

CENTRE OF AFRICAN STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN



# From student to jobholder

A SURVEY OF GRADUATES' EXPERIENCES OF THEIR STUDIES AND TRANSITION TO  
THE LABOUR MARKET FROM AUGUST 2005 TO SEPTEMBER 2009 AT THE CENTRE  
OF AFRICAN STUDIES

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A SURVEY OF GRADUATES' EXPERIENCES OF THEIR STUDIES AND TRANSITION TO THE LABOUR MARKET FROM AUGUST 2005 TO SEPTEMBER 2009 AT THE CENTRE OF AFRICAN STUDIES

This survey had a response rate of 52%. The survey questionnaire asked graduates to assess their study programme and their transition to employment.

The study programme itself is assessed as satisfactory since all respondents have been either satisfied or partially satisfied with it. In general there is a high level of satisfaction, especially with the programme's interdisciplinarity. Respondents achieved a high degree of expertise, oral and written communication skills and independence. However, they feel that more effort could be put into easing their transition to the labour market, especially by giving them more opportunities for project work and thesis-writing in cooperation with businesses, and more careers advice from the career counsellor.

The study also shows that a high percentage of the students (82%) gained practical experience during their studies in the form of volunteer work, internships, fieldwork or student jobs. However, as regards the graduates' transition to the labour market, they present a mixed picture. Several ended up working for NGOs and being engaged in project work. But some have not used their education directly. As regards unemployment, the study shows that 89% of the graduates found jobs within a year of receiving their Master's degree.

## About the survey

### Background

The survey was carried out in 2010 with the help of a comprehensive questionnaire that examined graduates' level of satisfaction with the study programme, as well as the extracurricular qualifications they gained alongside the programme. This study should thus help us form a picture of the relationship between the graduates' studies and their subsequent access to the labour market, and thereby an assessment of their study programme. It should be noted that the Master's programme was first offered in 2005 and that there were very few graduates in the programme's first four years.

### Implementation

The survey questionnaire was sent to all graduates who graduated between 1 August 2005 and 30 September 2009. It was accompanied by a letter from the head of the study board and a stamped self-addressed envelope.



### **Response rate**

The questionnaire was sent to 23 graduates. Two were returned as addressee unknown. Thus 21 graduates had the opportunity to participate in the study, 11 of whom responded. This gives a response rate of 52%. Considering the form was sent to graduates from five years previously, some of whom live abroad, this must be said to be a satisfactory response rate. However, the resulting material is insubstantial and the study's representativeness can be questioned.

### **Recommendation**

The part of the survey that covers the graduates' period of study could usefully be given to all students when they graduate. This would probably result in a high response rate and a meaningful evaluation of the programme, as the graduates' education would be fresh in their minds.

### **The survey structure**

- 1) Questions 1-4: Background (gender, age, completed Master's degree, previous education)
- 2) Questions 5-9: The study programme (satisfaction with the programme, organisation of the programme, social environment, skills acquired, etc.)
- 3) Questions 10-12: From student to jobholder
- 4) Questions 13-21: Current employment
- 5) Questions 22-25: Continuing and further education
- 6) Other comments

## Background (questions 1-4)

### 1. Gender

73% of the respondents were female and 27% were male. The questionnaire was sent to four men and 19 women, i.e. 18% were men and 82% were women. So a small majority of men have responded.

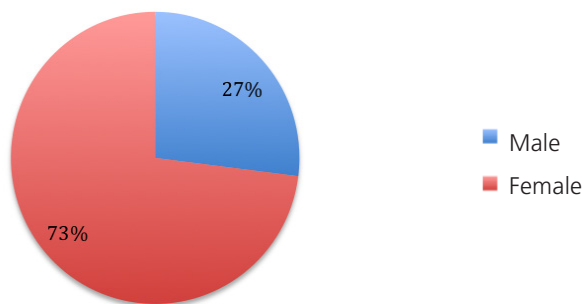


Figure 1 Gender

### 2. Age

Most of the respondents are aged between 30-34 years. These respondents account for 55% of the answers.

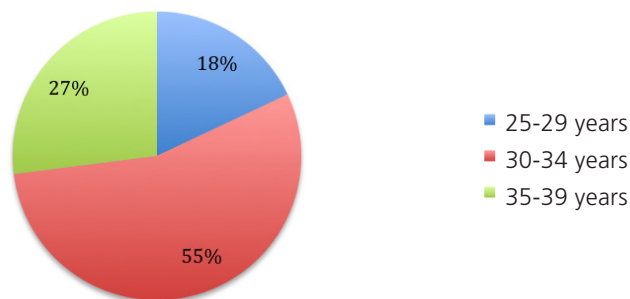
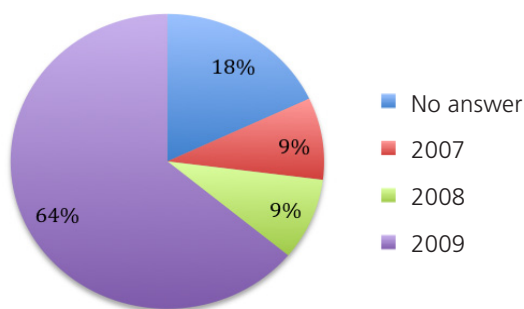


Figure 2 Age

### 3. Year of graduation

This study covers the period from August 2005 to September 2009, and despite the fact that only graduates from the first eight months of 2009 received the form, they constitute 64% of the respondents.



**Figure 3 Year of graduation**

#### **4. Previous education (before African Studies)**

All the respondents completed a qualifying Bachelor or professional Bachelor programme before undertaking the Master's in African Studies. None of the respondents indicated that they completed any other education before beginning the Master's programme.

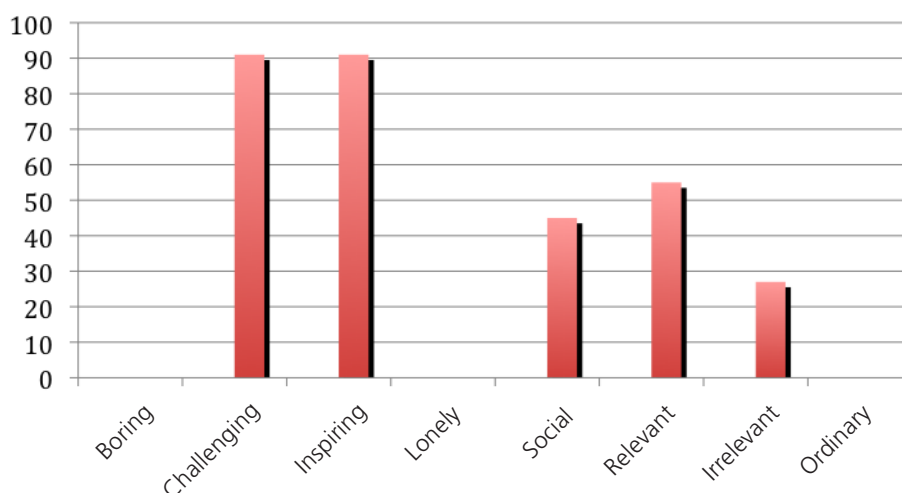
This question should be made more precise, as several respondents stated that they completed an educational programme before they started the Master's programme, which they subsequently identified as the Bachelor's degree that qualified them for the Master's programme.

### **The study programme (questions 5-9)**

#### **5. Characterisation of the study programme**

Respondents were asked to characterise the programme. Several boxes were ticked, which is why the answer percentages do not add up to 100%.

Generally, there is a very high score for the words 'challenging' and 'inspiring', both of which scored 91%. 'Relevant' scored 55%, meaning the education is characterised positively. The only negative word that was ticked is 'irrelevant', which scores 27%.



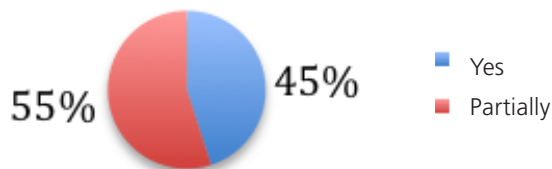
**Figure 4 Characterisation of the study programme**

Respondents had the option of giving their comments on their characterisation, but did not do so.

## 6. Satisfaction with the study programme

All respondents were either satisfied or partially satisfied with the study programme.

45% of respondents were completely satisfied with the study programme and 55% were partially satisfied.



**Figure 5 Satisfaction with the study programme**

Respondents were given the option of expanding on their answers with comments, and 55% did so. 66% of those who added comments stated they were partially satisfied with the programme and gave the following reasons:

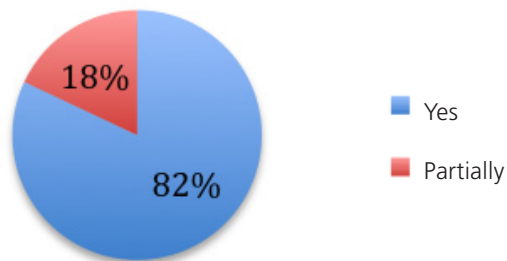
- The academic level was too low
- The students' backgrounds were too different
- The curriculum was too poorly designed (has since been changed)
- Too theoretical
- The job opportunities were too limited
- Hard to get enough time if you work alongside your studies
- Not enough focus on scientific and sociological methods to equip them for internships and fieldwork

The remaining 33% who commented praise the programme for:

- The combination of courses and elective courses
- Uncluttered teaching material
- Interdisciplinarity
- Engaged students, guest researchers and lecturers.

## 7. Graduates' satisfaction with their own efforts

There is a high level of satisfaction with the graduates' own performance: 82% are satisfied and the remaining 18% are partially satisfied.

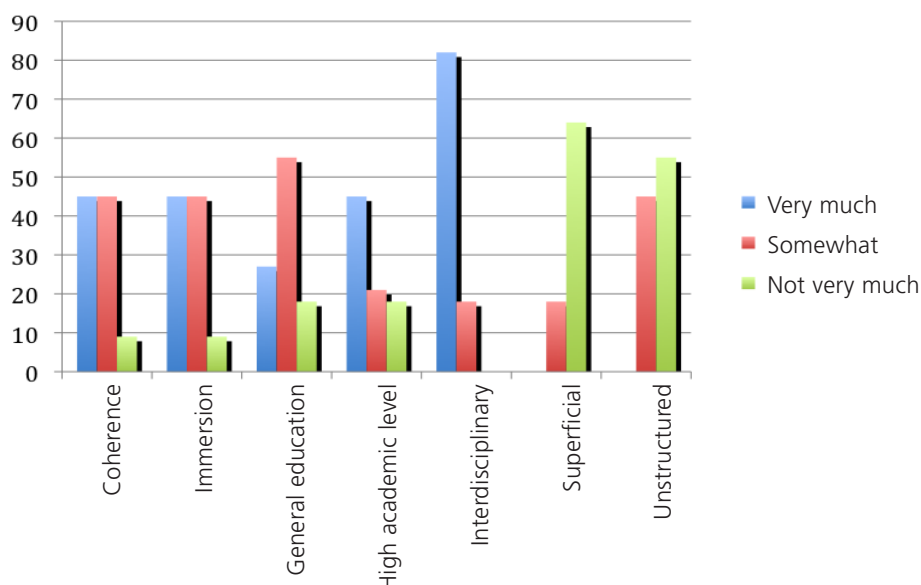


**Figure 6 Satisfaction with own effort**

However, one respondent suggests that the students should be offered an introduction to study methods, since there is a big leap from the Bachelor programme to the Master's programme. The lack of satisfaction is due to too much work in addition to the studies.

## 8. Which of the following words apply best to your studies?

'Interdisciplinarity' is the absolute top scorer when respondents are asked to choose the words that apply to the study programme, with 82% of respondents indicating that it describes the programme very well. 'High academic level', 'coherence' and 'immersion' are slightly below 50%.



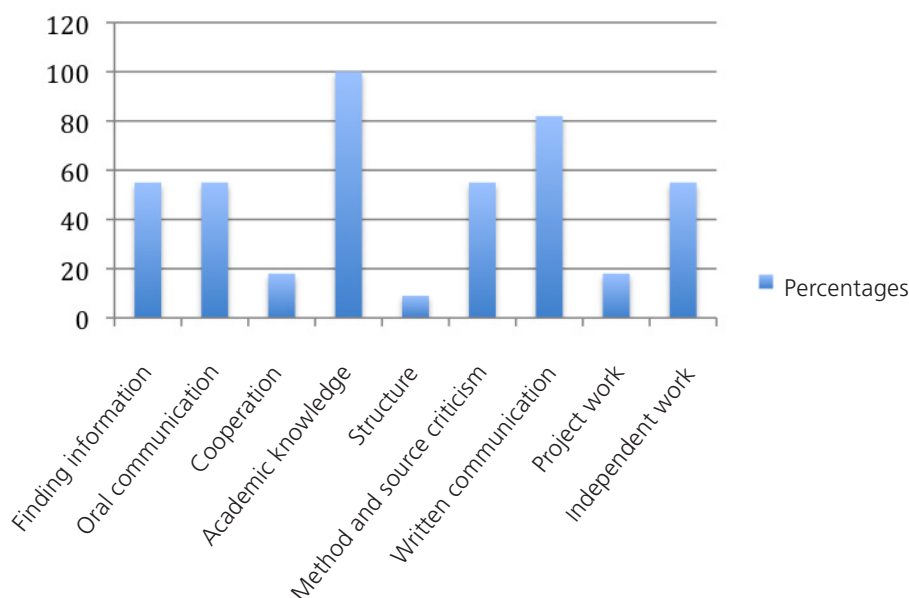
**Figure 7 Assessment of the study programme in percentages**

Respondents had the option of giving their comments on this section, but did not do so.



## 9. What skills have you gained from your studies?

All respondents feel they acquired academic knowledge in their studies. Independence, written and oral communication and methodology and source criticism also score highly – all above 50%. In contrast, collaboration, structure and project work score low.



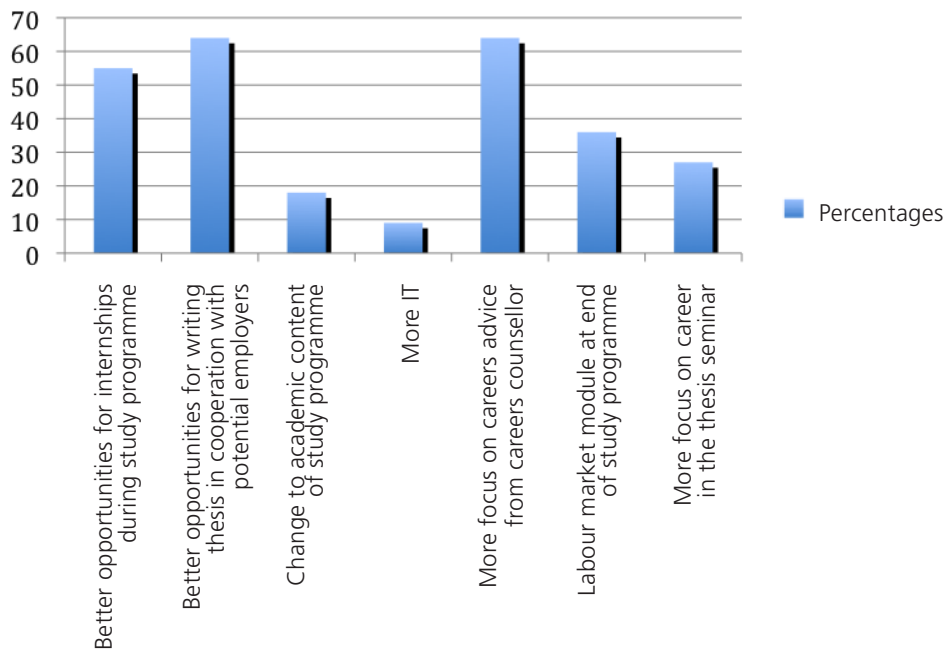
**Figure 8 Skills gained during the study programme**

Respondents had the option of giving their comments on this section, but did not do so.

## From student to jobholder (questions 10-12)

### 10. How can African Studies ease the transition to the labour market?

The graduates feel that more effort could be put into easing their transition to the labour market mainly by giving them more opportunities for internships and thesis-writing in cooperation with businesses, as well as more careers advice from the career counsellor.

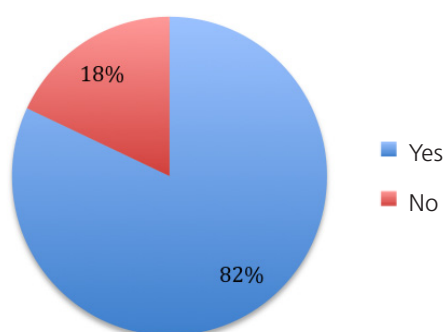


**Figure 9 Proposals to ease the transition to the labour market**

One respondent indicated that the programme should include more research. Another said it would be a good idea to create a course that equips students for converting theory into practice on the labour market, and to clarify the job titles and work areas graduates should focus on according to CAS. Student jobs are also seen as important, because NGOs rarely hire recent graduates who have no experience. Studying abroad is not considered sufficient.

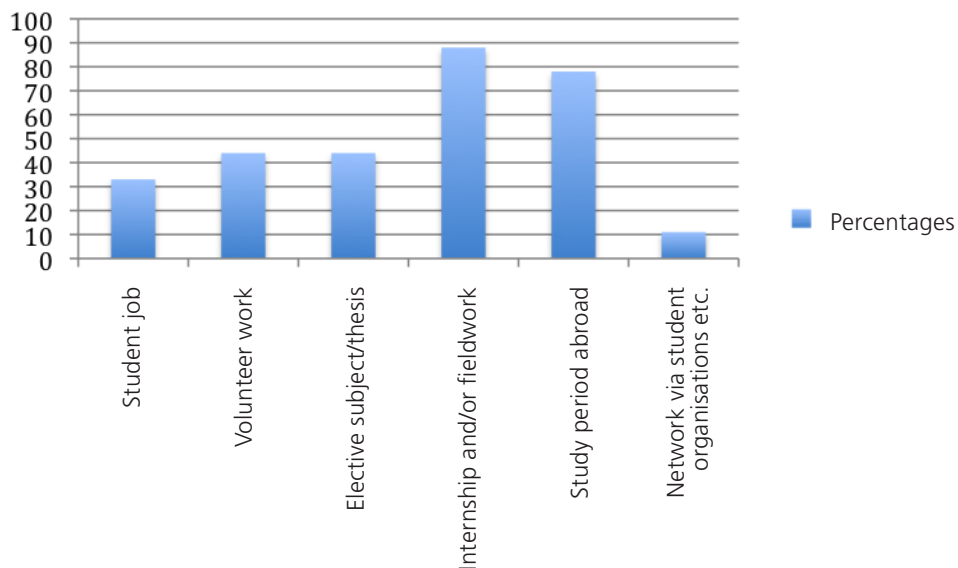
### 11. Did you gain qualifications for the job market alongside your studies?

On the question of whether the respondents gained qualifications alongside the study programme, 82% said they did. The qualifications were mainly gained through studies abroad, internships and/or fieldwork, with more than 70% indicating these as the most important qualifications.



**Figure 10 Qualified for labour market**

It is interesting in this connection that respondents also call for better opportunities for internships (question 10). Volunteering, thesis-writing and elective courses also score relatively highly. Student jobs scores low, in fifth place.



**Figure 11 How did you qualify yourself for the labour market?**

Student jobs:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Care Denmark

Volunteer jobs graduates took as students:

- Internships in NGOs in Africa
- Project development and consultation in voluntary organisations
- Care Denmark
- Networks and NGO work

## 12. What is your dream job?

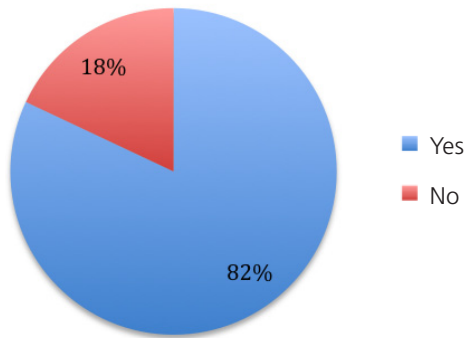
The graduates' dream jobs vary, so they are listed below as they may also serve to form a picture of what skills a graduate of African Studies has or should have:

- International NGO
- Programme/project design
- Project manager in development organisation
- Programme coordinator
- Journalistic communication work between Denmark and Africa
- Teacher/consultant/facilitator
- Project and organisational development
- Researcher

## Current occupation (questions 13-21)

### 13. Have you had a job after you graduated?

82% of the respondents have had jobs after they graduated.



**Figure 12 Have you been employed?**

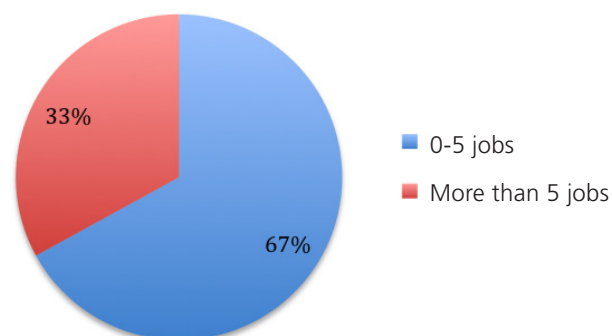
Only the 82% of respondents who have been employed are included from questions 14-21. The results are thus based on nine respondents.

### 14. Year of first employment

This question is omitted, as it does not contribute any relevant information, since question 17 gives a clearer picture of how long the graduates were unemployed before their first job.

### 15. Number of jobs applied for before the graduate's first job

The chart below shows how many jobs the respondents applied for before their first employment after graduating. It is divided into 0-5 jobs and more than 5 jobs. Two-thirds of the graduates found employment within their first five applications.



**Figure 13 No. of jobs applied for**

## 16. Number of jobs before current job

78% of the respondents are still in their first jobs.

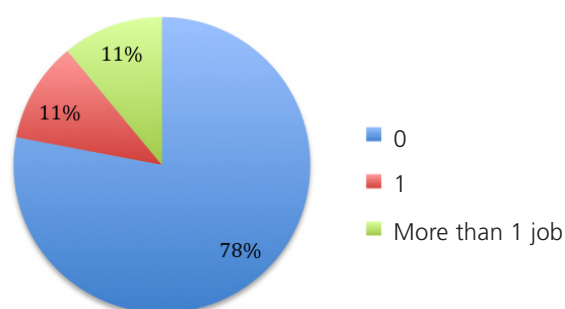


Figure 14 No. of jobs before current job

## 17. How long were you unemployed before your first job?

As the table below shows, 45% of the graduates found jobs within a month of graduating. After six months, 67% found jobs, and after a year 89% found jobs.

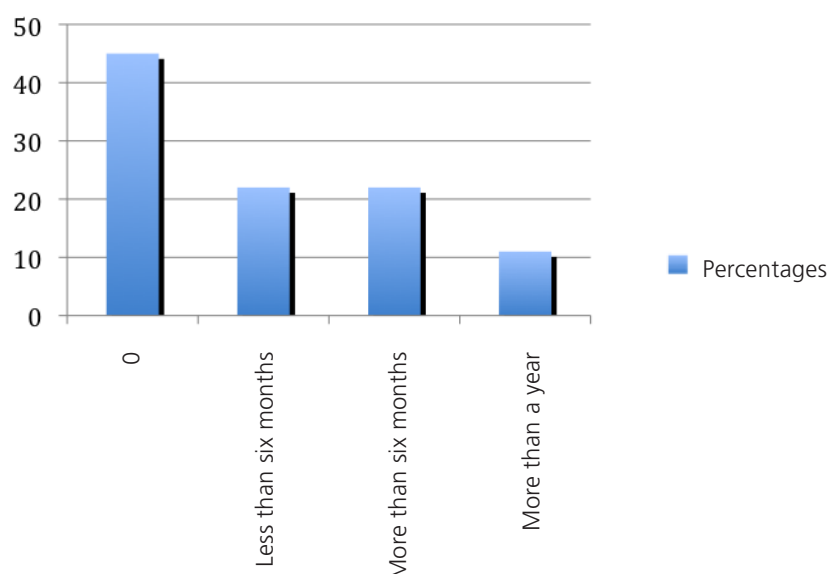
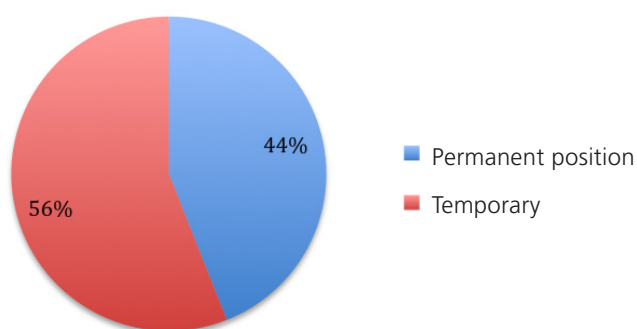


Figure 15 Period of unemployment before first job

## 18. Are you currently employed?

Of the graduates who have been employed, 100% are currently still in work. Of these, 44% are employed in permanent positions and 56% are employed in temporary positions. 78% are in full-time jobs and the remaining 22% are in part-time jobs.





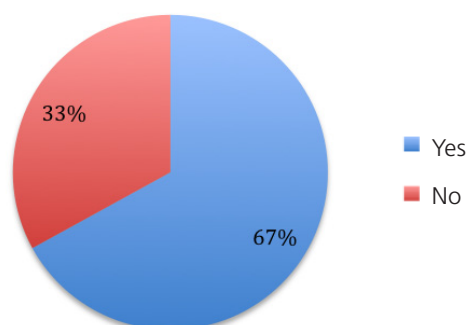
**Figure 16 Form of employment**

The following is a list of their places of employment and job titles:

- Danish Immigration Service – head clerk
- Herning Higher Preparatory Exam and Adult Education Centre – English substitute teacher for a year
- An African embassy in Denmark – linguistic secretary
- Information Centre on Disability, Tanzania – Programme Officer
- Freelance journalist
- CARE Denmark – Programme Coordinator
- Dansk Oplysningsforbund (Danish Information Association) – Administration employee
- DanChurchAid– JPO – Sudan
- Temporary employment agency for pre-school teachers – pre-school teacher’s assistant

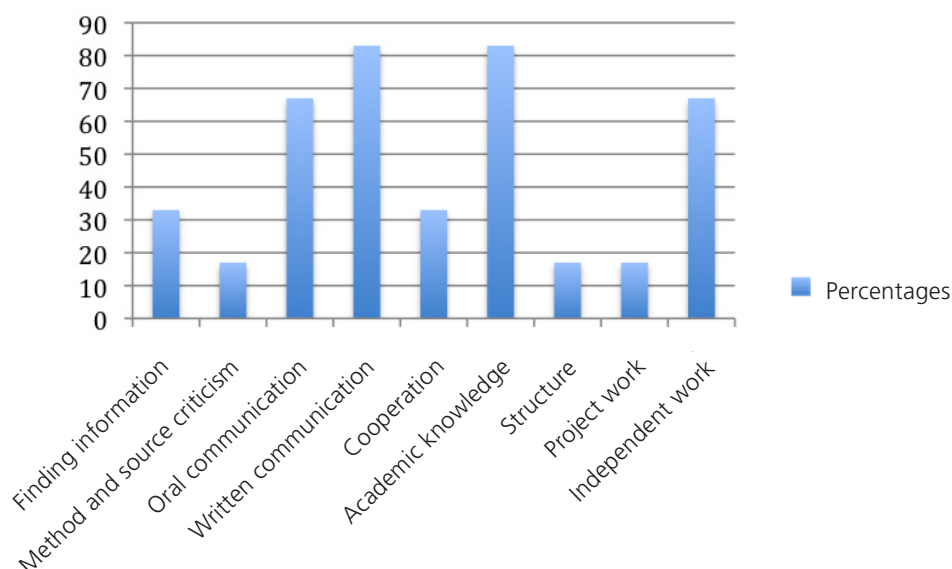
### **19. Did the study programme qualify you for your current job?**

Two-thirds of the respondents feel that the programme qualified them for their current jobs. The rest, who do not feel the programme qualified them for their current job, are employed in jobs that fall outside the programme’s core area – jobs such as pre-school teaching assistant, English teacher and administrative employee.



**Figure 17 Did the study programme qualify you for a job?**

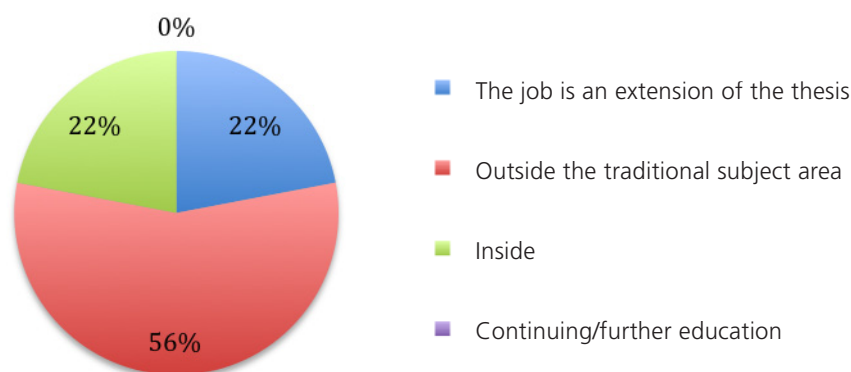
The table below, which shows the skills the graduates use in their jobs, shows that they use their written and oral communication skills, academic knowledge and independence to a great extent. These score above 60%. These were also the skills most respondents cited in question 9 as the ones they had gained from their studies. On the whole there is a good connection between the skills they believe they have acquired and the skills they actually use in their jobs.



**Figure 18 What skills do you use in your job?**

## 20. What is the connection between your education and your job?

56% indicate that their jobs fall outside the programme's traditional subject area. 22% indicate that their jobs lie within the programme's traditional area, and the remaining 22% that it is an extension of their thesis subjects and/or elective subjects. The respondents who indicate that their jobs are extensions of their theses add that their jobs lie within the programme's traditional subject area. Thus 44% indicate that they are using their education in their jobs. No respondents have undertaken further or continuing training to get their current job.



**Figure 19 Coherence between job and education**

## 21. How did you become aware of your current job?

The graduates mainly became aware of their jobs via traditional job adverts. However, a third got their jobs through previous jobs.

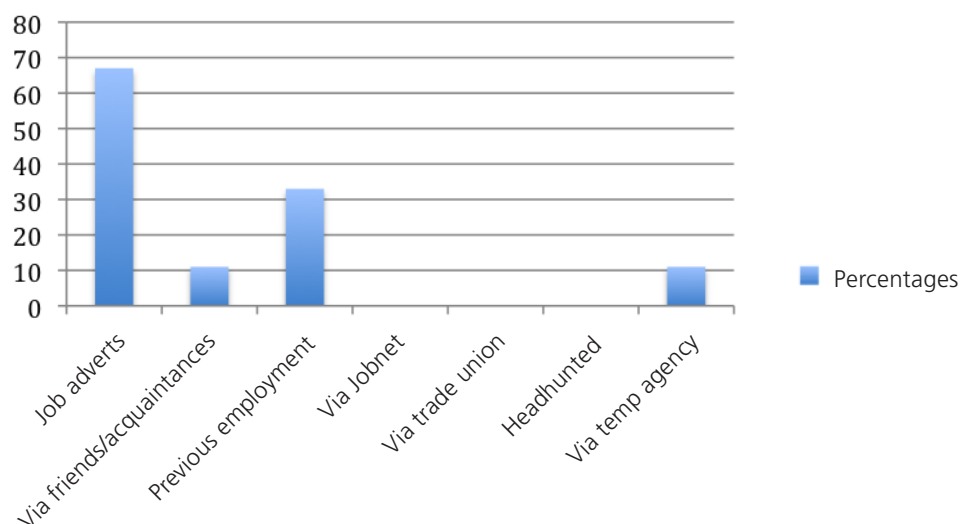


Figure 20 How do the graduates become aware of vacant jobs?

## Further and continuing education (questions 22-25)

### 22. Have you completed any further education after graduating from African Studies?

82% have not completed any further education after graduating.

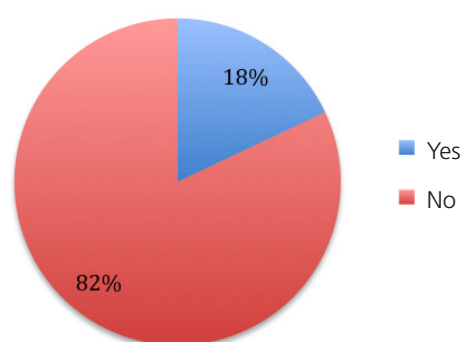


Figure 21 Completed further education

The 18% who have continued their education have taken courses in project management, language courses and advocacy courses.

### 23. Does your current employer finance continuing and further education?

56% do not get their further education financed, while 33% do.

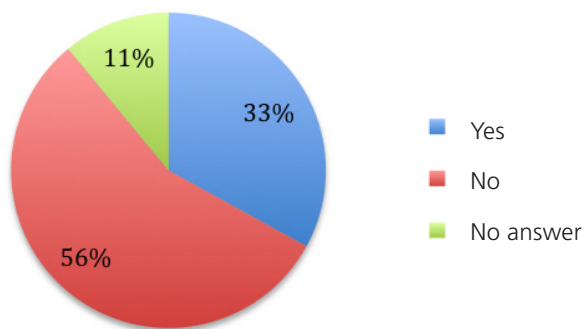


Figure 22 Does the employer finance further education?

### 24. Would you be interested in continuing and further education at the Centre for African Studies?

The graduates would be interested, especially in the short courses. This may be because it is easier to get time off work for courses that do not last a whole semester.

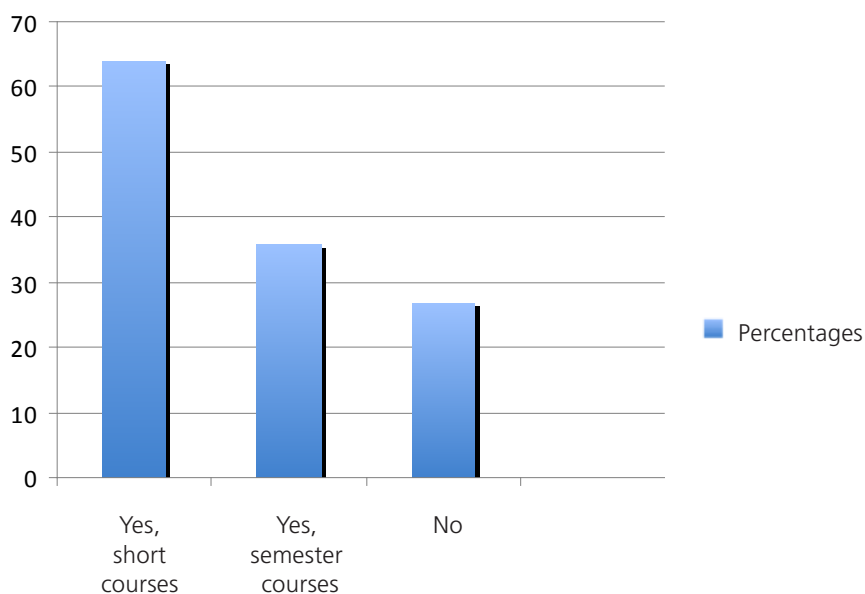


Figure 23 Interest in continuing and further education at the Centre for African Studies

The respondents listed a number of subjects they might be interested in:

- PhD preparatory courses
- Use of new media in political culture and development trends
- Human rights
- Women's land rights in Africa
- Updates on trends in Danish and international aid policy and cooperation
- Project management
- Themed courses
- Gender and development
- New trends in development theory
- Funding

## 25. What would hinder you from undertaking continuing and further education?

The biggest obstacles to further and continuing education are lack of time and funding. Also, one respondent cited the unemployment benefit system's rules and controls as an obstacle.

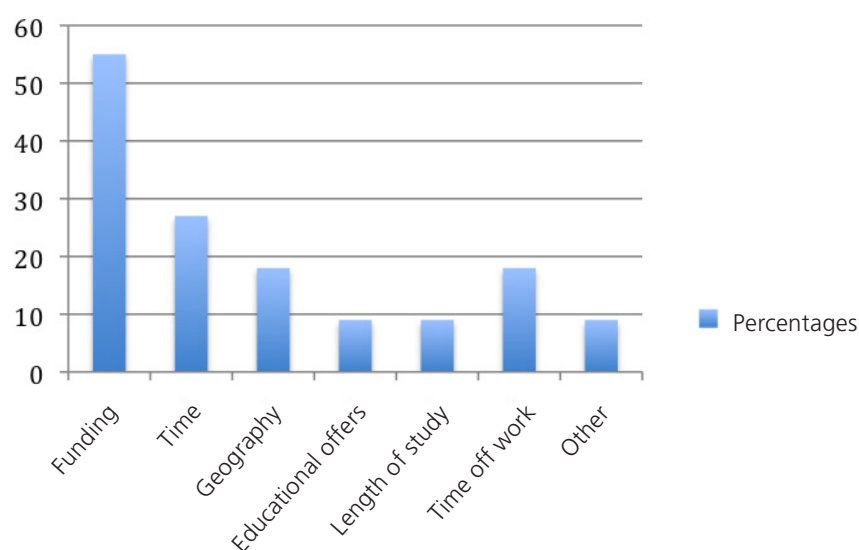


Figure 24 Obstacles to further and continuing education



## Other comments

Three respondents made further comments, which are listed below:

- Hard to get settled in Denmark again after a stay abroad
- Difficult to cast aside the formal, academic and study-related mindset when writing job applications in order to relate more concretely to the current job situation
- Important to inform the world outside the university about the skills students gain at CAS
- Need for a better link to the business sector, e.g. through cooperation with companies or organisations working with Africa-related issues
- Impossible to use the study programme in Denmark due to lack of experience of project work

