

Hospitality graduates career pathways: An analysis of LinkedIn profiles

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This article shares the results of research that explored the demographics and career pathways of hospitality graduates from Auckland University of Technology (AUT). The study [1] investigated graduates' employment during and after their studies; promotions; job mobility; tenure of employment; and other aspects of their career pathways. A small selection of the key findings are presented here.

The study analysed graduate profiles on LinkedIn, which is the world's largest professional, online social network. LinkedIn is an employment-oriented network service that provides a website and mobile app allowing both employers and job seekers to make profiles and build connections with each other. In 2019, there were more than two million New Zealand LinkedIn users. In this study, the researcher selected a sample of 130 profiles of New Zealand LinkedIn users who had completed a Bachelor of International Hospitality Management degree at AUT in 2008–2018.

A selection of the key findings

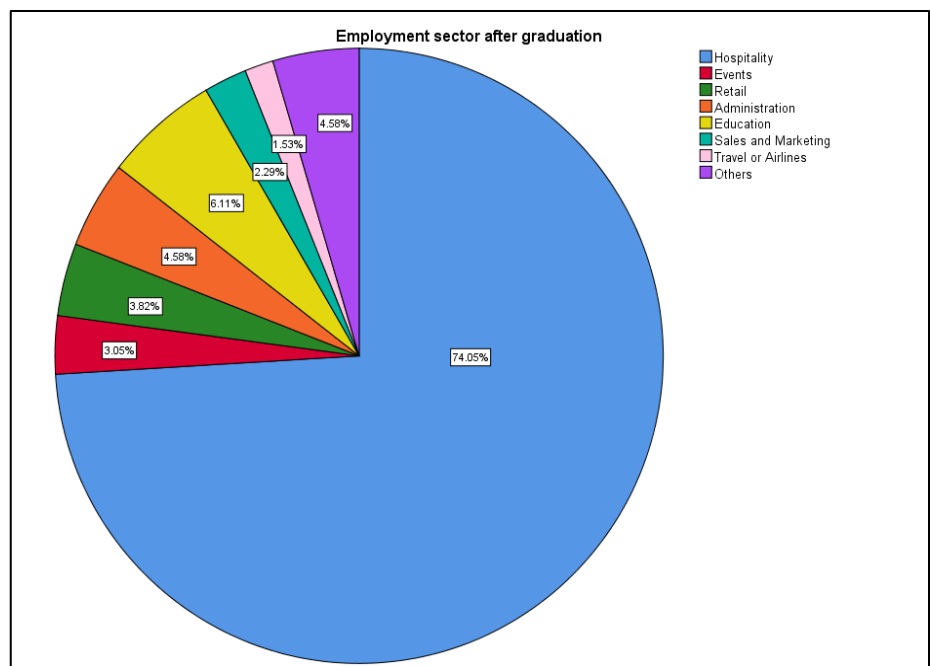
Of the study participants, 72% were women and 28% were men. This gender distribution broadly matches the results of previous studies worldwide [2, 3], showing that, internationally, most people studying hospitality management in universities are female. 62% of the LinkedIn participants were domestic enrolments and 38% were from overseas.

A key finding was that 80% of New Zealand's hospitality graduates were employed throughout their studies, and that 66% were employed in the hospitality sector while still studying. This finding informs the ongoing discussion between education providers and employers about how 'work ready' graduates are and the effectiveness of tertiary education in providing relevant skills [4, 5]. The finding shows that a clear majority of graduates had been working in the industry for several years before they graduated and therefore had experiences of 'real world' hospitality work in addition to theory.

After graduating, 74% of hospitality graduates decided to work in the hospitality sector (Figure 1), which is 8% more than the 66% of graduates who worked in the hospitality sector during their studies. This 8% worked outside of the hospitality industry as undergraduates but took hospitality work after graduating. Internationally, 74% of graduates finding work in hospitality is a high percentage compared to findings from other countries, e.g. Oman [6], where in 2017 this figure was only 41%; in contrast, research in Poland [7]

found a figure of 59%, which is nearer to the result in New Zealand.

Figure 1: Sector in which New Zealand hospitality students were employed immediately after their graduation (2008–2018)



A quarter (26%) of New Zealand hospitality students decided not to work in the hospitality sector after graduation and opted instead for work in other industries; three quarters of these graduates were male (76%). Of the 74% of graduates who entered the hospitality workforce, the results show that about two-thirds were female and one-third were male. While this is a pleasing result for tertiary educators, showing a good result for industry-specific employment outcomes for hospitality graduates, the gender imbalance raises some intriguing questions that would benefit from further research.

Further results show details of graduates' length of stay at their first workplace. While a quarter (24%) of the participants chose not to enter the hospitality industry after graduating, 34% of graduates left their first place of employment within one year and 22% decided to leave their employer within two years. With a total of 56% percent of graduates leaving their employer within two years, this finding raises serious questions regarding the effect of early employment conditions on hospitality graduates.

A possible contributing factor to this high turnover is the result that shows only 20% of graduates employed in the hospitality sector had any career advancement within their first place of employment. The data show that only 7% of graduates had job advancement in their first year, and 8% had a job advancement in their second year. Three percent had job advancement in their third and fourth years, combining to a rather lean 23% of graduates who were promoted within the first four years of their hospitality careers.

The data from this study provides a useful and original insight into New Zealand hospitality graduate work choices and raises some interesting questions about the quality of career pathways in the sector.

Further findings and discussion can be found in the original dissertation here: <https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/handle/10292/14117>

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