are not progressing fast enough – in many cases their horizontal movement could simply be the inevitable shifting around that happens with many early careers.

In this group, the overwhelming majority (75.8%) are women. With the above caveat on reading too much into this group in mind, this gender dynamic might suggest, again, that qualified black rural women find it more difficult than men of a similar background to get quickly onto a solid career track which allows growth and promotion over time. Of this group,

18 (62%) have managed to work in their field of study at some point, but some are currently in jobs not directly related to their studies.

Case 1: Pretty is a 24 year-old woman from the Northern Cape who obtained an ND in human resource management from CUT. She found job interviews “challenging” and took 6 months to secure her first opportunity. This was a learnership with a private company. She then did another learnership with the Department of Education. Today, she works as a clerk for the SA Police Service in a small town in her home province.

Case 2: Boitumelo is a 24 year-old woman from the Eastern Cape. She Studied a BEd at UCT, before doing a PGCE. She was initially unable to get a teaching post upon completing her studies, so she worked as a potter and then as a call centre agent for a clothing retail company. Boitumelo then finally landed a teaching post at a government school in the Western Cape. After a while, she moved to her current job, teaching at a small private college. Although there is potential for Boitumelo’s career to grow, her current position is not a major step up from her government teaching job, and she admits that the salary is not enough to meet all her needs.

6. No Career Yet

Eighty-four individuals (30% of the entire study sample) are not yet on a career path of any kind. In 35 cases (41.6% of those in this group), they had never worked, either because they were still studying or because they had not yet secured their first job or internship. In the other 49 cases, they were either unemployed or working in menial dead-end jobs not related to or becoming of their studies. In this group, 48 (57%) are women and 36 (43%) are men. In only 18 cases (21.4%) had these individuals worked in their field of study, and where they had, it was often only temporarily.

Case 1: Lindelwa is a 22 year old woman from KwaZulu-Natal who obtained an ND in retail and business management from DUT. After her studies, she took three months to find her first opportunity, which was as a trainee at a furniture store. She then got onto the graduate trainee programme of a large wholesale chain. Having completed this programme she was taken on as a part-time night general worker, which is not a job which someone with a tertiary qualification might expect, in terms of skills required, development prospects or remuneration. Although it is still early in Lindelwa’s career, her early prospects have been disappointing.

Case 2: Dumisani is a 23 year-old man from the Eastern Cape, who studied an ND in operational management at DUT. It took Dumisani a year to secure his first job, which was as a general hand at a bed manufacturing factory. He then moved to a clothing factory shop, where he currently works as a general assistant. As with the above case, Dumisani is still young but despite having a tertiary qualification is still struggling to find work that is not menial and poorly paid.

Career Development Prospects from the Perspective of HR Professionals

Human resources professionals interviewed had a variety of valuable perspectives about the prospects of disadvantaged tertiary students in the workplace, and on what they were doing to assist them. An HR professional in the banking sector shared the following:

“Yes, we have had many success stories of students joining [the company] who have gone on to do really well. They stick to the job at hand, don’t job hop, determinedly find ways to move up the ladder etc. To the point I’m actually hoping to write a book one day, so many are the wonderful stories we can share. We have a very supportive graduate programme for their first 18 months of work which encompasses hard and soft skill training. We also give regular feedback and have a mentor system as well as an internal coaching function.”

In the auditing field, the following insights were shared:

“If they put in the work, they most definitely can move up the ladder and be successful in the field. The dropout rate is higher now than in previous years. This is due to students not properly knowing exactly what audit is all about. They choose the profession with the idea that it pays well, and not knowing the hours that go into the job at any level within the career type.”

At another large accounting firm, based in Cape Town, tertiary students are recruited from a work-readiness programme run by an organisation called Guarantee Trust. This organisation takes recently qualified prospective employees and trains them in a range of skills, such as interview technique and workplace skills such as communication, time management, prioritising and handling stress. An HR professional at this firm said the following:

“Those who have been through work-readiness programmes are definitely better placed to do well than those straight from university. We have a big focus on learning, development and counselling through our learnerships and our support programme. We give rewards to those who do well and develop their hard and soft skills. They also get a very comprehensive induction so they can get the skills to be professional and cope with the pressure.”

HR professionals thus acknowledged that there were skills lacking among new recruits – especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds – but that they did have mechanisms in place to assist these recruits to make the most of their careers.

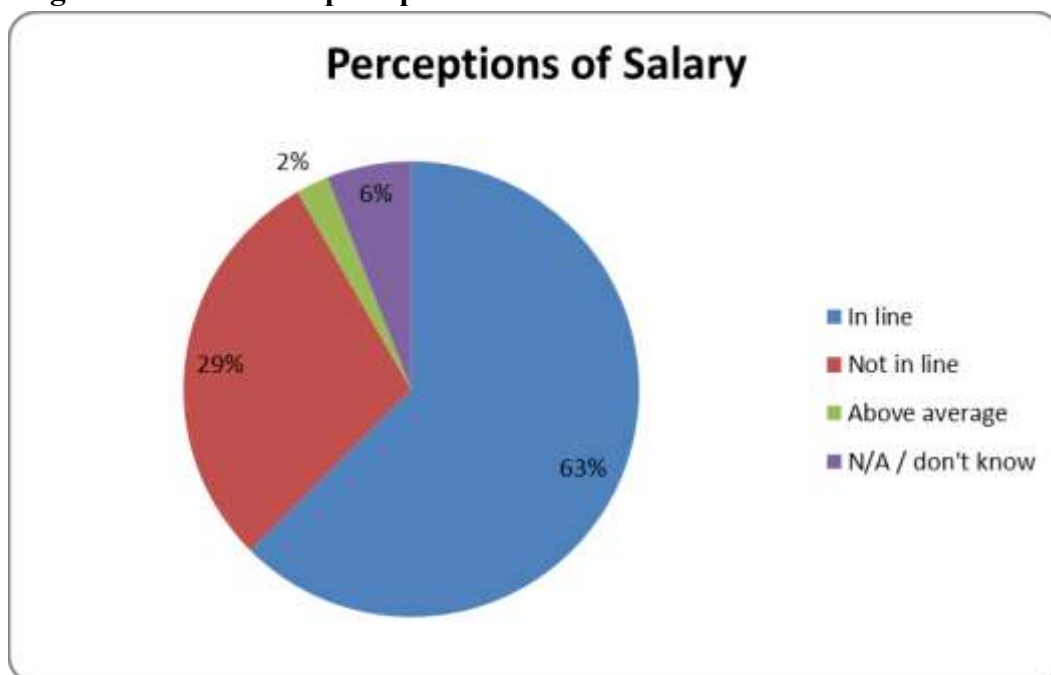
Remuneration and Perceptions of Remuneration

Of the 216 individuals working at the time of our interviews, 178 were willing to provide details of their gross monthly income. The average monthly income for these individuals was R19,225. Of the 26 who declined to give their salary information, 13 described their salary as “good”; while 5 said it was “average” or “fair” (8 provided no indication). Salaries ranged from those few very senior individuals earning close to R100,000 per month to interns with a monthly stipend of just R1,500 per month.

Again, there was a discrepancy between the average salaries earned by men and women. The average for the 95 men who provided salary details was R20,308 per month. Meanwhile, the average for the 83 women who provided salary details was significantly lower, at R17,985 per month. This discrepancy is largely to do with the fact (as discussed in the previous section) that far fewer women than men were working in senior positions, or in careers which can be called “good” or “great”. This has had the effect of skewing the monthly average for women as a whole. There were senior women with large salaries among the REAP tertiaries, and it did not appear that women were necessarily being paid less than their male counterparts in similar positions.

Certainly, when it comes to tertiaries’ perceptions of their salaries, men and women were very similar when it came to judging if their wages were in line with industry norms for their positions. Overall, 63 per cent of tertiaries felt their remuneration was in line with industry norms: from those doing articles or internships, right up to senior individuals (see Figure 25). A small proportion (2%) acknowledged that they earned above industry norms. Almost a third of those who were working (29%), however, felt that their salaries were below what others in their industry were earning. Of the women, 28.4 per cent felt that their salaries were not up with industry norms, while 27.2 per cent of men felt similarly.

Figure 25: Tertiaries’ perceptions of their salaries



Among those who did not feel their salaries with in line with industry levels, the following responses were given, showing that while some were disgruntled, others were prepared to be pragmatic:

“No, I don’t earn enough, but it’s a stepping stone.”

"No, it should be higher considering my experience."

“No, radiographers in the Western Cape are the least paid.”

“No, it’s too little for someone with an Honours degree.”

“Not really, but I am happy to be gaining conflict resolution experience.”

“No, there are better opportunities out there.”

“It’s low but I am doing articles also.”

“For someone with a Masters? NO!”

Being Promoted

As the section of career paths suggests, some REAP tertiaries have been able to find good working positions and gain promotion in those positions or through moving to another company to take up a higher post. Of those currently working, 69 (32%) have been promoted in their working history, while 147 (68%) have not been promoted. Given that many of the REAP alumni are below 30 years of age and in the early phase of their careers, it is not surprising that only a third have been promoted. Indeed, it is encouraging that such a high proportion have been able to move up within the first decade or so of commencing their working lives.

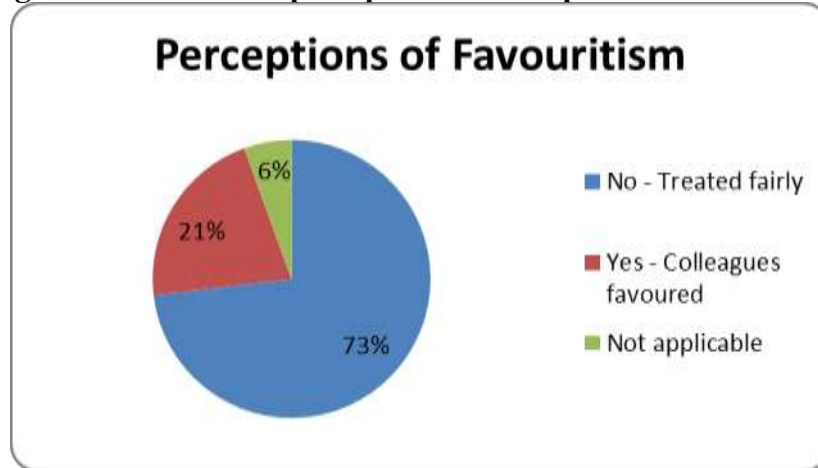
However, once again, there is a glaring gender discrepancy when it comes to promotions. Of the 69 individuals who have been promoted, only 20 (29%) are women while the vast majority (49, or 71%) are men. This confirms the above career analysis which suggests that black rural male tertiaries are much better placed than their female counterparts to obtain good jobs and rise up the career ladder in contemporary South Africa. Of course, the glass ceiling experienced by women in the workplace is a global phenomenon, but the fact that women who, on average, do better at their tertiary studies than men are being left so far behind when it comes to their careers, is a great cause for concern. Rather than being a reflection on these particular tertiaries, it likely indicates some key structural dynamics in the contemporary workplace which favour men and make it very difficult for most women to progress.

Perceptions of Favouritism

It is interesting to consider the REAP tertiaries’ perceptions of workplace favouritism in light of the above gender discrepancy when it comes to promotions. Almost three-quarters of those currently working (73%) said that they had not experienced their colleagues being favoured in any way over them (see Figure 26). Interestingly, in a handful of cases study participants stated rather, that it was them who had been favoured. For example, one man said, *“I feel I am the favoured one because at my age and with only a few years of experience, I have risen quite high.”* Another said, *“I am the only geologist in this small company, so I’m actually the lucky one.”* Only 21 per cent felt that their colleagues had been favoured at some point in their working careers. In a small proportion of cases (6%), interviewees could not answer this question because they had only recently started working.

Most interesting though is that on the whole, women and men held almost identical views on workplace favouritism, despite the statistics for the whole cohort showing that men had been favoured in several areas. Twenty out of the 95 women who were working (21%) said they had noticed colleagues being favoured, while 26 out of 121 working men (21.4%) said they had noticed this.

Figure 26: Tertiaries' perceptions of workplace favouritism



Where favouritism was noticed, it tended to be less about gender and more to do with racial or ethnicity-based favouritism, as the following quotes illustrate:

"Colleagues with the right skin colour get more even with less qualifications. The starting scale tells you something is wrong."

"It's not my business but the colour of the skin matters."

"Salaries are racially structured. A white lady who is two years my junior gets more money."

"Along racial lines. There are blacks who have been here for 20 years but still in the same post."

"This is quite common. Positions in mines are based on experience and not qualifications. Those not qualified but experienced are being favoured."

"National Certificate holders are favoured with overtime opportunities and end up earning more."

"At [bank where she worked], white colleagues would come to Polokwane, get promoted and be transferred to Johannesburg, Blacks were overlooked. In education too, friends of the principal rise fast."

"Those that are politically connected rise from student to department spokesperson."

"I overheard a conversation in the corridors that I was too young to earn what I earn. For me that's not fair. It means certain people are supposed to earn but not me."

"If you know someone in management, you get up the ladder fast."

"There is a lot of corruption. You pay the selection panel and you get the job. Or you know one panellist and you get the job."

"There is a lot of political manoeuvring and some people get preferred on a factional basis. Favouritism and cronyism is the order of the day."

"There is political influence when it comes to appointments. This position I have is a highly politicised one. If you don't belong to the right faction you are doomed."

“There is favouritism based on race and tribalism. Some people get huge bonuses because they speak the right language.”

“Males are given promotions quicker than women.”

“It happens a lot. Being black in a white-dominated enterprise, there is always the case that whites get favoured.”

“Nurses get recognition after just two years of service. HR seems not to be recognised at all.”

Experiences of Racism, Harassment or Discrimination

Related to the above question of whether tertiaries felt that colleagues had been favoured, is the question of whether any of them have direct experiences of racial or other kinds of discrimination. The majority of working respondents had never experienced any kind of discrimination (71%). It was common for these individuals to say that they worked in very professional surroundings and that there were policies and procedures in place which governed workplace conduct. But in the case of 61 individuals (29%), discrimination of some form had been experienced. Many of these experiences were similar to those expressed above, relating to certain people being favoured depending on their race, language group or other criteria. Others experienced racism from colleagues or bosses more directly. It must be noted that tertiaries reported racism not only from white colleagues or bosses, but from a range of individuals. The following comments illustrate these experiences:

“Yes, there are colleagues who are blatantly racist, both white and black. Some colleagues physically fought after a racist slur.”

“Yes, racism is camouflaged in many ways and it’s institutionalised so much.”

“Yes, racism is there. I fortunately can speak Afrikaans but those that do not are abused verbally.”

“One coloured boss always picked on me, and I thought he was being racist.”

“The boss at [restaurant] used to call us a bunch of baboons.”

“Being coloured and the immediate boss also being coloured, the blacks think I am being preferred because of that.”

“White colleagues harassed us and didn’t accept us getting more money than some of them.”

“Yes. I had to leave one company because I was racially abused.”

“White clients always wanted to talk to my white juniors even though I was the most senior. Maybe it’s a cultural thing not a racial one.”

“Racism at [bank] was bad. We were treated like sub-humans. After a year and a promotion, that is when the situation improved.”

“Not racism, but politics. Durbanites were not happy that someone from the Eastern Cape was funded.”

Asked about experiences of sexual harassment or abuse in the workplace, only 3 individuals (1.3%) said they had ever experienced this. While it is positive that so few young tertiaries report that they have faced such an experience, it may be that this is more of a problem than it seems given that sexual harassment and abuse often goes unreported.

Frustrations Faced in the Workplace

Despite the fact that three-quarters of those who were working had not experienced any discrimination, racism, or even unfair practices, there were a range of frustrations at work which most experienced. Only 44 individuals (20%) claimed not to have faced any frustrations in their lines of work, while 80 per cent (172 individuals) said they had to cope with frustrations (see Figure 27).

Figure 27: Workplace frustrations of REAP tertiaries

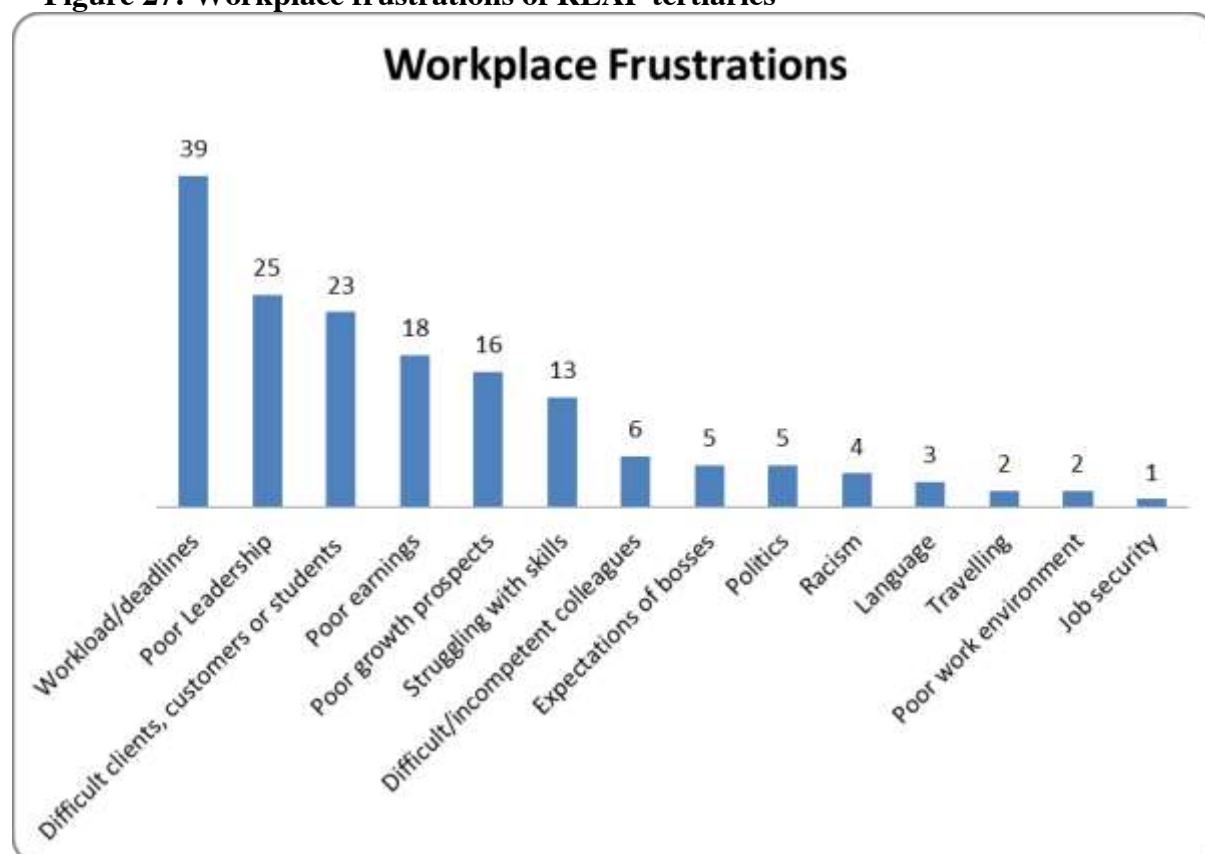


Figure 27 shows the major frustrations experienced by REAP tertiaries. The largest proportion of those who shared their frustrations (24%) said that the workload and the pressure of their deadlines, along with the long hours required to deliver their work, was the most frustrating and stressful aspect of their careers. Twenty-five individuals (15.4%) said that the way their bosses operated and the lack of mentorship or leadership from them was their most frustrating aspect of their working lives. A similar number struggled with difficult or demanding clients, customers or students (in the case of teachers). For some (11%), the most frustrating aspect of work was the fact that their wages were low compared to what was expected of them. Slightly fewer (9.8%) felt that their jobs lacked any real growth or development prospects, a fact that they found frustrating and demotivating. Others cited issues connected to the nature of the workplace, such as high expectations, the need to manage politics and political pressure (especially those in government positions), racism and language challenges.

Expectations to Behave or Speak a Certain Way

As a way of gauging how well REAP tertiaries were able to adapt to the workplace, we asked if they had ever experienced expectations from their bosses, or the corporate culture in general, to dress or speak a particular way or to participate in extra activities (political, sporting etc.) if they hoped to do well and gain promotion.

Interestingly, given that these are mainly first-generation professionals from rural backgrounds, the overwhelming majority (86%) said they had never experienced any particular expectations other than what they took to be normal in a working environment (dress smartly, be on time, be professional etc.). Only 30 individuals (14%) said they had experienced such expectations, generally around dressing or speaking in ways they would not normally have done. Only a handful cited being expected to play a particular sport or join a political party when they started working.

This is not to say that these tertiaries did not struggle to adapt to certain things when they commenced work, as the next section discusses.

Workplace Skills Lacked

Although a very high proportion of REAP tertiaries reported that they did not feel pressure to speak or look different, most nevertheless said there were ways in which they had to adapt, and skills they had to learn when they commenced their working lives. Indeed, only 36 individuals (16.6%) said they did not lack any skills (or face challenges adapting to working life) when they commenced working, while 83.4 per cent identified skills which they found themselves lacking. In many cases there was more than one skill lacking upon commencement of work.

Figure 28: Skills lacked on commencing work

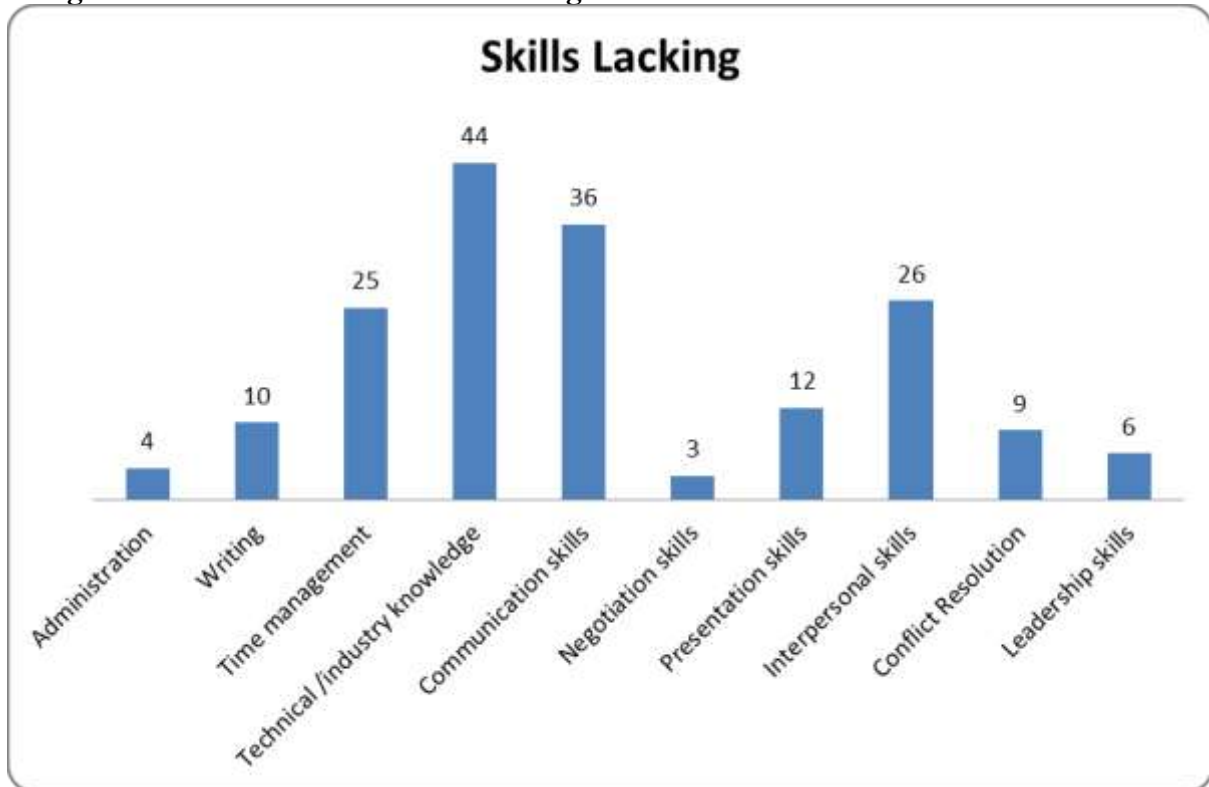


Figure 28 shows the most common skill deficits identified by the study participants. The most commonly cited deficit was real knowledge – either technical or more broadly – about the industries these individuals had gone into. For many, while their studies had prepared them theoretically (up to a point), they found that there was still much to learn – and many “hard” skills to gain – when they started working. Perhaps not surprisingly, those holding diplomas often felt much better prepared for the workplace because of the more technical focus of their courses and because of their experiences of workplace attachment. Diplomates in certain fields were of the opinion that graduates holding degrees were at a distinct disadvantage because their courses were too academic to prepare them for the practical and technical work they would have to perform in the workplace.

Thirty-six individuals stated that adequate communication skills were lacking when they started work. In some cases, this was because they struggled to communicate in the language most commonly used at work – be that English, Afrikaans or one of South Africa’s other official languages which were spoken by most of their colleagues. In other cases, language proficiency was decent but their confidence to speak, ask questions, present and debate was low. Writing reports and emails in a professional manner was also a struggle for many of these tertiary students. Study participants spoke of learning over time to overcome shyness and lack of confidence and become better communicators.

One of the more remarkable cases of struggles to communicate comes from two mining engineers – Buko and Kenneth - working at a large gold mine in Gauteng. One is a 25 year-old woman from the Eastern Cape and the other is a 26 year-old male from Limpopo. Both studied BSc mining engineering degrees at Wits University. Having been sponsored from their second-year by the company and being attached to them during vacations, both were recruited as mining engineers upon graduation. Mining engineers occupy a middle position

between the largely white senior mine supervisors and managers, and the black (largely) migrant mine labourers. While they had become used to communicating with white seniors during their vacation work at the mine, upon joining as mining engineers a whole new communication challenge became apparent. One of their main jobs is to manage and instruct the mine workers. The problem they found was that these workers insisted on using *fanagalo* (the unique pidgin mix of Zulu, English, Afrikaans and other languages used since the 1800s in Southern African mines). The workers – who come from a variety of ethnic groups – would refuse to speak English and, so as not to privilege one language among them, respond only to instructions and communication in *fanagalo*.

The problem for these two young mining engineers was that *fanagalo* is a language of command associated with apartheid-era exploitation and racism. As such, they had never been taught this language and it is almost inconceivable that it would be on a course curriculum in present-day South Africa. Their inability to speak this language was, however, a major barrier for both of them and they found themselves desperately trying to learn the language to be able to work effectively with the mine workers. Buko also faced the added challenge of trying to work with and manage often traditionalist older men who did not respond well to being managed by a woman. Having only recently started working, this continues to be a challenge for both Kenneth and especially Buko.

Related to communication skills, 26 individuals said that interpersonal skills and relating to colleagues, bosses and clients in the workplace was something they struggled with when they commenced work. Working in highly pressured environments, with sometimes difficult colleagues often coming from widely different cultural backgrounds; and managing high expectations from managers and clients, put great strain on young tertiaries when they started out. Many thus found that they had to develop their interpersonal skills – learning patience, calmness and tact for example – in order to manage these complex social environments. Similarly, 9 individuals said they lacked conflict resolution skills from the outset while 3 said that they wished they had been better trained in negotiation skills.

Another commonly-cited skill deficit was time management (25 individuals). Study participants described how different it was to manage time in a tertiary institution compared to in the workplace, with the latter being a much less forgiving and more pressurised environment. This is obviously something many first-time workers experience, not only those from a rural background. Smaller numbers also stated that they had struggled with presentation skills, writing skills and administration – all key skills needed in many of the jobs being performed by the REAP tertiaries. Some of those recruited into positions where they had to manage colleagues soon after starting (such as the mining engineers in the above case study) stated that their leadership skills were lacking and they had to make a great effort to learn how to be effective in this role.

Thus, “hard” skills (industry knowledge, writing, presentation, time management, administration) were said to be lacking in 95 instances, while “soft” skills (communication, conflict resolution, leadership, negotiation skills, interpersonal skills) were said to be lacking in 80 cases. This emphasises that while tertiaries may be in need of better “hard” skills as they enter the workplace, a range of “soft” skills – just as important – are lacking from the outset.

HR Professional Perceptions of Tertiary Challenges in the Workplace

To gain a different perspective – from the employer’s point of view – human resources professionals from different fields were asked about deficits they had noticed among young graduates from the kinds of backgrounds REAP students are from. The first question that was asked of each HR professional was to do with what crucial skills in their field needed to be acquired in order to perform well. An HR professional in a leading law firm gave the following response:

“I would say that time management is critical, as well as being able to know how to communicate with superiors around this – i.e. they need to be able to push back at times in order to manage workload, which isn’t something that comes easily, but is critical if they want to avoid getting burnt out really quickly. A lot of what is required, though, is actually attitudinal – they need to be open to learning, and learning quickly, working as a team, collaborating across departments, stepping up when the need arises, etc. Dealing with failure (they’re going to get it wrong initially, and that’s okay, as long as they learn and move on).”

She went on to describe the skill deficits common in her experience:

“The deficit we experience is less about skill, and more around adapting to a corporate environment. For many of them, particularly those from a disadvantaged background, they are experiencing the corporate environment for the first time. The key deficits are, therefore, more around engagement and building confidence.”

In the banking sector, the following observations were made:

“They need exposure to the corporate world away from the university campus i.e. internships, presentations on campus by people from business, exposure to practical application of (in our case) financial markets (such as trading equities etc.) rather than just learning accounting in a classroom. With the way the world is changing, the fact that technology is influencing everything and will increasingly do so, they all need computer prowess including coding skills.”

Thus, the common challenges – and opportunities – this HR professional noted were the following:

“The main deficit when talking about the average graduate starting work is that they have academic knowledge but no practical experience and it takes a while to see how the latter is applied in the real world. Whilst less about a lack of skill (we don’t struggle to find exceptional students) they are sometimes frustrated at not being able to start adding value immediately. There is a settling in period during which time they grow their ‘Corporate EQ’. Our graduates from a rural background have often come from very poor homes and they come with a hunger to succeed you don’t always see in students from a more privileged background. On the down-side they haven’t had the same opportunities and exposure and the gap between finishing university (where they may have had to wash cars or work in a restaurant on weekends to pay for their studies). The ‘polish’ of said students from a township for example isn’t there and they won’t be hired into a client facing role initially. This causes frustration because they are determined to succeed. And NEED to succeed as most have family back home to support as well as large loans to repay.”

In the accounting field, an HR professional observed the following skills as being key:

“Being able to communicate with business leaders (CEOs, Financial Managers etc.) as they are out dealing with clients from the very beginning of their learnership. Many of these clients are business owners and high level professionals. They will also need to learn time management (especially in our industry) – time is money and we bill accordingly. Time budgets being blown on audits result in costs the firm has to incur.”

Thus, she noted the following with regards to the key skills lacking in recruits from a rural background: *“Time Management is definitely a deficit, as well as communication. I also find that they struggle at first to adapt to the corporate culture of the firm.”*

Another HR professional in the field of accounting shared the following important insights:

“It is an adjustment for everyone for their first job. To adjust to corporate culture, hours of work, and even catching transport to work is difficult. It is tough for people without their own transport. But the main challenges we are seeing is with things like the codes of conduct and getting used to punctuality and the full-time work environment; prioritising, coping with stress and those sorts of things. They need to learn to take responsibility and gain the tools to cope under pressure. Some of the disadvantaged recruits come with bachelors degrees, not honours and they struggle to adapt, especially because they have to do their honours at the same time as working. So they have more pressure, more stress, and they face pressure to support their families too. And they don’t always have the tools to cope. You have to be so scheduled and balance every little part of your life if you want to do well. Some drop out and can’t cope. It’s not necessarily their background, but because of decisions they have had to make because of their backgrounds.”

REAP Tertiaries’ Lives and Aspirations

In this final findings section, we explore some aspects of the study participants’ broader lives, which provide context to their current achievements and situations.

Owning a Motor Vehicle or Residence

Whatever misgivings are held about the environmental sustainability of each middle class person owning a motor vehicle, there is no doubt that cars are an aspirational status symbol in contemporary South Africa, as well as a reliable (if expensive) means of transport in large cities with inadequate public transport provision. We consequently asked REAP tertiaries about their ownership of motor vehicles, to gain further insight into their financial situation. Of the study participants, 109 (39.4%) had acquired vehicles by the time of our interviews while 167 (60.6%) had not. All but three of those owning cars were employed, with the other three being two post-graduate students and an intern. It is interesting to note, with the above context in mind, that only just short of 40 per cent had yet acquired their own vehicles, yet almost 70 per cent were employed (not including the interns) and earning on average close to R20 000 per month. The 60.6 per cent of tertiaries who did not own cars yet therefore included many employed persons (83), along with all the unemployed individuals, all but two students and all but one intern. It is likely that the relatively high number of employed tertiaries not owning cars is an indication that these young tertiaries have other financial priorities, such as paying off student loans in some cases, and supporting family members at home and in their education.

Tertiaries were similarly asked whether they rented accommodation, or if they owned their own residential property yet. Unsurprisingly, given the age profile of this cohort, only 52 individuals (19%) owned their own properties, while 224 (81%) were still renting. All of those

who owned a property were employed and they tended to be older and more established in their careers. It must be noted that a number of REAP tertiaries had, or were in the process of, building decent houses for their kin in their rural homes; a more important priority than buying themselves urban property.

Relationships and Dependents

A slim majority of REAP tertiaries (55.8%) were not in long-term or steady relationships at the time of our interviews with them. Of those 122 in relationships, there was an even gender split. Being employed in a substantive position appears to have an impact on whether a tertiary is in a long-term relationship or not. Just over 50 per cent of employed individuals were in long-term relationships. Age is clearly a factor along with financial security, as the average age of employed persons (26.8 years old) is higher than that of other categories. Thus, the majority of younger tertiaries who are still studying, interning or unemployed fall into the “single” category. Indeed, 74 per cent of interns are single, 71.4 per cent of students are single and 66.6% of those who are unemployed are still single. It is interesting that while the average age for the unemployed group is the lowest of any category (24), a higher proportion of them are in relationships than either students or interns. This might suggest that more of them are relying on the support of a partner.

The majority of REAP tertiaries have not yet had any children. One hundred and sixty-eight (60.8%) have not had or are not expecting a child yet, of which 82 are female and 86 are male. One hundred and two tertiaries have had children (37%), while 6 were expecting a child at the time of our interviews. Again, the gender balance for those with children is fairly even. Of those with children, the majority (73.5%) have just one child, while 21.5 per cent have had two children and less than five individuals have three or more children.

A more important consideration concerns not so much how many children these tertiaries have had, but to what extent having a child has affected their careers. In 63 per cent of cases (174 individuals including those still expecting), this question is not applicable since they have not yet had children. Among those who have had children, 69 individuals (67.6%) said that having children had not had any impact on their careers, while the other 33 (32.4%) said that having children had had an impact. The gender split for those who said that having children had had an impact was also even, with 17 women and 16 men saying there was an impact. What is striking, however, is that half of the men said that having a child had actually had a positive impact on them as it had made them more responsible, focussed and hard-working. None of the women said that having children had had a positive impact on their careers. The following comments illustrate this dynamic:

“I would have gone overseas but my kids come first before my career.” (working mother)

“I left the force so that I could do something better for my child. And shifts were affecting my relationship with the child.” (working mother)

“I had my first child in my first year. I would have done better if I didn’t have a child.” (working mother)

“I can’t just move around even overseas.” (working mother)

“It did affect me. In the mining sector one gets moved to other departments if they have kids.” (working mother)

“It affected me big time. Firstly, I would have completed my studies earlier. Secondly, I can’t just go and work anywhere far from home.” (unemployed mother)

“The perception of life changes, your focus shifts and one has to make sure the child has the best upbringing.” (employed father)

“Yes, it affected me positively. I now have reason to work even harder.” (employed father)

“The child is my motivation to do better.” (employed father)

“It’s a huge responsibility. My first child is in grade 1 now.” (employed father)

“This has spurred me on to do better for my child.” (interning father)

“It did impact me. I wanted to study further but it’s no longer possible.” (employed father)

Overall, having a child impacted negatively on the careers of only about 20 per cent of those who have had children so far, with women being impacted more commonly than men.

Bringing up and supporting children is one kind of responsibility, but what about other family members, who commonly rely on successful kin to support them in various ways? Almost three-quarters of REAP tertiaries (73.5%) are supporting a wider group of people: family members – mainly sisters and brothers, parents and grandparents. In most instances they are paying school and university fees for young siblings or cousins, sending remittances or buying groceries, or even funding new houses or cars for their parents. This is a very common scenario for young educated people from poor communities. Those from rural backgrounds may face a particularly heavy burden, given the poverty and lack of access to opportunities their families face. It has been referred to as “the black tax” by commentators, while this generation is sometimes referred to as “the sandwich generation” because they have to take financial responsibility for both their older relatives (who missed out on a decent education) and their younger ones. Such obligations often mean that the young person – still studying or just starting careers – bears a huge burden and is unable to invest adequately in their own needs and development.¹³

Although most of those who are supporting kin in this way are employed or at least interning, there are six students and five unemployed individuals who are relied upon for support, even though their means are severely limited. Students sometimes have to use their bursary money to assist their family members, while unemployed persons scrape together whatever they can to assist. Seventy-three individuals were not supporting anyone (26.4%), with 67 per cent of these being either unemployed (34 individuals) or students (15 individuals). Only a small number of employed REAP tertiaries (24) did not experience the burden of supporting family members.

Did those supporting kin regard it as a burden, however? Surprisingly, only 40 of those supporting family members (20%) said that supporting kin was a burden to them. Although it does put extra pressure on young tertiaries trying to repay student loans, buy property and study

¹³ See Mosibudi Ratlebjane (30 October 2015). “How ‘black tax’ cripples our youth’s aspirations”. *M&G Online*. Found at: <http://www.msn.com/en-za/money/topstories/how-black-tax-cripples-our-youths-aspirations/ar-BBmB3BT> (Accessed 30 October 2015).

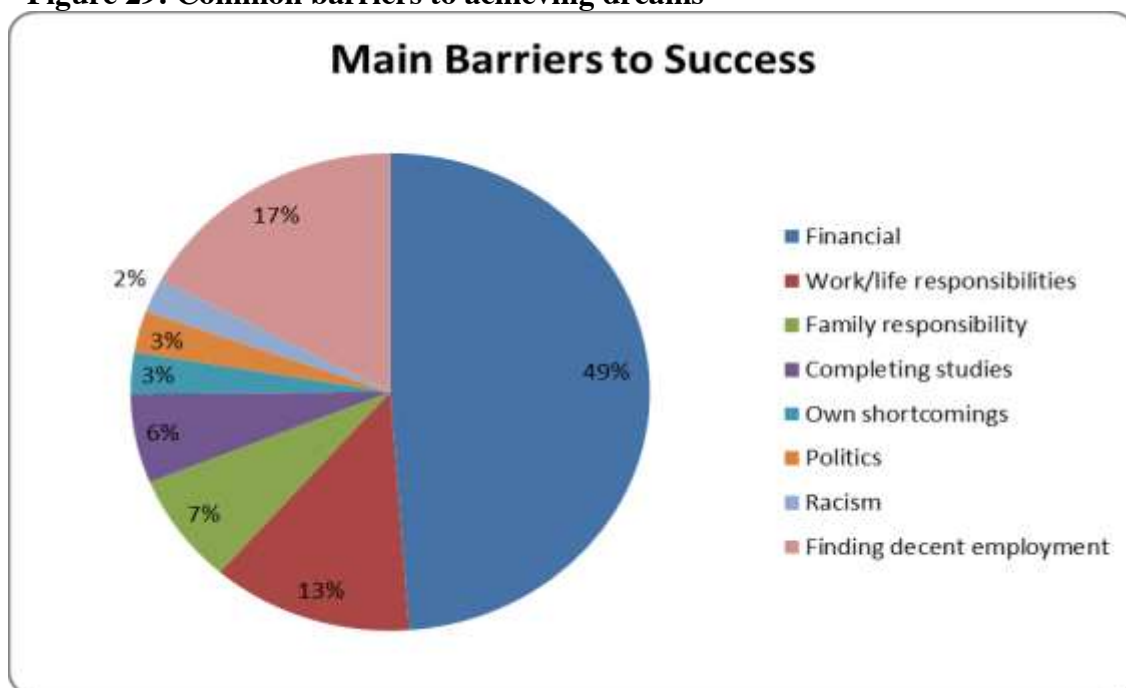
further, most REAP tertiaries felt that it was their duty to support their families, and they were therefore willing to make sacrifices. Despite the fact that most therefore appeared to find these obligations bearable and something of an honour, it is likely that there is a negative impact on them and their careers, as well as their longer-term aspirations.

Future Aspirations and Barriers Faced

Many of the REAP tertiaries hold lofty ambitions for their careers. However, what is striking compared to the ambitions they held while they were at school is that most of these ambitions are fairly realistic and attainable. A number want to study further and complete PhDs (more than 20), Masters degrees, MBAs or industry-related certifications. Others want to rise to senior positions within their field or own their own business. Those still studying or job-seeking have more immediate ambitions to complete their courses or obtain decent employment. Some working currently in government really want to make a difference to the way things currently operate in the public sector. Interestingly, they see themselves learning lessons from the private sector as a way of improving government service. For example, one shared the following: *“I want to work in a private company, gain experience and go back to government when I am 50. There is no growth in terms of learning new things in government and no challenges, so I want to bring that experience from the private sector.”* Another said: *“I want to register with SAICA and ultimately bring change to public service. Public servants are viewed as lazy and incompetent, so I want to change that perception.”* Others also want to make a contribution to society and be a good role model at the same time as succeeding in their own careers.

Most REAP tertiaries were also aware that various barriers stood in the way of their aspirations. Only 23 (8.3%) said that there were no challenges they faced in reaching their dreams. The other 91.7% cited a range of challenges, the most common of which are recorded on Figure 29.

Figure 29: Common barriers to achieving dreams



Half of these tertiaries said that finances – be they for further study, or for starting their own business, to pay off student loans, or just in general – were a major obstacle for them to overcome. A further 20 per cent said that balancing work and life responsibilities and responsibilities towards family members was their key challenge. The fact that nearly 70 per

cent cite these as their major challenge should provide a clearer idea of whether the so-called “black tax” is taking a toll on these tertiaries. It would appear that most of this cohort – despite playing down the impact that their obligations to help family members and pay back student loans is having – do feel worried that these burdens will get in the way of their career success. Those (17%) who still find themselves unemployed or hoping for a better working position feel that their major barrier is lack of access to these opportunities. Others cited their own lack of motivation or self-belief (3%), political barriers in the workplace (3%) and racism (2%) as factors they would have to overcome to realise their dreams.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

This research has confirmed the findings of other authors,¹⁴ who have shown that graduate unemployment is not as much of a problem as popularly believed, or erroneously reported in the media.¹⁵ Indeed, the REAP alumni/tertiaries included in this study show that black rural youth, if given the opportunity and support needed to obtain tertiary qualifications, can go on not only to obtain these qualifications, but also to find appropriate work and build sustainable and successful careers in their fields of study. This is evidenced by the fact that 78 per cent of the study participants were fully employed or interning, while only 14 per cent were unemployed, a figure in line with nationwide black tertiary unemployment rates. Furthermore, over three-quarters obtained their first job within six months of completing their studies, and 71 per cent obtained a first job in their field of study. Fifty-nine per cent of those working are also now on a discernible career path, with 91 per cent of these working in a job directly related to their field of study. Young black tertiaries with skills are in demand in an economy still desperately short of skills.

However, such a positive overall assessment tends to hide a range of nuances in experiences and outcomes amongst rural tertiaries, as well as some concerning retrogressive structural factors. The findings of this study show clearly that there are still many barriers which need to be overcome by black rural youth in obtaining appropriate qualifications and finding a job opportunity which can be built into a successful career. Just how successfully a young person negotiates these barriers depends on a range of factors, including gender, social networks, chosen field of study, the institutions at which they study, the presence or absence of role-models, and individual determination and resilience. The image below, which circulated on social media in 2016 and prompted a number of similar images, illustrates that tertiaries with skills do not all find it easy to enter the workplace.

¹⁴ Hendrik van Broekhuizen and Servaas van der Berg (2013). “How high is graduate unemployment in South Africa? A much-needed update.” Econ 3x3 research paper (www.econ3x3.org); Antony Altbeker and Evelien Storme (2013). *Graduate unemployment in South Africa: a much exaggerated problem*. Johannesburg: Centre for Development and Enterprise.

¹⁵ See, for example, Marianne Merten (18 April 2016). “The great reversal: Stats SA claims black youth are less skilled than their parents.” *Daily Maverick*, found at: <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-04-18-the-great-reversal-stats-sa-claims-black-youth-are-less-skilled-than-their-parents/#.VxYZrXqc3fy> (Accessed 19 April 2016). And see Nick Spaull. (13 May 2016). “Black graduate numbers are up.” *M&G Online*. Found at <http://mg.co.za/article/2016-05-17-black-graduate-numbers-are-up> (Accessed 7 August 2016), for a rebuttal of these notions.

Figure 30: An image shared on social media of a young BTech (chemical engineering) graduate resorting to advertising her skills on the street



It is true that rural school-goers such as many of the individuals in this study lacked both the role models and the career guidance at school to choose the best study options and career choices early on. As has been pointed out by other scholars, there is often an inflated idea about what is possible – a “mismatch between aspiration and [reality]” – which has become evident in the new South Africa, in which anything was supposed to be possible.¹⁶ As seen in this study, very few REAP students had family members who were white collar professionals, and yet most dreamed of becoming medical doctors, accountants, lawyers, engineers and scientists when they were at school. Hardly any aspired to be an artisan or work in the so-called “trades”, or indeed become an entrepreneur. Entry to a tertiary institution gave many of the individuals in this sample a reality check in terms of what they could qualify to study. In the case of medicine and law in particular, very few actually qualified to study in these fields, but there was more success in the fields of commerce, management, science and technology. Although a large proportion (over half) felt that they had ended up studying courses of their own choice, 24 per cent felt that they took courses chosen more by their circumstances than their own desire.

In the case of this study’s sample, the overwhelming majority of these students were ultimately successful in obtaining their qualifications. Others on the REAP programme (roughly 40 per

¹⁶ Katherine Morse (2016). “(In) Accessibility of Tertiary Education for Young People from Disadvantaged Backgrounds: A Terrible Case of Missing the Mark”. PowerPoint Presentation.

cent of them depending on the year) struggle to complete their studies.¹⁷ Among the REAP alumni, however, the desire to learn and build on undergraduate studies is high, with 59 per cent of the REAP alumni studying further, often while they worked. This has added to their skills and enhanced their chances of successful careers.

This research has identified that while most REAP alumni (57%) felt they had adequate job-search skills, and access to the necessary tools and resources, over a third still felt that they had lacked the skills and tools to look for work in the final months of their studies and thereafter. Most found the internet to be the key source of job-related information, and those without good access to the internet struggled the most. Surprisingly, very few of these individuals found useful information about potential jobs and careers through their institutions. Equally, these tertiaries were not using NGOs such as Harambe and others to assist them. More could be done to link struggling final-year students to the career development offices at tertiary institutions, to career expos and to NGOs working in this field.

Although a large majority (78%) of study participants had received some training in CV compilation and interview technique, there are clearly some deficits faced by many as they attempt to market themselves in order to gain employment. Over a third felt they lacked adequate interview skills, while HR professionals identified CV compilation and interview comportment as a challenge for some. Despite these deficits, it is interesting to note that most of these tertiaries obtained a job fairly soon after graduating, often in their field of study. Many study participants also said they learnt how to perform better in interviews through trial and error over the course of a number of interviews. Training is important – particularly mock interviews – but there is no substitute for personal experience.

This study has also identified, however, that tertiaries with different qualifications had varying success in finding appropriate employment. Graduates had slightly better chances than diplomates, and certain qualifications appear to be particularly difficult to use for the purposes of becoming employed. National Diplomas in office management, public administration, retail and logistics management, finance, and human resources proved particularly problematic, along with bachelors of arts and, to a lesser degree, science. Many tertiaries turned to school teaching to bide their time while they wait for opportunities within their field.

This brings us to a key finding and structural problem within the labour market: the particular struggle of female tertiaries to find appropriate jobs and build successful careers, when compared to their male counterparts. Seventy-two per cent of the 39 unemployed persons are female (only slightly more than a quarter had small children); of those on a discernible career path, only 38.6 per cent are women; of those whose careers were scored as “good”, only 29.4 per cent are women; of those whose careers were scored as “great”, only 14.3 per cent are

¹⁷ Hartnack (2011) found that of the 2002 cohort, 64 per cent completed their qualifications. A more recent internal analysis has shown that later cohorts might not have attained as high a throughput rate. As the former study found, however, even those who have dropped out or suspended their studies can go on to study again at a later point or find a job they would not likely have without a year or two at a tertiary institution and the knowledge and connections this afforded them.

women. Women are less likely than men to work in their field of study; of those who are seemingly employed in fairly stagnant careers, 75.8% are women; and of those employed in menial or dead-end jobs, 57 per cent are women. Furthermore, women earn on average over R2000 less per month than men and only 29 per cent of the tertiaries who have been promoted to date are women.

Given that female REAP students have tended to outperform men in their studies; it is interesting to consider why male rural tertiaries have so soundly outstripped women in the workplace. It seems unlikely that some of the deficits carried into the workplace by rural tertiaries (inadequate hard and soft-skills) are significantly more evident in female tertiaries than male tertiaries, although it is possible that, for complex reasons, rural women may struggle to put themselves forward to the same extent as men. It is more likely that the most significant factor in this marginalisation is structural, with the workplace – both in the private and public sectors – favouring advancement by men. This, despite employment equity policies and measures meant to reduce the dominance of the workplace by men.

Indeed, research by other scholars has shown that the barriers are often less about the individual candidates trying to get employed, and more about the fact that many employers are reluctant to take on the inconvenience of hiring young inexperienced tertiaries, especially if they are from groups considered to be more difficult to train and manage.¹⁸ Dieltiens (2015: 9) describes this as “business’s frosty attitude to young people with little experience, untested in the workplace”. This is a global phenomenon,¹⁹ but is clearly something affecting rural female tertiaries in South Africa particularly badly. In the government sector, as Dieltiens (2015: 14) also found, study participants identified political barriers that they faced in accessing employment and especially doing well in the workplace. Senior government employees we interviewed stated plainly that without being politically active and openly supportive of the governing party (or certain leaders/factions), it was really hard to progress in the sector. It is possible that young men have been more able and willing than women to play the political game, and thus been able to forge successful government careers to a much greater extent. Indeed, it is clear that many more men than women tend to get involved in student politics on tertiary campuses, which is where the political capital and links are first made.

There are certainly interventions to be made by tertiary institutions or organisations such as REAP, and those more focussed on work readiness, in improving the work readiness of tertiaries; providing additional training in key hard and soft skills, such as those identified by the study participants themselves (industry knowledge, presentation, writing, communication, conflict resolution, interpersonal skills, time management). There is also a need for more

¹⁸ See Veerle Dieltiens (2015). “A foot in the door: NGOs as intermediaries in the South African youth labour market.” *REDI3x3* working paper. Found at <http://www.redi3x3.org/sites/default/files/Dieltens%202015%20REDI3x3%20Working%20paper%2011%20-%2020NGO%20intermediaries%20and%20youth%20employment.pdf> (Accessed 15 August 2016).

¹⁹ See Ronald Alsop (19 November 2015). “This is the real reason new graduates can’t get hired.” BBC News. From: <http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20151118-this-is-the-real-reason-new-graduates-cant-get-hired> (Accessed 19 November 2015).

comprehensive training for tertiaries in how to market themselves to employers in ways that overcomes the noted reluctance to hire young employees who take a lot of work to induct into the workplace.

REAP tertiaries themselves identified areas in which tertiary institutions and organisations such as REAP could provide better support. The most common suggestion was that the mentoring of students must be improved, to include better career guidance and assistance with issues outside of the academic project. Many also felt more should be done to link students to the workplace through attachments, holiday work and internships. Also requested was more training in CV writing and interview techniques, and improved contact by REAP with former students. There was also a feeling that REAP could strengthen networks among REAP alumni who are working already, and do more to link current students to alumni working in the fields in which they are studying. Indeed, 38 former REAP students who are doing well in their careers expressed willingness to mentor REAP students who wish to follow them into similar careers. Some said that REAP should provide more training on entrepreneurialism, given that the job market is perceived to be becoming more difficult. It must also be noted that some other participants said that students must learn to take initiative and not wait for others to help them.

Aside from interventions which better address deficits in the tertiaries themselves, there is also a strong case to be made for working with employers to improve their capacity and willingness to hire and develop young tertiaries. This is because, as Dieltiens (2015) argues, there are structural and workplace culture-related barriers which must also be addressed if all young rural tertiaries are to gain equal access to employment and career opportunities. REAP and other work readiness programmes and NGOs could play a larger role in getting employers to address some of their practices which serve to exclude and marginalise rural tertiaries, and women in particular.

With these issues in mind, the following recommendations are given:

- REAP is to be commended for initiating a project which seeks to help its alumni to access and do well in the workplace. Given the findings of this research, this project should pay particular attention to the challenges, deficits and barriers faced by female students and tertiaries as they seek to commence work and build their careers.
- REAP, through this project, should build on the mentoring work it has traditionally done in fostering better training in CV writing, skills marketing and interview skills. Such training could not only be done in the workshop space currently favoured, but also through a range of online training tools and mobile phone applications which could be shared with REAP students. Such tools, once developed, would be more easily accessible to students and alumni and not create too large a training/mentoring burden on REAP staff.
- Soft skills, in particular, could also have more of a focus on REAP's training agenda. Again, creative online and mobile phone applications could be developed and used for both current students and alumni, rather than simply targetting students while they are studying through workshops.
- In REAP's negotiations with tertiary institutions on the needs of rural students, it should be highlighted how few rural tertiaries are making use of career expos and career offices, where they occur/exist. Tertiary institutions need to make such programmes more relevant and accessible to students as they can be an important way to access information and job opportunities.
- If REAP's programme is to assist those in the workplace, it must not only focus particularly on helping women, but must also focus on the first year of employment in

particular. Success in the first year of work is a crucial indicator of long-term career prospects (Dieltiens 2015: 10), so REAP might put most of its resources into this year and getting its tertiaires established.

- Unlike many middle-class white students from private or former Model C schools, black rural students lack access to an “old boy’s network” which can provide the crucial link and social capital to access and succeed in the workplace. Black rural students also need access to similar networks, as has been increasingly argued.²⁰ With many REAP alumni now progressing well and gaining influential senior positions in both the private and public sectors, REAP has a ready-made “old-students network” it could link current students to. This would help not only to connect them to potential openings, but also to crucial insider knowledge and advice in whichever sector they are looking to go into. As indicated above, several alumni are willing to actively mentor REAP students. REAP should thus purposefully build its alumni into this kind of network.
- It is clear that interning and volunteering provides a crucial “foot in the door” for many tertiaires. This option must be encouraged, especially among those who may have unrealistic ideas about what kind of first job their degree (or diploma) might land them. There were many examples in this research of young people proceeding on good career paths having taken some time to do an internship, or even two internships, despite being poorly remunerated for a year or more.
- REAP might also consider linking their former students with organisations such as Harambe, so as to give them a better chance of finding work opportunities when they first enter the post-study world.

²⁰ See Jonathan Jansen (29 January 2016). “The Big Read: Poor job seekers need their own old boys network”. *The Times Live*. From: <http://www.timeslive.co.za/thetimes/2016/01/29/The-Big-Read-Poor-job-seekers-need-their-own-old-boys-network> (Accessed 31 Jan 2016).

5. Appendix A

Alumni survey Tool

REAP – Alumni Research Questionnaire (2016)

Date of interview.....Interviewer.....

General:

1. Name.....
2. Sex (tick) M: F:.....
3. Age.....
4. Current working location (city).....

Family and Education:

5. Tell us a bit about your family background (where from, how many siblings, what kind of lifestyle etc)?
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6. What work did your parents or other relatives do (e.g : cousins and uncles/aunts) and what impact did this have on what you wanted to do?
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.....
7. When at school, what did you aspire to be as an adult and what influenced your choice of tertiary study?
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.....
8. Did your study choice allow you to reach your goals?
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.....
9. Did you go on to do further studies (if so, in what subject)?
.....
.....
10. Did your study programme ever involve any workplace experience or industrial attachment?
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.....

Employment History & Experience

11. After completion of your studies, how did you go about looking for employment opportunities (where did you find information about jobs or internships) and what difficulties did you face in finding this information?
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12. Did you ever have any training in CV writing or interview technique (From whom? Was it helpful) and did you feel you were able to sell yourself to potential employers effectively?
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13. What social networks did you have in places where you first sought a job or had interviews (i.e. did you have relatives/friends to help with accommodation, transport or linking you to the company)?
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14. Did you ever face problems that prevented you from attending an interview or job you had been offered (explain)?
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15. Were there any skills you lacked in order to perform well in interviews or psychometric tests? (Wearing appropriate dress; being well prepared to answer questions, arriving on time etc)?
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16. What was your experience of interviews and how could you have felt better prepared?

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17. How long after completion of studies did it take you before you obtained your first formal job (full or part-time)?

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18. Where have you been employed, and in what capacities (note periods of unemployment)?

Employer/ location	Position	Full-time / part-time?	Permanent or temp?	Date started And ended	Reason for Leaving (if applicable)

19. Did you volunteer or intern with any organisation during or after your studies, and was this a valuable experience? (explain)

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20. Did you work in jobs that were not related to your field of study just to get by, or even start your own small business ever while waiting for a job (elaborate)?

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21. Have you been promoted ever in your working career (explain)?

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22. What is your current monthly income (before tax)? (from your job and/or business activities)

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23. Do you feel you earn a wage that is in line with the industry pay levels for similar positions?

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24. Have you ever felt that other colleagues of similar qualifications and experience were being favoured in terms of salary, promotion opportunities, training etc? (eg: men or other racial groups favoured - explain)

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25. Have you ever experienced expectations from bosses or colleagues that you should look, speak or dress a certain way or participate in any extra-work activities (sports, social, charity, political etc) that might affect your chances of career advancement if you failed to participate?

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26. What skills were you lacking most when you started working (e.g. time management; conflict resolution, workplace comportment, communication skills, writing skills, communications, technological ability, industry knowledge)?

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27. Have you since been able to improve these skills (provide examples)?

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28. Have you ever experienced racial or sexual harassment or abuse in the workplace by colleagues or bosses (explain)?
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-
-
-
29. What frustrations, if any, do you face in your current job in terms of work expectations, workplace culture, the nature of work etc?
-
-
-
-
30. How do you overcome such difficulties and who helps you?
-
-
-
-

Family Life

31. Do you own your own residential property or a car?
-
-
32. Are you married or in a long-term relationship?
-
33. Do you have any children yet and if so, how many?
-
34. Has having children affected your career in any way, either during the pregnancy or afterwards in terms of balancing family and work responsibilities?
-
-
-
-
35. Who have you been able to support financially (close family, relatives back home, friends etc) and have family expectations ever placed any burden on you that has affected your career?
-
-
-

REAP Support

36. How helpful was REAP in preparing you for job interviews and the workplace (workshops & training, student advisors/peer buddies and community service)?

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37. Did you learn anything through REAP that you still apply today in life or at work?

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38. What could REAP or tertiary institutions do better to prepare students for the workplace?

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39. What are your career ambitions for the future?

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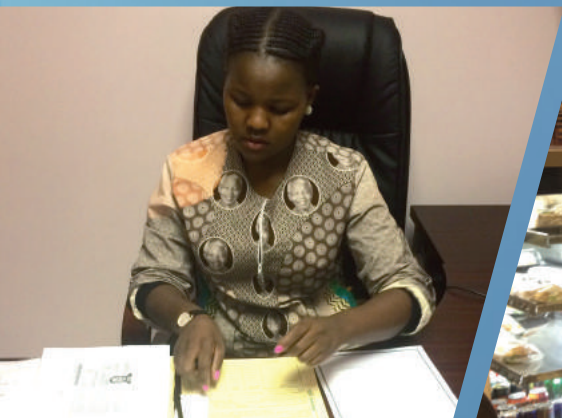
40. What are the biggest barriers (work, family, financial etc) you still have to overcome to realise these ambitions?

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH!



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