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Working Paper
Ina Muenzinger (2010) How Can SMES Become More Competitive On The Graduate Labour Market?
Working paper number 53.

White Rose Research Online
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THE UNIVERSITY of York

University of York
The York Management School
Working Paper No. 53
ISSN Number: 1743-4041
March 2010

How Can SMES Become More Competitive On The Graduate Labour Market?

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This paper is circulated for discussion purposes only and its contents should be considered preliminary

Abstract

Extensive research in strategic Human Resource Management demonstrates that an organisation's success is bound by its workforce knowledge, skills and abilities (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). Recruiting a highly talented workforce has therefore become recognised as a strategic business challenge (Gurtheridge et al, 2005) and this also applies to the recruitment of top graduates (Phillips, 2008). However, SMEs have as of yet remained greatly underrepresented within the graduate market and this dissertation aims to address the issue by exploring how SMEs can become more competitive within this field.

Building on previous research on talent recruitment (Maurer and Liu, 2007) the dissertation suggests that recruiting SMEs need to act like marketers, closely attending to graduate work aspirations and employer expectations, fulfilling graduate needs, wants and desires - as long as the exchange also remains beneficial for the organisation. To avoid direct competition with recruiting TNCs in campus campaigns, SMEs are recommended to make use of more direct communication channels such as email and they are advised to attend to information content and specificity very carefully. To differentiate from the competition, SMEs are further advised to engage in employer branding. The recommendations are developed on the basis of primary data as obtained from interviews with prospective graduates.

Acknowledgement

First of all I would like to express my gratitude to Jocelyn Hayes, my supervisor for this dissertation, who always offered me very helpful support and encouragement throughout the dissertation project. It was a great pleasure being able to work with her.

I would also like to thank Eric Kaarsemaker for his valuable feedback on the literature review of current research in strategic Human Resource Management.

Furthermore, I would like to thank all my friends for their moral support with special thanks to Christopher Etheridge and Nathan Arnold for their tremendous efforts in helping me recruit interview participants.

Finally, I would like to thank all participants of the interviews for their readiness to spare an hour of their time and for participating in the conversations with as much enthusiasm as they did.

York, 2009
Ina Muenzinger

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Over the last two decades it has become increasingly more evident that organisational performance is bound by its workforce knowledge, skills and abilities (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). Attracting talented employees therefore represents a strategic business challenge and can be considered a preliminary for organisational success (Guthridge et al, 2008). Growing managerial awareness of this aspect has lead to a "war for talent" (Phillips, 2008) and one major aspect in the competition is that of top graduate recruitment.
The business objective of graduate recruitment is to train a talented, young workforce according to the company´s needs and to prepare the graduates for taking on more strategic roles within the business once the required knowledge and experience has been gained (Beddingfield, 2005). With the economic recession, a third of top employers have reduced their graduate recruitment spending for the 2008-2009 intake, while a fifth of organisations have further increased their spending, and starting salaries amongst the UK's leading graduate employers are predicted to rise by 5.9% during 2009. So while many leading graduate recruiters have reduced their intake numbers, competition for the best graduates has further intensified and a quarter of top graduate programmes now offer a generous starting salary of more than £30,000 (High Flyers Research Ltd, 2009).

Research on graduate recruitment is continuously expanding but very limited attention has yet been paid to the recruitment activities in small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs). This is surprising given that SMEs make up over 99% of all active businesses in the UK; they account for 55% of employment and 51% of turn over (Inskip, 2004). According to the European Commission, SMEs can be defined as "enterprises which employ fewer than 250 people and which have an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million" (2003). In the UK, 97% of all employing companies operate with a workforce of less than 50 people (Bryant,

2008) leading to suggest that SMEs are indeed an important part of the British economy (Jameson and Holden, 2000).
SMEs may not make the same headlines as transnational corporations (TNCs) but they are exposed to the same pressures and often more intensely so, with less room for error (Bryant, 2008). In the competition for top graduates SMEs have fewer resources but with the economic recession their position may have greatly improved: For 2009, the leading graduate employers reduced their recruitment targets by 17% (High Flyers Research Ltd, 2009) and this implies that more finalists are now forced to look for a job elsewhere. This provides SMEs with an excellent opportunity to gain the attention of top graduates more easily and enterprises with sufficient resources to employ new staff may well want to use the current situation to their advantage.

However, despite making considerable recruitment efforts, many companies still strugge to recruit the people they really need (Gutheridge et al, 2008) and job advertisements often lack vital information for the type of people that are aimed to be addressed (Mathews and Redman, 2001). In graduate recruitment this is often due to the fact that recruiters have rather inaccurate perception of graduate work interests (Wiles and Spiro, 2004), highlighting the need for further research within this area.

To help SMEs become more competitive on the graduate market this dissertation aims to further investigate graduate work interests and findings will be analysed to evaluate on more successful graduate recruitment strategies that can be adopted by SMEs. The investigation is based on previous research and primary data obtained from interviews with prospective graduates.
The following chapter provides a more detailed review of academic literature on strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), developments in graduate recruitment, graduate identity, the relevance of marketing in SHRM, and that of employer branding. Chapter three outlines the methodology adopted, defining the key research objectives and explaining the data collection techniques with its procedures and limitations. Chapter four presents the main findings and implications are discussed within the context of the research

objectives. Chapter five then concludes with several summarising remarks.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This chapter aims to review recent academic literature in relation to graduate recruitment to provide a strong research base for the subsequent study. The first section of this chapter evaluates current ideas of SHRM; how it can enhance business performance, how it relates to SMEs and how SMEs can benefit from graduate recruitment. The literature review then focuses on graduate recruitment, current patterns and trends, business challenges and how SMEs pursue different recruitment strategies from those of larger organisations. The following section reviews current knowledge of graduate identity, their work interests and aspirations, and how different social factors mediate job and employer preferences. The chapter then explores the benefits of marketing in relation to graduate recruitment, discussing the concept of internal marketing and individual practices. The next part of the chapter evaluates the concept of employer branding, what it means and how it can support talent recruitment. The end of the chapter finally highlights the need to gain more detailed insights into the graduate psyche to develop recruitment strategies which attract graduates more effectively. This then leads to the formulation of the research objectives for this dissertation.

2.1 Strategic Human Resource Management

According to the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm, human capital can be regarded a vital strategic asset and represents a valuable source of sustainable competitive advantage (Becker and Huselid, 2006). Sustainable competitive advantage through human capital can be achieved with a workforce that has superior knowledge, skills and abilities which are of strategic value, non-substitutable and difficult for other organisations to imitate (Kinnie et al, 2006:10). Sustainable competitive advantage can further be increased by means of superior human capital management. This usually implies that

individual HRM policies and practices must be integrated in a complex HRM architecture that is entirely organisation specific to support all ongoing processes within the firm. A supportive HRM architecture should therefore demonstrate strategic fit, internal fit, organisational fit, person fit and environmental fit (Wall and Wood, 2005; Kaarsemaker and Poutsma, 2006; Lepak and Snell, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al, 2005; and Becker and Huselid, 2006).

Especially the concept of strategic fit has received much attention over recent years. The concept highlights the fact that activities in the recruitment, motivation and retention of staff must fall in line with organisational needs to facilitate strategy execution (Becker and Huselid, 2006). A firm's strategy is based on differentiation (Kaplan and Norton, 2000) and differentiation can be achieved on the basis of four major criteria: quality and service, price, innovation, and customer relationship. Depending on the strategy adopted, strategy execution requires a workforce with certain strategy-related knowledge, skills and abilities (Miles and Snow, 1984). The HR function is therefore advised "to build and maintain a workforce that is able and willing to deliver the outputs the strategy requires" (Huselid et al, 2005:49).

With growing competitive pressures at the local, national, and global level, organisational benefits of SHRM will continue to become more pronounced (Brewster et al, 2005) but it should be noted that some sectors will be more affected than others. In lower skilled, labour intensive industries where firms compete on the basis of low cost, HRM is most likely to remain basic with low wages, part-time labour and limited career development opportunities (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000). This dissertation therefore concentrates on SHRM within industries that are more knowledge-driven and service-based, competing on the basis of innovation, quality and customer service.

While the industry type greatly influences the value of SHRM for organisations, company size does not necessarily matter. Most academic research concentrates on SHRM within larger organisations (Inskip, 2004) but SHRM

can be similarly applied by SMEs (Karami et al, 2008). SMEs may be more restricted in their activities due to less financial and human resources (Gray, 2004) but where SMEs do apply SHRM policies and practices, the benefits are similar to those achieved by larger organisations (Karami et al, 2008). Research on SHRM can therefore be considered as applicable for SMEs as it is for larger organisations.

In the attempt to further improve current notions of SHRM, attention is now shifting towards the significance of strategic workforce segmentation. Some positions within an organisation are of greater strategic value than others and Huselid et al (2005:49) suggest classifying the workforce into A-players, B-players, C-players, etc. This allows for the development of a more cost-effective HR architecture which helps to concentrate on the employees with greatest strategic value. Once the A-positions have been identified, HRM is to concentrate on the needs of employees in those positions in order to attract, motivate and retain the most suitable A-players in A-positions. However, it should be noted that A-players can only work at their full potential with a motivated support staff of B- and C-players and HRM must also attend to their needs even if the needs of A-players are prioritised (Huselid et al, 2005:49).
With growing awareness of the importance of A-players, the competition for the best people has transformed into “war for talent” (Phillips, 2008) and is predicted to further intensify as more senior staff of the baby boomer generation is going into retirement and as talented employees are becoming inclined to switch company more often (Gutheridge et al, 2008; Michaels et al, 2001: 4-6). Senior managers are high in demand but talent strategies also focus on capable graduates. Graduates do not have the same levels of knowledge and experience – yet they have shown to offer organisations substantial benefits: graduates make dedicated and committed employees, they want to achieve and are eager to learn. This makes it easy for organisations to train them according to the company needs (Steward and Kowles, 2000), growing future A-players who have a solid understanding of the firm and who can strongly associate with firm’s business philosophy. Furthermore, outputs of recent graduates can be high while starting salaries are low (Beddingfield, 2005). All

these considerations can make graduate recruitment a very appealing business investment.

2.2. Graduate Recruitment

In response to the current economic recession, many firms recently cut their graduate intakes but interest in the best graduates has yet remained high (Osborne, 2008). However, the safeguarding of graduate positions can be rather challenging with reduced personnel budgets (Heaton et al, 2008) and graduate recruiters are also facing new challenges in terms of recruitment and selection. With fewer graduate jobs available, application rates for individual vacancies have immensely increased and the processing of applications has become more costly in time and financial resources. It has also become more challenging for recruiters to identify truly committed candidates, as increased competition for jobs has lead graduates to apply for anything even if it does not related to their interests and career ambitions (Reed Business Information UK, 2009). As a result graduate employers are now using more sophisticated methods of recruitment and selection than ever before. This is irrespective of company size but the strategic criteria applied greatly vary (Branine, 2008).
Larger organisations adopt a rather long-term approach. They recruit graduates on the basis of personality and transferable skills, rather than qualifications. They aim to ensure that the graduates fit with the business philosophy and relevant training is then provided (Branine, 2008). To attract the most valuable candidates, larger organisations offer highly appealing graduate schemes and other benefits – in the hope that the graduates will stay loyal to the firm to make valuable contributions once sufficient training has been provided. However, graduates on graduate schemes generally only start to make significant contributions from their third year of employment and 86% of graduates leave their first employer before that time. This makes the investment into graduate schemes rather risky but when organisations manage to keep their recruits the benefits can be substantial: The graduates are well networked within the organisation, they know the business operations in different departments and understand how these are linked. They know the people involved and are more

likely to gain internal support for important projects. This allows them to be more efficient and effective in strategic problem solving (Beddingfield, 2005) and transforms them into A-players with great organisational value.
SMEs, by contrast, often lack the resources to provide full training. Recruitment is therefore more based on present knowledge and skills rather than personality (Heaton, 2008). SMEs invest less in further training, expect immediate contributions, and only aim to retain graduates for a period of two years as they see themselves as less capable to fulfil graduate long-term expectations of career progression (Steward and Knowles, 2000). Recent findings, however, suggest that SMEs are in fact more likely to fulfil graduate long-term expectations as talented managers of large corporations often decide to switch over to a smaller employer. Smaller employers tend to provide a better work-life balance, are less bureaucratic and leave A-players greater scope for applying their talent (Ahmadi, 1997; IEE, 2006). SMEs can therefore offer graduates more than they may think and they should become more confident in approaching graduate recruitment with more long-term aspirations.

The retention of graduates can yet be predicted to remain a challenge for organisations of all sizes alike. Many graduates enter the job market with the expectations of “phased employment” (Beddingfield, 2005), involving periods of “binge working” for one or two years followed by periods of travelling or alternative activities. Others follow a systematic career plan so that they already looking for the next career step before their introduction stage with their current employer is completed (Beddingfield, 2005). Main drivers for this approach are to gain more diverse work experience and to find a job with a more attractive employer (Browning, 2005).

Another major problem in graduate employment is the fact that employers tend to hold rather inaccurate perceptions of graduate work interests and subsequently fail to attend to important work issues (Wiles and Spiro, 2004). However, even when graduate work interests are understood it can be rather challenging to account for these interests graduate demands are extremely high (Pollard et al, 2007; Kimmel, 2008). Organisations may struggle to meet those

demands but can be blamed for creating their own problems: In the competition to attract the best graduates, employers present themselves in the most favourable light possible, further fuelling graduate expectations, and while this may enhance recruitment success it also increases the risks of graduate disappointment and their premature leave long before the investment pays off (Heaton et al, 2008).

To enhance the long-term success of graduate recruitment, employers are advised to gain a more in-depth understanding of graduate work interests, they need to better co-ordinate recruitment strategies with retention efforts and they need to act fast to beat the growing competition (Branine, 2008). SMEs are not necessarily at a disadvantage as smaller employers are in fact favoured by many finalists (Kimmel, 2008) but awareness of job opportunities within the SME sector tends to be low (Ahmadi, 1997). SMEs recruiting graduates therefore need to become more distinctive on the graduate labour market and they need to find more innovate ways of attracting and retaining top talents (Fisher, 2007).

2.3 Graduate Identity

Work aspirations and job choice are greatly influenced by people's sense of identity. The concepts of the self and identity have been defined as "cognitive constructs that influence social interaction and perception, and are themselves influenced by society" (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005:114). Following this idea, graduate identity can be defined as a self-concept as held by university finalists and this self-concept influences the ways in which finalists relate to employment and employers. Graduate identity can be seen as a strong determinant of employment preferences and it is rather striking how little academic research has attended to this important aspect. As of yet graduate identity has only been discussed by Holmes and colleagues (1998, 1999), and Jameson and Holden (2000) but their research largely concentrates on the importance of investigating graduate identity, with actual findings remaining limited.

Within other contexts, however, graduate work interests have been more widely

researched and findings generally conclude that graduates are particularly looking for work satisfaction and that they expect work to add meaning to life (CIPD survey, 2006). They seek employment that relates to their personal values and interests (Beddingfield, 2007; Chapman et al, 2005) so that employment further acts as an expression and (re)construction of identity (Elsbach, 2009). A person's occupation is often used as a point of reference to evaluate the self as well as others, and the sense of the self is not only determined by how we see ourselves but also by how we believe to be seen by others (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005: 117-124).

Employment can be an important component in the self identity construct and empirical evidence can further support this view. Amongst car designers, for example, it was found that occupation serves an important function in identity affirmation (Elsbach, 2009). Other employees have been found to identify more strongly with the employer organisation rather than the specific job role, and this may go on to the extent that employees fully identify the characteristics they assign to the firm (Pratt, 2000). Equally, employees can experience considerable value conflicts in relation to their job and employer (Mulcahy, 1995) and may need to confront with negative social stigma attached to their jobs (Ashford et al, 2007).

The general conception is that people "are what they do" (Ashford et al, 2007) and job seekers aim to find a job that relates to their sense of personal identity and that also reflects this to the outside world in a positive light (Honeycutt and Rosen, 1997). The underlying mechanisms of this phenomenon can be explained by three principles of social theory: self categorisation theory, self attribution theory and the concept of the looking glass self.

According to self categorisation theory, people gain a sense of self identity by categorising themselves as members of a certain group and by identifying with the distinct characteristics assigned to that group (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005: 124). Self attribution theory suggests that we make attributions about ourselves based on the observation of our own behaviour (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005:122)

and it has become evident that people's search for suitable employment is greatly driven by their reflection on past work experiences, personal feelings, impressions and reactions. The concept of the looking glass, in turn, proposes that our self-concept also derives from seeing ourselves as others see us (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005: 117). The evaluation of a job vacancy is therefore not only influenced by aspects of self attribution but also by the job seekers evaluation of how the employment would be perceived by socially significant others (Lievens et al, 2007).

Social identity theory was originally developed to explain intergroup relations, but has more recently also heavily influenced research on organizational identity and workforce commitment (Lievens et al, 2007; Lee, 2009). A better understanding of work identity can help to encourage a desirable organisational culture (Pratt, 2000) and this in turn can help organisations to attract and maintain a more homogenous workforce with similar interests than can then be more easily satisfied.

Ideally, graduates should be proud of the organisation they work for and they should identify with their role as this greatly enhances motivation, satisfaction and commitment (Pratt, 2000). Graduate recruiters are therefore advised to better attend to graduate identity and work interests, and they need to enhance the "employment experience" to attract and retain the best and most suitable candidates.

2.4 Benefits of Marketing in Graduate Recruitment

Schweitzer and Lyons (2008) propose that recruiters "need to think like marketers, creating job offerings and employment relationships that provide mutual value for firms and their employees". The authors suggest that HRM of talented staff should best follow the concept of the 4 Ps of Marketing: product, price, place and promotion. Job adverts should be tailored towards a specified target audience, promoting the job as a highly attractive opportunity, at an

acceptable “price”, and this message should be communicated in an appropriate way, using the most suitable communication channels.

The marketing approach to talent recruitment originates in work by Berry et al (1976) who introduced the concept of “Internal Marketing” referring to a firm’s efforts to understand and respond to the needs of employees to increase their job satisfaction and the firms overall productivity (Gounaris, 2008). From this point of view, job vacancies and HRM policies can be regarded as the internal product of a firm and employees can be seen as a firm’s internal customers (George, 1990). Treating employees like customers can enhance workforce motivation and retention, and this in turn is to result in higher customer satisfaction and loyalty (Ahmed and Rafiq, 2003), good word of mouth and better prospects in attracting a better workforce. The approach has long remained a theoretical proposition but has most recently also been supported by first empirical evidence (Gounaris, 2008; Lings and Greenley, 2009).

However, managers should not underestimate the complexity of such systems. It can be rather challenging to co-ordinate all major business processes with the internal marketing strategy. Furthermore, it can be difficult to secure adequate levels of common interest amongst customers, shareholders and employees (Boxall and Purcell, 2000). It is hard to design HR architecture that equally accommodates for everyone’s needs and as of yet there is little theory to provide practical guidelines for the implementation internal marketing strategies (Gounaris, 2008).

Marketing principles are more easily applied to SHRM when applied to individual components of the overall HR architecture. With regards to recruitment marketing principles can be particularly useful when applied to job advertisements. Job advertisements aim to promote a vacancy offered and the attractiveness of the vacancy can be enhanced though the use of powerful persuasive heuristics as often used by marketers in other fields of advertising (Griskevikus et al, 2009).

The persuasive heuristics are based on the two principles of “social proof” and “scarcity”. “Social proof” is based on the conception that a certain product or (job) opportunity should be desirable if it is generally popular. Underlying causes for this inference are three human reward mechanisms: the motivated to form accurate perceptions of reality, to develop and preserve meaningful social relationships, and to maintain a favourable sense of personal identity (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004). In graduate recruitment it may, therefore, be desirable to refer to previous graduates who benefit(ed) from working with the firm. The principle of “scarcity” emphasizes the distinctiveness and rarity of a certain job opportunity. Graduates will be comparing available alternatives (Dhar and Sherman, 1996) and graduate recruiters may, therefore, want stress the limited number of places available and exceptional benefits.

Furthermore, job attractiveness can be greatly influenced by the nature and degree of information specificity provided about the company, the job, and the work context. The information shapes the job seekers’ attitudes towards the job and the company, perceived levels of person-fit and interest in the job (Chapman et al, 2005; Feldman et al, 2007). Providing positive information about the work context (Saks & Wiesner, 1994) and the firm's social reputation appears to enhance job attractiveness (Cable & Graham, 2000). Also the nature of benefits offered can strongly mediate graduate interests in a job vacancy and different individuals show different preferences (Jennings et al, 2003).

Successful recruitment therefore requires an in-depth understanding of the interests of the intended target audience. This allows for more effective job marketing in terms of the nature of the vacancy offered as well as the promotion of it. More targeted recruitment methods can be more cost-effective and more successful as it can help narrow the pool of applicants, concentrating only on the most suitable and most capable individuals (Feldman et al, 2007). To further improve efforts in graduate recruitment it is therefore essential for SMEs to gain a deeper understanding of graduate needs, wants and desires at the workplace.

2.5 The significance of Employer Branding

Employer branding builds on the concept of internal marketing and refers to the "management of an organisation's reputation, both within the firm and external to it, to create and maintain a positive image which presents the firm in a favourable light as a distinct and desirable employer" (Lievens et al, 2007). In this notion, employer branding can be viewed as a valuable component of strategic HRM and graduate recruitment.

Employer branding can enhance the organisational image, help to differentiate from the recruiting competition and empirical evidence suggests that this can improve applicant quality and quantity (Lievens et al, 2007). Underlying reasons for these findings lie with two key factors. Firstly, job seekers often use the organisational image as a vital source of information to evaluate the degree of person-job fit so that it helps job seekers to be more selective in their applications. Secondly, organisational image influences the perceived level of employer attractiveness and can strongly affect the job seekers pride to work for a particular organisation (Cabel and Turban, 2003), relating back to social theory and the concept of the looking glass self.

Once employed, employer branding can further support the motivation and retention of staff by creating a common sense of identity within the firm and a sense of personal belonging. The employer brand communicates a certain work philosophy, underlying norms, obligations and expectations, and encourages employees to adopt a certain working attitude which unites all those that conform. Such a shared culture enhances the individual's sense of belonging, increases work satisfaction, reduces turnover and improves bottom line performance (Lee, 2009; Aspara, 2008).

For a brand to be successful, Moroko and Uncles (2008) note that the image does not only need to be distinctive but must also remain consistent and accurate over time to generate trust and loyalty amongst the workforce. Notably, these observations further emphasise the importance of internal fit

between individual HRM policies and practices as already discussed in the literature review on SHRM and internal marketing. However, the concept of employer branding goes beyond discussing organisational needs as it does in fact provide a useful framework for the implementation of a better co-ordinated HR architecture. The employer brand communicates the business philosophy to staff at all levels, helps setting priorities in strategy design and execution, and establishes values and norms which provide guidelines for the behaviour of individuals (Backhaus and Tikko, 2004).

Under the current economic pressures employers may struggle to maintain a strong organisational image but they must try to remain visible on the graduate market to preserve a positive image amongst students and graduates for the time after the crisis. It is a critical time for cost-effective marketing and brand presence must be preserved even if graduate intakes are currently reduced (Reed Business Information UK, 2009).

SMEs do not evidently have the same marketing budgets as commercial giants and they may struggle to create a strong employer brand which supports the organisation in the competition for the best graduates. However, with careful consideration, insightful planning and sensitive implementation, employer branding can yet lead to successful outcomes even with a limited marketing budget. The critical criterion is that managers and company owners recognise and adopt employer branding as a long-term process that requires consistent, continuous communication (Lassen et al, 2008; Moroko and Uncles 2008). Once established, organisational reputation has been found to remain fairly stable over time (Highhouse et al, 2009) and this further highlights the importance of investing essential components of a desirable employer brand when aiming to recruit a talented graduates.

Overall, the body of reviewed literature indicates that SMEs should integrate their graduate recruitment activities into a more strategic HRM architecture and they should adopt a more long-term approach to graduate employment as they, too, can have the capability to retain top graduates to turn them into valuable

future A-players for the firm. However, the competition for top talents is fierce and in order to become more competitive in the area of graduate recruitment, SMEs are advised to apply different forms of marketing strategies in their recruitment activities in order to market graduate vacancies more successfully towards highly skilled candidates.

Designing successful marketing strategies requires an in-depth knowledge of the target labour market relevant to the job vacancy offered and needs, wants and desires must be well understood and addressed (Maurer and Lui, 2007). To help SMEs become more competitive on the graduate labour market, this dissertation will now further investigate the graduate psyche, exploring their attitudes and perceptions of work and employment, what they are looking for and what they are hoping to gain from it. The findings will then be used to develop marketing strategies for SMEs on how to attract top graduates more successfully.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1. Objectives and Research Questions

The dissertation seeks to obtain valuable information for recruitment within SMEs on how to encourage top graduates to evaluate job vacancies with SMEs more positively and how to encourage them to apply - despite the fact that SMEs may not be able to offer an expensive graduate scheme. To gain a better understanding of graduate work interests the study aims to gain further insights into the graduate psyche, their needs, wants and desires, how they relate to work and employment, and what important factors recruiting SMEs should attend to.

The key research questions are defined as the following:

- What is a graduates' approach to future employment?
- What are their work aspirations?
- What are their employer expectations?
- How important is organisational reputation to them when looking for a job?
- What are graduates' attitudes towards working with an SME?

The insights gained are analysed within the context of existing literature and new marketing opportunities are identified to help SMEs become more competitive on the graduate labour market.

3.2. Approach: Qualitative

The research approach of this dissertation is of qualitative nature as this allows generating a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons for graduate

applicant behaviour (Kent, 2007:89). Qualitative research may be criticised for being subjective and for lacking transparency (Bryman and Bell, 2003:295) as it does not provide any statistical power (Saunders et al, 2007:472). However, to date there has been very limited research on top graduate recruitment within SMEs and qualitative research is commonly used to generate hypotheses about behaviour that is little understood (Kent, 2007:89).

In comparison to quantitative research, qualitative research allows to “access people’s minds” (Chatzidakis et al, 2007) and “to uncover the unconscious” as people may not always be aware about the reasons behind their behaviour or they may not be able to express these without assistance (Kent, 2007:91). In addition, qualitative research is more fluid and flexible, and questions are more open-ended which gives better opportunities for individual expressions. It also enables the moderator to be more reactive; research questions can be rephrased where it may be appropriate and this further allows exploring unexpected fields of importance that may only arise during the data collection (Chrzanowska, 2002:24). Qualitative research is generally considered to be more creative and therefore excellent for the identification of gaps in the graduate market or to generate suitable advertising themes in the promotion of graduate vacancies and employer branding (Kent, 2007:90).

3.3. Data Collection: Depth Interviews

Primary data are obtained from depth interviews with prospective graduates, with a standard duration of approximately 45 minutes. Interviewing is a well established research method to investigate attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour of certain social groups, and it can help gain valuable insight into the underlying causes of the phenomena observed (Fielding and Thomas, 2001:123; Kent, 2007:89-101).

To enable comparisons between the groups, the interviews will be semi-structured, following a framework with a set of predetermined questions while yet leaving sufficient room for expressions of individual views and feelings

(Saunders et al, 2007:178). The framework will be tested in a pilot study and further amended where necessary prior to the actual data collection (Appendix I, p.I). Unstructured interviews would be useful to explore the respondents' interpretations and accounts in greater detail, but graduate recruitment has been under investigation for some time so that research at this stage can be more specific with a set of predefined questions (Green and Browne, 2005:54). Throughout the group discussions participants are never challenged to rationalise their statements and the surnames of participants are withheld on mutual agreement.

3.4. The Sample: Prospective Graduates

The dissertation concentrates on prospective graduates from the University of York. The University of York as been consistently ranked amongst the top 10 universities within the United Kingdom, with a single exception by this year (The Times, 2009). Entry requirements are high and the student population of the University of York was therefore identified as a representative sample of top graduates.

Participant recruitment was based on convenience sampling. Disproportionate quotas were to be set subject area of studies (Kent, 2007:94) but due to the very limited time for data collection before the end of the academic year, sampling had to be based primarily on convenience.

In total, 14 interviews were held, including one pilot study. Participants were 9 males and 5 females, from various degree areas, with a mean age of 20.71, ranging from 20 to 23.

3.5. Data Capture Instruments

The interviews were tape recorded, upon obtaining consent from the participants. Responses are then later transcribed with additional notes on observations of non-verbal communication (Saunders et al, 2007:475) to

contribute to a cohesive analysis and good quality results.

3.6. Analysis Technique

Like quantitative data also qualitative data consist of systematic records (Kent, 2007:87). After transcription individual responses are categorized, grouped and systematically analysed according to the topics as largely predefined by the research objectives. Such a predetermined framework helps to focus on the relevant data within the large set of data as it identifies the main variables, themes and issues. However, throughout the data analysis recordings can be flexibly re-categorized where new themes, patterns or relationships emerge (Saunders et al, 2007:479-488).

Every qualitative study requires a unique analytical pattern and it is important to adopt an appropriate analytical strategy (Bryman and Bell, 2003:425). In this study the data are analysed by combining the inductive and deductive approach in a technique known as template analysis. A template is a list of categories that represent the themes of the collected data with their hierarchical relationship between the themes. As part of the analysis the initial template is continuously revised until all data have been coded and analysed (Saunders et al, 2007: 496-497) (Appendix II, p.II).

3.7. Limitations

Interviews data can be criticised for lacking factual information and responses can be influenced by a large variety of factors which are often difficult to estimate or control for (Chrzanowska, 2002:25). Interviews are self reports and one could argue that they merely serve the construction of a self-image (Kent, 2007:91). In addition, responses may have been influenced by social desirability biases which are likely to be controlled by social norms rather than personal values (Gillespie, 2008:83). Further biases may have occurred as participation was entirely voluntary and individuals with greater future orientation towards after graduation may have been more willing to participate.

Data collection had to be undertaken in a very limited amount of time over the last two weeks in June, recruitment was rather pressing and did not allow for disproportionate quotas on area of studies. To recruit participants, an email had been sent out to all University Departments, but response rates were limited and recruitment had to be largely based on personal contacts. This resulted in a majority of respondents coming from a human sciences background and the findings would be more representative, had there also been more students interviewed from a natural sciences background as perceptions and approaches may differ. With more time available, more reliable findings may be obtained from a bigger and more varied student sample.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of Findings

The findings are structured and analysed according to the five key research questions. The first part of the chapter evaluates the graduate approach to future employment, focussing on the drivers for the choice of degree, the significance of work experience and voluntary activities when making career considerations and the level of importance assigned to the opinions of socially significant others. The second part provides an analysis of graduate future work aspirations, what they are hoping to gain from employment and what work really means to them. Part three investigates student expectations of their future employer, focussing on desired work characteristics, people management and expectations of financial reward. Part four provides insight into the significance assigned to organisational reputation when seeking work, including the organisations' image as an employer as well as their position within the industry. Part five evaluates graduate attitudes about working within the SME sector, looking at the image of SMEs as an employer, presumed working conditions and perceived career prospects. All five parts first present significant findings with subsequent analysis of these in order to develop useful marketing strategies for SMEs on how to recruit top graduates more successfully.

When quoting interviewees individuals are referred to by their first name and age. For further details on degree subject, year of study, and sex, please see Appendix III, p.III. For a sample of the interviews, please see Appendix IV, p.IV.

4.1. Graduate Approach to Future Employment

The interviews opened with questions concerning the respondents' degree of studies and the main reasons for deciding on the particular degree. These involved mainly their interests and preferences, as established during the sixth

form. Students decided to study “the thing I felt the most interesting at school” (Dave, 22) and when asked how they were planning to apply the gained knowledge in future employment, general responses were “I don’t know” (Nathan, 20). Few students chose to study for a degree because it “would be useful” (Parisa, 21) and even fewer individuals chose a subject related to an explicit career direction.

Only a small minority took up summer internships or placements to explore potential career options. Respondents often preferred following their natural inclinations and discovered career preferences more as a by-product of their involvement in university clubs and societies. Peter M. (20), for example, explained that “since I have come here to this university I got involved with a lot of things, particularly with things like welfare and that, doing stuff for people. And now I have been thinking about counselling as a long term thing or maybe social work”.

Many respondents did not appear in a rush to make up their mind about future employment and were general open to suggestions. However, career considerations were yet seen to be a very personal matter and when asked how friends react to their future plans, respondents often answered rather surprised that “actually, we don’t really talk much about careers at all” (Mike, 21). Career considerations tended to be discussed with parents more “but I don’t discuss it much with them because I don’t want to be heavily influenced by an outside influence to direct my career…in the end I will be doing the work so I need to be happy with it” (Ali, 22). Sources influencing career plans were predominantly the media, personal observations and experiences.

The implications for SMEs are that graduates often only have little work experience and very limited awareness about work opportunities and personal preferences. Graduates tend to be open to ideas, take chances as they come and often do not actively seek anything specific. This makes them very receptive to recruitment campaigns and it should not be surprising that the majority of graduates tend to apply to TNCs on first instance as such

companies show a strong prominence on campus. The top recruiting TNCs usually compete for the best graduates in form of extensive campus campaigns, including posters and flyers directing to e-recruitment websites, career fairs and campus recruitment presentations (Highflyers Research 2009). Campus recruiters take on roles as marketing representatives in these activities and act as a key influence in the graduates' application choices. Campus interviews with recruiters have a direct influence on graduate application interest and job acceptance (Maurer et al, 1992) and in a survey amongst accounting students it was further found that 64% of finalists were familiar with their pre-selected as a result of campus campaigns. Kimmell et al (2007) therefore advise organisations to seek distinct campus presence prior to the actual recruitment and selection stage as this will help them to become included in the graduates' list of desirable firms to work for.

SMEs, however, do not have the resources for extended campus recruitment campaigns and they also do not need to cover the same amount of graduate vacancies (Bryant, 2008). A more cost-effective way for SMEs to approach finalists would therefore be a launch direct marketing campaign in form of mailings via the university departments. This strategy allows SMEs to get into direct contact with the finalists without having to compete for their attention with expensive promotional campaigns. Furthermore, the mailing campaign can be narrowed down to a small number of departments which are the most likely to give access to the type of finalists the SME needs. This helps organisations to concentrate on those graduates which are of greatest strategic value to the firm and enhances the likelihood of finding suitable candidates with the potential to become A-players. To concentrate on top graduates, SMEs can further specifically focus on recruitment at top universities. Top universities represent an environment graduates strongly identify with and by concentrating on top universities the organisations indicate to the graduates that they are members of a group which the organisation highly values (Avery and McKay, 2006).
A direct marketing campaign of this form can be most effective and efficient for SMEs in their efforts to recruit top graduates and concerns about information overload though e-marketing can be kept at a minimum within this context

(Maurer and Liu, 2007). University departments tend to be very selective in the emails they forward to students so that the students would not be inclined to view emails from recruiting SMEs as spam and universities have a personal interest in helping SMEs promote graduate vacancies as the universities are keen to keep good records on student employment rates after graduation. However, it should be stressed that also email content and presentation must be paid great attention to detail as this can further enhance the success rate in attracting the most talented and most suitable candidates (Mathews and Redman, 2001; Feldman et al, 2007). To attend to these aspects in the best way possible, SMEs therefore also need to gain a better understanding of graduate work interests and how to respond to these (Wiles and Spiro, 2004).

4.2. Work Aspirations

It is important for graduates to enter employment in an area where they can apply their strengths, they want to "do something that is actually worthwhile" (Peter M., 20), "something that is intellectually stimulating… having a degree of independence and freedom to make decisions" (Tom, 22). Rachel (23) would further "like to be in a sort of professional environment where everyone's sort of university educated… having only done part time jobs you can sort of feel that you are not really being yourself or whatever". It was also important "that I sort of believed in whatever I am involved in" (Vicky, 20). A person's nature and type of employment was seen to be an important reflection of personality and abilities, and the students expressed strong desire to find a job which corresponds to their personal values, beliefs and interests.

Despite the majority of interviewees only having fairly vague career plans it was striking that almost everyone expressed a pronounced reluctance to take up an office job. The typical office job was described as "just sitting there at their desk… typing emails… 9 till 6 every day. I want to work somewhere with less structure, more dynamic" (Rebecca, 20). Joseph (21) further observed that "I have an image in mind of people typing but I have absolutely no idea what they

are typing and why". This suggests that the negative perceptions of "an office job" largely result from a lack of knowledge rather than negative experience. It also needs to be highlighted at this point that most respondents came from subject areas such as History and Philosophy, and were only vaguely familiar with the business environment. The dissertation originally anticipated to focus on students with a background in business but students from arts departments showed to be much more cooperative in the survey and this may in fact be a valuable finding for businesses in itself.

Many respondents came from a family background where both parents have "always worked hard and that's just an ethic I have been brought up with" (Chris, 20). Work was seen as a central aspect of adulthood and it was considered to cover "about 40 years of your life, so it's going to dominate it. So you might just as well choose something you really want to do" (Rebecca, 20).

As found in previous research (Beddinfield, 2005; Fisher, 2007), top graduates were shown to be full of ambitions to learn and to achieve, and while every individual has their own personal motives and preferences (Gutheridge et al, 2008) many common interests could be observed. Graduates commonly want to apply their knowledge and skills, they want freedom and responsibility, and they want to have a job that is meaningful. When emailing graduates about graduate vacancies, SMEs should therefore address these issues in the job description wherever possible, and they should also clearly state how the role of the vacancy is important for the organisation and why. This approach allows them to tailor their job offers more specifically to market demands to improve their position in the competition for the best graduates (Maurer and Liu, 2007).

However, it is not only information content but also information specificity that can mediate an individuals' opinion about a job advert (Feldman et al, 2007), especially in regards to benefits (Jennings et al, 2003). So while attending to common graduate work interests, SMEs can further specifically target individuals who have motives and interests which closely match those of the firm. Indeed, the nature and type of benefits offered can communicate a

significant amount about the company values and what type of graduate the vacancy is best suitable for. For example, the food store retailer Aldi states that "we're looking for outstanding graduates, born leaders possessing the drive and ambition to succeed in a demanding and fast-pacing environment" and when graduates "are up to the challenge" they are rewarded with an extensive benefits package including a starting salary of 40K and a fully expensed Audi A4. Aldi thereby clearly states their business philosophy that "only the best will do" and they are aiming to attract likeminded graduates who are business oriented, competitive and profit driven (Aldi, 2009). By contrast, the research company IpsosMORI promotes graduate benefits such as a structured training programme and a supportive, friendly working environment. Potential applicants are provided with a detailed description of the work areas they could get involved in but salary rates remain non-specified (IpsosMORI, 2009). Contrary to Aldi, IpsosMORI are aiming to attract graduates value embraces competence and teamwork, and who show a genuine interest in the nature of the company's work.

SMEs may not be able to offer graduates a company car or an expensive training scheme but they, too, can offer exceptional benefits to help attract suitable candidates who can relate to the company's working approach. A small organisation which does, for example, embrace the concept of individual freedom and responsibility may emphasize on self managed team work and flexible working hours. The benefits highlighted do not necessarily need to include financial reward but should communicate the business philosophy and this may be a considerable challenge for SMEs (Inskip, 2004). It can be hard for SMEs to identify and express their business philosophy but the efforts will pay off, also in relation to other business operations as a common understanding of values and goals helps co-ordinate various internal policies and practices (Becker and Huselid, 2006).

4.3. Employer Expectations

Students expressed strong desires to build on their skills, to gain valuable work experience. They wanted to work for an employer who “offers opportunities for you to progress” (Rachel, 23) and they wanted to be provided with a “structured personal development plan” (Ali, 22) which allows them to “become a specialist in the area I pick” (Parisa, 21). The specialist area of choice was sometimes, however, rather romanticised, further highlighting that career considerations are not yet as developed. Mike (21), for example, explained that he would like to go into environmental protection because he enjoys “collecting field data and things like that. You could be scuba diving… just wondering around in tropical rainforests and that. The practical side of environmental science is quite fun, it takes you to places”. In this case, the prospects of travelling and adventure were evidently more important than the work itself and the employer was not really recognised as a party with interests in its own respect.

Other individuals showed more realistic employment expectations but it was emphasized that “I don’t want to be bossed around by anyone incompetent… who just happens to be in charge of me” (Joseph, 21). It was important to be “getting on with people, to associate with the other colleagues” (Andrea, 21). It was further considered important to receive recognition for good work and ideally to have a person that acts as a personal mentor one can turn to if in doubt. It was also highlighted that the employer should acknowledge that “humans are no machines” (Nathan, 20).

When asked about the importance of financial reward, respondents often explained that “having lots of money… is not massively important to me… but I’d say stability. Not maybe security because you need a lot of money for security. But stability – enough to keep going, sensibly, you know - not just to live on crap all the time and enough to buy books and things“ (Peter M., 20). Expectations of an acceptable graduate salary varied between 18-26 K. However, while pay was not perceived to be of vital importance instantly after graduation, many students indicated that its importance would significantly

increase over time.

Consistent with findings of Kimmell et al (2008) development opportunities were perceived to be one of the most important factors in the first stage of employment. SMEs will not be able to offer an expensive graduate scheme with great exposure to the international environment (Bryant, 2008) but they, too, can provide graduates with high quality training (Heaton et al, 2008). Given the fact that many top managers of TNCs switch over to SMEs (IEE, 2005/6), smaller organisations may in fact even be better in giving graduates the opportunity to gain the type of experience which will prepare them for later life.

As also discussed by Schweizer and Lyons (2008) talent recruitment should be based on a marketing approach, treating potential employees potential customers and responding to their needs, wants and desires. To attract top graduates, SMEs must provide for the demands for development opportunities and they are advised to highlight the opportunities they offer in their job advertisement – but only if those promises can and will be realised (Heaton et al, 2008). It will come at a cost for the organisation if the job advertisement creates a mismatch of expectations as these will inevitably lead to graduate disappointment, increasing the risk of a premature leave long before the graduate has become a loyal A-player for the firm (Beddingfield, 2005). In the current economic climate and the high competition for graduate jobs, employers have no need to present themselves better than they are – in fact honesty and transparency can even be promoted as an additional company bonus seeing that the graduates are currently entering a labour market full of doubt and uncertainly (Phillips, 2008).

However, overall graduate expectations are still rather high (TMP survey, 2009) and many graduates remain to concentrate primarily on employment opportunities which match their personal values and interests. As discussed, job and employer attributes serve as a major point of reference for graduates when evaluating the degree of person fit with a job vacancy offered (Chapman et al, 2005) and it is therefore essential for SMEs to be aware of the interests of

the type of graduate they are aiming to attract. To motivate and retain talented graduates the findings further highlight the need to be able to offer a progressive salary raise as the importance of financial reward greatly increases over time.

Knowledge of this kind helps SMEs to fulfil the minimum requirements for attracting top graduates but it does not help them to differentiate themselves from other recruiting competition. The degree of perceived job attractiveness also depends on the symbolic attributes that are assigned to the job and the company so that SMEs must also carefully attend to their reputation (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003).

4.4. Significance of Organisational Reputation

When asked about the importance assigned to organisational reputation respondents usually stated that “it would be quite important” (Parisa, 21) as it was considered “a good indicator as to where you are best serving” (Chris, 20) and students were “quite concerned what sort of people I’d work with” (Nathan, 20). Organisational reputation was also seen to have an impact on “what people think of you” (Parisa, 21).

It was consistently stressed that it would be very important to work for “an ethical employer” (Tom, 21) although Mike (21) added with slight self-mockery that he expressed this preference “even though I have just come out of a job in retail”. Apart from being able to associate the self with ethical behaviour, further advantages of working for an ethical employer were considered to be that “they care about their employees more” (Vicky, 20) and that they would provide a more friendly working environment.

While organisational reputation as an employer was consistently rated as very important, expressed views on the importance of organisational reputation as market leader were more diverse. However, almost every respondent had come

to the University of York on the basis of the University's reputation so that organisational success and prestige may in fact be more influential than the findings may suggest. Individuals who did state that they attended to an employer's position on the market did so for several reasons. Peter C. (21), for example, is determined to become a Journalist and he would ideally like to work for a national newspaper because "If you are calling from a big newspaper like the times people are more prepared to talk to you than when you are calling from the Yorkshire Post". Typical reasoning also included that "I wouldn't want to pull all my efforts into getting a job and then being made redundant after six months" (Peter M., 21). More successful companies were also perceived to add more value to the CV and the CV was understood to "determine what companies will employ you" (Nathan, 20).

As observed amongst other labour markets (Chapman et al, 2005) the findings of this survey point out that an organisation's reputation greatly influences the value assigned to the organisation as an employer and as a place to work. Amongst graduates organisational reputation was considered to be a reliable indicator of the working environment, people management and development prospects. Employer reputation was further seen to have a strong impact on their sense of identity as the students appeared to be very sensitive to this general conception that "people are what they do" (Ashford et al, 2007). Membership to a certain organisation was understood to come with significant consequences as others would draw inferences between the organisation and the self (Hogg and Terry, 2000) so that the employer's reputation was considered to be either socially enhancing or limiting. The same was considered to apply to future career prospects.

A positive organisational reputation was seen to be very desirable and notably, every single respondent strongly emphasised that they would definitely want to work for an employer who shows ethical concern. Following the notion that recruitment of top talents should be carried out in form of job marketing (Maurer et al, 1992) SMEs should therefore highlight superior commitment to business ethics in their job advertisements – if they are able to do so. Ethical

commitment can serve as a valuable factor of differentiation on the graduate market but should not be over estimated. Ethical commitment was often directly related to superior people management so that this aspect in itself may also present a valuable differentiation factor alongside with a strong position within the industry the organisation is operating. In addition, despite the emphasized reluctance to work for an "exploitive business" (Mike, 21) it yet became evident that there are also other factors which influence job choice, such as availability, locality and convenience. Similar observations were made by Chapman et al (2005) in relation to the influence of the perceptions of the application process, recruiter behaviours as well as hiring expectations.

However, identification with the organisation yet remains a strong factor in job choice. In addition, it is not only desirable for graduates to identify with the organisation but also for the organisation itself: The employee's degree of identification with the firm strongly impacts on their attitudes and behaviour at the work place and this in turn directly affects bottom line performance (Haslam, 2004, cited by Eisenbeiss and Otten, 2008). Strong organisational identification has also been found to be associated with stronger employee loyalty, less fluctuation and better tolerance to merges with other organisations (Eisenbeiss and Otten, 2008). Crucial for the development of employee identification with the firm is the period of employment entry. Newcomers seek for information about their new job and the organisation, their first experiences within the new environment will shape their future attitudes and behaviours so that organisations must strongly attend to the impressions they create (Avery and McKay, 2006). When recruiting graduates SMEs should consider providing additional information about the firm, they need to be aware of how graduates associate with SMEs and they need to address these attitudes, counteract negative attitudes, encourage positive attitudes and create a strong organisational image the graduates are keen to identify with.

4.5. Attitudes towards SMEs

Attitudes towards SME were not negative but the way in which positive attitudes were expressed, negative connotations were yet often implied. When asked if they would consider working for an SME, Nathan (20) replied “yeah, I think so… sometimes you just have to work wherever you can” and Joseph (21) said that “I have absolutely no problem working for a smaller organisation”, indicating that people could very well have a problem with it. After careful consideration, Ali (22) noted that “size is not really important. Reputation is, but reputation is not really directly related to size… actually, now I am more attracted to work for… well, I wouldn’t say a small company but a dynamic company… which is like creating things new”. This statement indicates how terminology used in a job advertisement can greatly influence people’s perception of the vacancy offered. The statement further illustrates student attitudes towards SMEs often become more positive once the option is considered.

Advantages of working for a smaller organisation were believed to be that “being part of a smaller team… you see your results more” (Tom, 22). It was also believed that “you would have the chance to experience a greater variety of work, and you would get the chance to work on a project and complete it yourself rather than splitting it up between people” (Parisa, 21). Smaller organisations were considered to be “more down to earth” in their people management (Vicky, 20) and “more likely to be innovative which means more interesting and funky ways of treating its workers” (Joseph, 21). SMEs were believed not to “absorb everybody and transform the individual into a number… and you probably find a better atmosphere in a smaller business in so far as you know everybody” (Chris, 20).

There was a general consensus that working for an SME would allow more varied work, more opportunities to get noticed, a more supportive environment, and more flexibility and individual freedom. However, some respondents also expressed scepticism: “small companies are often small because they just started up and they don’t have a lot of money in fact and often they are in dept… so my freedom over the company’s GOALS, if I am near the top of a company, are improved – the company’s freedom as a whole is probably

diminished by its smallness, because of its lack of capital" (Joseph, 21). Rachel (23) further noted that "you probably have to plan your career a lot more proactively because there wouldn't be such a structured graduate programme as you find in larger organisations".

The findings highlight that graduates often view employment with an SME as a secondary choice and prefer to work for multinational corporations as also found by Moy and Lee (2002). However, this pronounced preference is questionable as larger firms tend to be more bureaucratic so that the people at lower levels of the organisation often only perform very narrow tasks (Ahmadi and Helms, 1997). Smaller businesses, by contrast, often have the opportunity to offer graduates more responsibility within a wider context much earlier on (Raybould and Sheedy, 2005). Looking for work within the SME sector can therefore indeed be a very interesting alternative for graduates and the findings indicate that graduates do in fact very much appreciate the advantages of working with an SME – but only once confronted with the idea.

To receive greater attention on the graduate market, SMEs need to approach the graduates more proactively, and they need to make the graduates realise what opportunities the SME sector can offer them. Given the importance of the organisational image, SMEs should further aim to better manage their organisational reputation, best by drawing on the concept of employer branding (Lievens et al, 2007). Graduates are aiming to gain personal satisfaction from employment and in their attempts to find a suitable job they are looking for vacancies in organisations which they can personally relate to. The employer brand can help establish a strong organisational identity the graduates are seeking (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004), and considering the significance graduates assign to the employer image and company culture (Heaton et al, 2008), the employer brand can become the most crucial differentiation factor for SMEs when competing for the best graduates against well established TNCs.

To attract top graduates the employer brand of an SME needs to communicate professionalism, commitment to graduate recruitment and a distinct business

philosophy which gives an insight into the firm's values and its way of working. As highlighted by Ali (22) the terminology used in advertisements must be chosen very carefully. Graduates are not interested in working for a "small" firm but for one that is "dynamic". They further want to work within a team that is personable and professional, and they want to be treated likewise so that the tone of communication with them should reflect this. Since SMEs are competing with big, the employer brand must be based on a message which is clear, precise and consistent. It may be a challenge for SMEs to develop such a message but with persistent management support it is certainly possible (Inskip, 2004) and once a strong employer brand is established, the efforts will pay off: A strong and desirable employer brand can attract new talent and this in turn can become a sustainable source of competitive advantage to enhance and secure long-term organisational success.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

As highlighted in previous research, talent recruitment is a critical component for organisational success (Gurtherdige et al, 2008). The competition for the best employees has escalated into a "war for talent" and this trend is also notably reflected in the graduate labour market (Phillips, 2008). The organisational value of graduate recruitment has become very evident (Beddingfield, 2005) and despite the current economic recession, the competition for the best graduates remains fierce (High Flyers Research Ltd, 2009). To date, the graduate labour market has been dominated by larger organisations and TNC, and while increasingly more SMEs are also beginning to recruit graduates, their approach remains rather short-term focussed as they consider themselves less able to fulfil graduate long-term expectations in terms of pay and career progression (Steward and Knowles, 2000). However, SMEs can also provide valuable training and development opportunities (Heaton et al, 2008). In fact, experiences gained within the SME sector can even be of much greater value for graduates than the exposure to the business environment with TNCs as many talented managers within larger organisations later prefer to work for an SME (Ahmadi and Helms, 1997; IEE, 2005/6). It can therefore be of considerable advantage for graduates to gain experience within the SME sector from a very early age to become prepared for the future better and sooner. SMEs should have more confidence in their ability to attract top graduates and they should adopt a more strategic and more long-term approach to graduate employment to nurture valuable A-players for the future of the firm (Becker and Huselid, 2006).

This dissertation further supports the argument and highlights that SMEs may have much better chances in attracting top graduates than they anticipate. The interviews clearly demonstrate that current graduates are by no means reluctant to work for SMEs. When confronted with the idea, general reactions were indeed rather positive and the graduates were very well capable to see

numerous advantages of working for an SME. Notably, however, this was only once this employment option was brought to their attention. Overall, the graduates showed limited awareness of work opportunities, were open to ideas and this strongly suggests that SMEs may only need to become more proactive in their recruitment efforts. They need to raise greater awareness amongst graduates and they need to take on more confidence in promoting their graduate vacancies as an excellent opportunity.

To maximise recruitment success this dissertation argues that the related practices should be more strategic and more based on principles of marketing, treating potential employees like potential customers, and adjusting product, price, place and promotion according to labour market demands (Maurer and Liu, 2007). SMEs must attend to graduate work interests more carefully (Wiles and Spiro, 2004) and they need to fulfil graduate needs, wants and desires wherever possible, as long as there also remains a benefit for the firm. The findings of this dissertation point out that graduates are particularly interested in gaining work experience, they want to contribute to something meaningful and they want to be given freedom and responsibility to apply and further build upon their skills and abilities. In addition, graduates expect to receive recognition for good work with financial rewards also becoming more of an issue over time, highlighting that SMEs will need to provide an evident successive pay rise structure when aiming to attract and retain talented individuals.

To differentiate from the recruiting competition, SMEs are further advised to make use of employer branding (Backhause and Tikoo, 2004) as the organisational image was found to greatly impact on the perceived value of offered vacancies. The interviews with graduates revealed that it was seen as highly desirable to work for an ethical organisation and it was also sometimes considered important to work for an organisation with a good reputation within the industry. However, the most important aspect of an organisation's image was the firm's attitude towards people management. When developing an employer brand, SMEs must therefore attend to these issues and set priorities according to their individual significance.

To avoid direct competition with recruiting TNCs, SMEs are recommended to use more direct communication channels to reach their target audience. A very cost-effective strategy in this respect presents a mailing campaign via university departments. University departments tend to be very selective in the emails they forward to students so that the students would not be inclined to view emails from recruiting SMEs as spam and universities have a personal interest in helping SMEs promote graduate vacancies as the universities are keen to keep good records on student employment rates after graduation.

To tailor recruitment efforts to organisational needs, SMEs can further selectively contact university departments of their choice and they can adapt information content and specificity of the email to reflect the organisations business philosophy and company culture. Business philosophy and company culture can be further communicated though the use of terminology and language in which graduates are addressed. The email then provides graduates with various points of reference to evaluate job attractiveness and person fit, and this helps organisations to narrow their pool of applicants down to the most suitable candidates (Feldman et al, 2007; Heaton et al, 2005).

The primary data collected for this dissertation can be considered honest and reliable, as all interviews were held in privacy and the responses given had no further consequences for the participants. Furthermore, SMEs were not mentioned in the recruitment stage so that there should not be any topical participation biases. It may, however, be questionable how representative the data are as the participants mainly came from academic areas within the arts and social sciences. For further investigations it will therefore be beneficial to take more time for participant recruitment to obtain a greater sample and to set quotas on different subject areas. It would be particularly interest to investigate graduate employment within the SME sector beyond the recruitment stage to gain a better understanding of aspects which affect successful recruitment, motivation and retention. It would also be of interest to conduct a comparative survey on the organisational value of graduates from top universities as compared to other universities to investigate whether discrimination is desirable

or not.

Graduate recruitment within the SME sector is in the early stages of development (Ahmadi and Helms, 1997; Steward and Knowles, 2000) but the evidence strongly suggests that graduate recruitment within this sector will grow with increasing awareness about related opportunities and advantages, for both organisations and graduates alike. With the current economic recession and limited graduate vacancies SMEs may have improved chances of attracting some of the most talented finalists and it will be interesting to see how the graduate labour market will continue to evolve under these conditions.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Guideline Questions

Educational Details

1. What is the degree you are doing?
2. Why were you particularly interested in studying for this degree?
3. What made you come to York for your studies?

Career Considerations

4. Have you already started thinking about what you will do after graduation?
5. Have you already gained any related work experience?
   5.a. If so, what did you like/dislike about the work experience?
6. Do you already have any long-term career plans?

Social Influence

7. What do your friends think about your future plans?
8. What does your family think about your plans?

Attitudes towards Work and Employment

9. What do you hope to gain from your chosen area of employment?
10. What do you think motivates you to work?
11. What would you consider interesting and challenging about a job?
12. How important is work to you in your life after graduation?

Employer Expectations

13. How important is pay to you? What starting salary would you expect?
14. How important is organisational reputation to you?
15. How would you describe a good employer?
16. Who would you consider to be the most desirable employer for you? Why?

Attitudes towards SMEs

17. Have you considered working for a small to medium sized company?
18. What advantages would you see in this?
19. What disadvantages would you see in this?

Additional Questions

20. If you could pick any job you wanted, what would you go for and why?
21. If you didn't have to work at all, what would you do?

Demographic Details

22. What year of studies are you in?
23. What age are you?

Appendix II: Template

Categories	Individual Themes
1. Approach to employment	1.1. drivers for choice of degree
	1.2. approach to employment after graduation
	1.3. future career plans
	1.4. impact of work/voluntary experience
	1.5. influence of friends and friends
	1.6. other sources of influence
2. Work aspirations	2.1. work expectations
	2.2. desirable tasks and activities
	2.3. the meaning of work in life in general
	2.4. hopes and fears
3. Employer expectations	3.1. working conditions
	3.2. people management
	3.3. development opportunities
	3.4. financial reward
4. Organisational Image	4.1. commitment to business ethics
	4.2. image as an employer
	4.3. position within industry
	4.4. social implementations
	4.5. career implementations
5. Attitudes towards SMEs	5.1. first reactions
	5.2. general attitudes
	5.3. positive attributions
	5.4. negative attributions
	5.5. beliefs about working conditions/career prospects

Appendix III: Participant Profiles

Name	Degree	Year	Age	Sex	Date	Duration
Andrea	Educational Studies	3rd	21	F	08.06	36 Min
Rebecca	Politics & Social Policy	2nd	20	F	11.06	39 Min
Nathan	History & Philosophy	2nd	20	M	11.06	35 Min
Chris	Politics	2nd	20	M	19.06	48 Min
Peter M.	English & Philosophy	2nd	20	M	22.06	45 Min
Ali	Economics	3rd	21	M	22.06	40 Min
Dave	Philosophy	3rd	20	M	23.06	23 Min
Peter C.	Politics	2nd	20	M	23.06	41 Min
Vicky	Environmental Science	3rd	20	F	20.06	17 Min
Mike	Environmental Science	3rd	21	M	20.06	25 Min
Joseph	Philosophy	3rd	21	M	29.06	43 Min
Parisa	Accounting, Finance & Management	2nd	21	F	29.06	29 Min
Tom	History	4th	22	M	30.06	43 Min
Rachel	Management	4th	23	F	17.07	51 Min

Appendix IV: Sample Interview

Interview with Rebecca on 9th June 2009 (R=Rebecca, I=Interviewer)

I: What degree are you doing?

R: Politics and Social Policy.

I: Why were you particularly interested in this degree?

R: I did politics for my A levels as I was really interested in that and I wanted to be a police officer when I leave uni so I needed to do something social, something about people… so I did social policy.

I: OK, but how does a police officer relate to politics?

R: It doesn't so much relate to politics… that was just because I was interested in how the country is going and stuff. But I also wanted to do something about crime and policing and that and a lot of that is in social policy, like a lot of the modules are about the police and stuff. So I thought if there is a uni that did both aspects I might just as well do a combined degree.

I: Have you got any work experience related to your degree?

R: No, well… I worked at the Buckingham palace but that wasn't related really…

I: well, definitely sounds like an interesting environment and it probably depends on what you were doing maybe?

R: I was just standing in the state room… not really doing much… but I suppose it was to do with the monarchy… governing…

I: all right, so definitely a political environment so I am sure you got a feel for that…

R: yea, haha, I suppose… and then I worked in a children's camp for disadvantaged children in my local area. So that was quite social policy related in that it was all about deprivation and things like that . quite interesting.

I: what did you like about the two jobs

R: ehm, with the Buckingham palace I liked working with other students, like people of my age, really really interesting eh… yea that was very enjoyable…. And it wasn't a 9-5 job which I quite liked. You went in at 8am and then you might be working till 6 or till 3. it all varied on the evens on the day which I really liked. And it was not just sitting in a n office e writing, it was interacting with the public.

I: interesting. And what did you like about working in the summer camp?

R: I liked working with young people, again the other workers were my age which was good. I didn't get paid for that but it was going out sailing and canoeing with the children and stuff. So it wasn't in an office which was good.

I: what did you not like about the two jobs?

R: uuuuuuhhh… ehm… with the Buckingham palace you… never got set days off. So one week id have a Wednesday off and the next week Saturday was off. So seeing friends from home just didn't happen because I had such a strange schedule. It was really long hours and in Buckingham palace they are quite like: you couldn't talk about your job, all was really strict and you had to work uniforms. I didn't like that so much

I: so you weren't allowed to talk about anything you experienced inside?

R: yeah like I saw prince Harry and I got really excited but then I couldn't go out telling everyone… things like that…. And in the camp I would have liked to get paid. Otherwise I really enjoyed that.

I: ok, cool. Ehm so of course if you prefer not to talk much more about Buckingham palace you can just relate to your experiences from the camp for the next questions. Are there any major events that happened which made a really big impression on you which you will always remember?

R: ahm… well. Cant think of any… let me think. There was a media day where like lots of press came in and that was quite stressful. I remember that. Oh yeah, and then there was a massive concert outside the palace – not sure what it was for – and they had like red diaries and stuff. Millions of people outside and that was just a really, really hectic day.

I: that's two very hectic evens you remember then, and what was your role then?

R: basically, we had to let members of public in the palace and we had to make sure they got out safely while no random members from the general public where coming in.. so it was a security thing and lots of responsibility. Big pressure. And then in the children's camp, one child hurt themselves and then I was like the responsible adult and that was really stressful as well… because I didn't know first aid.

I: oh no! what did you do?

R: well… ehm, I ran to a member of staff… shamefully. I was like I cant deal with this here… and then it was taken off me – he is still alive, haha

I: haha, well you weren't trained.

R: yea, so that was their problem really. They should have really trained me – or not hired me.

I: oh, I am sure you did a very good job otherwise. Do you think the work experiences were in any way helpful in finding a career direction?

R: am, yes, I would … I guess what it showed me is that I don't want an office job. So I suppose that is not so much a direction but maybe what type of job I'd go for. I live in London and I always thought that I maybe want to work in the city in an office but working in these two varied places just showed me that this is not for me. I want to work somewhere with less structure, more dynamic, every day is different… and it drew me more to the police. In the Buckingham palace the police men were quite nice, I liked them.

I: all right, but how does London relate?

R: well I live in London and I always though I'd stay in London and have like a big office job, a banker or something. But then I went to work in different roles and then I realised that this is what I wanted to do. Not the typical London job.

I: ah, and what is a typical London job for you?

R: well, I'm kind of just speaking about what my parents do really but well.. its like just sitting there at their desk, typing emails, doing whatever they do, 9 till 6 every day. Every day is the same, they know what they are doing… there is job security but…

I: Ok, and have you already thought about what you want to do after graduation?

R: I have but sort of the airy fairy way. I haven't yet thought about how to apply or where to apply. And I don't have a back up plan. I mean I want to join the police but I don't have any alternatives.

I: So you still want to work with the police? That hasn't changed since you started uni?

R: No.

I: and what is it in particular you want to do what the police?

R: I THINK child protection. Because I am not like… rrrrrrrrrr person, eating people up or whatever… so just something working with children which I got from the kids camp … and just help people really.

I: right, I don't really know much about the police myself – where do they work with children in particular?

R: They don't normally work specifically with children but in the child protection unit there's things like children who are experiencing sexual abuse, domestic violence and that and you are specifically trained to work with them and be able to help. Affiliate with social workers… you know you have internet access to paedophiles, trace them arrest them, that sort of stuff…

I: Ok so you've already got a fairly good idea there… and you certainly want to get involved in that field at some point, do you have any other plans for after graduation? Like travelling or volunteering or anything?

R: part of me would like to take a year out because I don't have a gap year and I would like to see the world. I went to an all girls school, then went straight to university so I haven't … but at the same time there is practical issues like how would I fund travelling around the world? And paying off my student loan? And if I am out of work will I not just like not want to get back… of course I would have to but I could just see myself drifting. So I think if I went to work straight from university that would be easier… and that's probably what I'll do.

I: how much importance do you assign to work and employment in life in general?

R: I'd say very important, like a major part of life. Realistically, that would be about 40 years of your life, so it's going to dominate it. So you might just as well choose something you really want to do. You do it at least 5 days a week if you want a full time

job – so I think its really really important. Especially that you chose the write thing. I mean, this is a bit off topic but my flat mate is like: just shut me into any odd job and I will be happy. But I am like: I think its 40 years of your life, so its going to dominate it. So you might just as well choose something you really want to do.

I: oh I so much agree, haha. But then not everyone thinks that way… you said that you already have rather specific career plans. How do you want to achieve your goal of becoming a police officer?

R: well, I am hoping by just having a look on the internet, that there would be some recruitment thing but that could just be me being really naïve. I might think that its easier than it really is. But I suppose that would be a starting point and then I'd just see how it goes from there really.

I: and what motivates you to try achieving his goal?

R: ehm, the money, haha… I just want to have a stable job really.

I: yea ,sounds good. Now, you already mentioned a conversation with your flatmate earlier on. What do your friends think about your career plans?

R: annoyingly – I was at the badminton drinks after the matches and there was one guy asking me what I was wanting to do. I said that I'd want to work with the police and then he turned around and laughed: are you joking? And that from someone I don't even know that well… I think peoples reaction is that you couldn't be a police officer because I am quite like … ehm… what's the word… dunno what the word is. But I am not the typical person for choosing to work with the police. And also there is a lot of danger and my family is like: is this really what you want to do? So reactions are quite negative actually.

I: and how would you describe a typical police man?

R: amh, very confident, you have to be very think skinned, very confident, not necessarily… well I don't want to be snobby, but like you don't need to have a degree… a lot of people joining the police don't go to uni. I am calling them the police cadets and none of the people I met there went on to university. The staff members went from school straight to the police at the age of 16 and that's just a different… social economic background like… I don't know if that affects your personality as such but.. like…

I: and when you are speaking to your friends about your plans of joining the police do you specifically say what you want to do or do you keep it general?

R: No I just say police… haha, because when you say police people generally know what that is and that's all – ok, fine. You don't have to expand on it.

I: although they might associate you with the people who don't have a degree and that's maybe why you get funny reactions sometimes. People in general will only be thinking about the people in the front row sort of, the police they see on the street and they might not think about everyone working more back stage…

R: oh, yea, I never thought about that actually - yea I think that's why they think its such a negative thing working with the police. They see the people on the street arresting people and you hear all the bad press about stuff that goes wrong… so that's

probably got a lot to do with it…

I: but I presume that your family knows in much more detail what you'd like to do in the police. So do they not like about you taking on that career?

R: Ehm… they just cant see past the stereotypical… everyone in their family has always been in an office job., that is just the way they think… and they just generalise really. They see someone ein a uniform hitting someone and that s what they perceive the police to be like…

I: ok, but then how did you come to think that it would be nice to work with the police? Because you met nice policemen at Buckingham palace?

R: well, it was police cadettes which is like army cadettes but with a bit of police on the side like… I am generally quite a negative person, I don't like school, don't really like uni, but I really liked that! Really really loved it. And that's the main reason why. And then I met all those police men at Buckingham palace and they were all like: oh its fantastic, we love it, they were really nice people and they fuelled me even more that that is the direction I want to go into.

I: all right… but how were you first thinking about joining the police? Because if you grew up in an environment where everyone is working in a n office, how come you got this idea of doing something completely different?

R: I think it was partly being rebellious, haha. And then em, I was just obsessed with the bill, the police programme on TV. I was always watching that and for me there was just no alternative. There was just no alternative and no one was going to persuade me to do anything else…

I: in general, what motivates you to get a job?

R: I think for my background my parents have always worked and they sort of instilled the work ethic in me. And I see my aunt, she has not always had a job and stuff and they are a lot worse off, financially, so when you make the comparison: if you want to get on in life you really need a job, you need a financial… and also, I think I would realy enjoy having a job.

I: And what do you think you would enjoy about working?

R: I think it would be different from anything I have done before. It would be working with different people form different tages, multipeople, everyone's different… it gives you a goal, a point to aim for in your day, which I like… just yea, it feels like you progress.

I: very interesting… and what are your main concerns regarding employment?

R: that I get bored of it and I'm stuck in it for 40 years. Yea, job satisfaction, that I end up in something I don't want to be in and that I don't have the courage to move on to somewhere else. I think that's it… maybe that I don't get on with people. I mean I went to an all girls school and then suddenly all these different people. Maybe I won't get on with them – although I m sure that won't happen actually. Haha.

I: of course not!

R: yea, there's not that much that worries me really.

I: ok, that's good. And what would you consider satisfying about a job?

R: if I have the feeling that I am achieving something. Yea, if I feel that I made a difference today to someone's life. Or if I did something I didn't think I could do. Something like that. Just completing a task really. Yea, I m easily satisfied. But I would like to do something worthwhile, something with a point to it. It would be good to have money as well of course but for me its more the personal: I've done something.

I: What would you consider interesting and challenging about the job?

R: Every day is different, ehm… you didn't know really what you were going in to., something where they expect a lot of you… am yea! Haha, very not a very interesting answer.

I: no, that's really good. You were already mentioning earlier on the hectic day at the palace and how it impacted on you. How did you feel after the day was over?

R: I felt really good actually! It went well, but of course if it had turned out to be a disaster I'd probably say completely different things now… at the time it was stressful bit afterwards you feel like: I've done something or I don't know I could do that so that is really satisfying for me in a job.

I: And you were already saying that financial reward is obviously something you'd also need. Do you have any salary expectations?

R: ehm… oh, I don't really know… id like to earn … over 30 thousand… but I think police officers earn like 25 or 28? I don't really know… no, but I would like to earn… and at this age I wouldn't be expecting anything like that… but by the time I retire it would be nice to earn 30-40 thousand. Dunno how much graduates would get…

I: Well the average graduate job is paid on 22 at the moment as far as I know… And how important is employer reputation to you? The police obviously has a strong image. Do you know any people working there?

R: my best friend is a PCSA, a new position they just put in, someone below the police officers. They can't arrest people and they actually have a really bad reputation because they don't do that much but its crime prevention sort of. And she does that. And I was in the police cadettes with are now police officers so I know a bit about what it is like to work with the police.

I: right and did they tell you what it is like to work for the police?

R: they love it! The ones I know who are in there, but ehn, emhm this sounds really bad but this is like all they know… they went there straight from school so they haven't worked in a lot of organisations and they cant compare it to other things… so I don't know to what extent… this is all they know… well, this is not all they know but it's the only organisation they ever worked for so they are happy with it but if they had worked somewhere else … I don't know how great… coz what they said they love it but when they were telling me stories about their day to day life I was thinking is it really that great? So I wasn't really sure…

I: But you would still want to work with the police?

R: yes!

I: how would you describe a good employer?

R: well, ehm… if you have a problem they'd listen to it. Also that they pick up if you are struggling or not really coping because I am one of those people who don't really say when they have a problem. So I would like someone to be there who'd pick up on it… not for you but be aware of the problem and deal with it. Then also equality and that, no discrimination, just generally nice people really. That's all…

I: right, good and how would you try to distinguish good employers from bad ones?

R: oh… I don't know… see I'd like to think I could ask people bit that's probably not a realistic…

I: maybe not…

R: well, I suppose you could check the different branches on the internet and see if there are stories about them and that..

I: yea, I guess its quite difficult to distinguish between police branches… ok, keeping it more general then, would you prefer working in a big or small organisation?

R: I'd say definitely a small office. Coz at Buckingham palace I was in a really small tam, there were different teams people worked in and some of them were massive with like 30-40 students and in my team there were 10 and I absolutely loved it. We were really like… it was really good, like team bonding and stuff and we knew each other so well. And then in other teams people couldn't even tell you who was in their zone and stuff.. so for me a small organisation. You know people better, you work more efficiently, and it just works much better..

I: so if given the choice you would go for a smaller organisation?

R: yea, but then there is always the reputation thing… its like if you ask I would say id go for the small one but then if you've got a big name everyone knows… hm… probably yes, I don't want to lie, hihi.

I: sure, that's fair enough! And do you think you would be working with the police all your life?

R: I hope so… but I get bored really quickly so I could imagine that I do it for 10 years and then think that this really isn't for me… and then I wouldn't know what to do, hehe…

I: well, you would know that nearer then time when you see what's going on around you.

R: yea exactly. So yea, I'm not sure actually if it would be forever…

I: and how long would you try to stay in the first job?

R: definitely over 5 years! If I really really enjoyed it up to 10 – but that's only if I really really loved what I was doing. As soon as I'm not enjoying it anymore I'd want to be off…

I: And why the 5 year thing?

R: I don't know actually. I think its because with the police you have a probation period of two years so that's two years gone so I'd like to give it a bit more time… I thin k2 years is not enough to settle in… and five sounds like a roundish number…

I: How confident are you in finding a job with the police.

R: I would say quite confident – but then with the economic climate apparently a lot of people are applying for the police because its seen as a stable job. Companies are multilayered and people are often left right in the centre, laying them off making them unemployed. But with the police you are pretty much ensured that you are not loosing your job because there's always crime and my friend was saying that applications have been going up and up and up… so even a lot of people from university are applying for the police now. So there's more competition.

I: but then you've still got a year and many things might have changed by then. Do you think you would go on to doing a masters?

R: I think I don't enjoy my course enough to justify going into education – maybe if I would enjoy it I might… but I just don't enjoy my course enough.

I: what is it a bout the course you don't enjoy?

R: quite a lot for it actually. They just put you on really bad modules and you don't get a choice because I am a joint degree student so… like at the moment I am doing a maths module… and its just really badly organised which quite put me off the whole academic thing. WHICH IS A BIT OF A SHAME BUT:::

I: So you wouldn't recommend the occurs?

R: no. although that is maybe a very personal thing. I don't really know what I was expecting but I am certainly not enjoying it AS MUCH AS I THOGUHT I WOULD Its just not very interesting. Whole lectures on health policy and stuff and – I just don't like it doesn't interest me at all…

I: if you could pick any job you wanted, without thinking about getting a salary or anything, what would you chose?

R: anything… maybe a spy, haha. I love MI5 haha. That's what id love to do, haha!

I: Haha, why that?

R: possibly because the whole MI5 reputation is amazing. And then there is spooks, another TV programme, really glamorises it and makes it the best job in the world. Its just exciting! Awh, would be amazing – going do different countries… yea!

I: and what would you do if you didn't have to work at all?

R: is that an option between working or not working?

I: Yea, or what you'd do alternatively

R: I think I'd always wanted to work, just to have a structure to my day. I get really

stressed out when I don't have a lecture on a day because I'm just like: what do I do with all the empty time I've got? That's probably really tragic. I think if I wasn't working id volunteer… somewhere… anything just to get myself a bit of routine

I: ok, well thank you very much. That's all been really interesting. Just two final questions then – how old are you and what year are you in?

R: oh, ehm, I'm 20 and I'm a second year.

I: Thanks a lot…