eSTEeM Seminar Series

An Impact Study of Taught MSc Related Subjects in Employability

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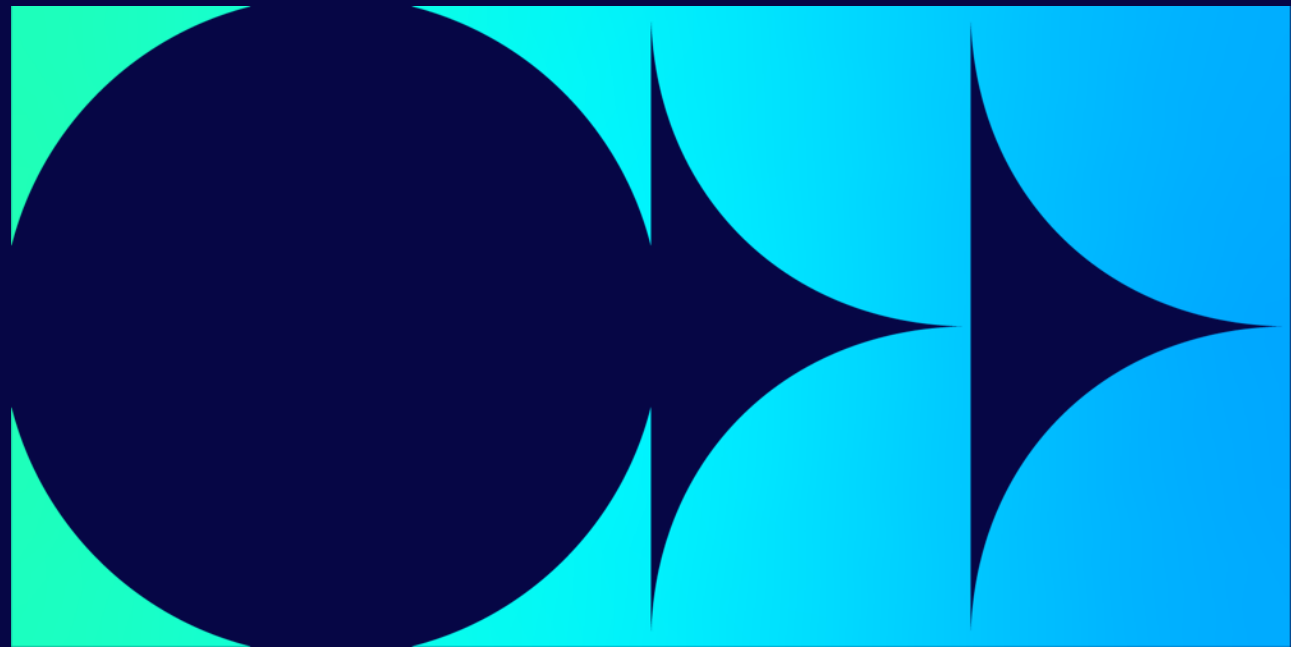

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Background

- The data collection took place in the summer and autumn of 2017 and the project was scheduled to be completed by autumn 2018.
- Unfortunately, due to a lengthy secondment on Daphne Chang's part and COVID, we were not in a position to write up the report until now.
- Analysis is part complete and I will share the findings so far.

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Project Aims

- To investigate the impact of a MSc on employability
- To understand students'
  - Motivation
  - Perceptions and reality of gaining a MSc
  - Gendered differences?

- Five technology related MScs were in scope:
  - F36 (MSc in Technology Management),
  - F65 (MSc in Environment Management),
  - F47(MSc in Systems Thinking in Practice),
  - F66 (MSc in Computing)
  - F56 (MSc in Advanced Networking)

- The capstone module T847 was used as a proxy for completion of the Masters qualification (from 11K – 16K)

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Methodology

- Two research tools were used: an initial online **questionnaire** and a follow-up **semi-structured** interview (via phone) with those respondents who had indicated their willingness for this.

- The initial contact was an email which contained a link to the online questionnaire

- The survey respondents were sourced from 2 spreadsheets supplied by the Quality Enhancement and Learning Analytics Team

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On-line Questionnaire Set-up

- The online questionnaire was constructed using the Bristol Online Survey tool
- The initial contact with the respondents was by an email containing a link to the on-line questionnaire
- There were 11 questions plus a request for a telephone interview as a follow-up
- The questionnaire had one question per page
- The question types were a mix of “select one answer from a list” and “choose all that apply”
- The questions were all mandatory, some had optional free text comments
- The survey remained open for 21 days with email reminders after 10 and then 15 days sent to those who had not already responded

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Role of the on-line Questionnaire in the Survey

- The on-line questionnaire had 3 purposes:
  - To give baseline data on the respondents
  - To act as a recruitment tool for the semi-structured telephone interviews
  - To serve as a starting point /bridge for the telephone interviews

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Semi-structured Telephone Interviews

- The telephone interviews were based on a list of 7 questions
- Respondents had been asked in the on-line questionnaire to indicate times/days that would be suitable for a telephone interview.
- The respondent replies were extracted from the questionnaire and manually sorted into daytime weekday, evening weekday, weekend and no time preference categories
- These categories were used to create a series of doodle polls that were emailed to respondents to ask them to book interview time slots
- Interviews were contacted by phone and recorded using a data voice recorder and the interviews then transcribed
- Of the 63 respondents offering a telephone interview a total of 33 interviews were held and recorded

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Response rate from on-line questionnaire

- 264 students emailed the invitation to the questionnaire
- Within 4 days 42 responses were received (16%) with 28 potential interviews
- After the first reminder there were 81 responses (30%) with 45 potential interviews
- By the close of the questionnaire there were 111 responses ie 42% of those invited to take part
- There were 63 respondents willing to have telephone interview (ie 23.9% of those surveyed and 56.8% of those who completed the questionnaire)
- Of the 63 respondents who indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed, 33 interviews were held

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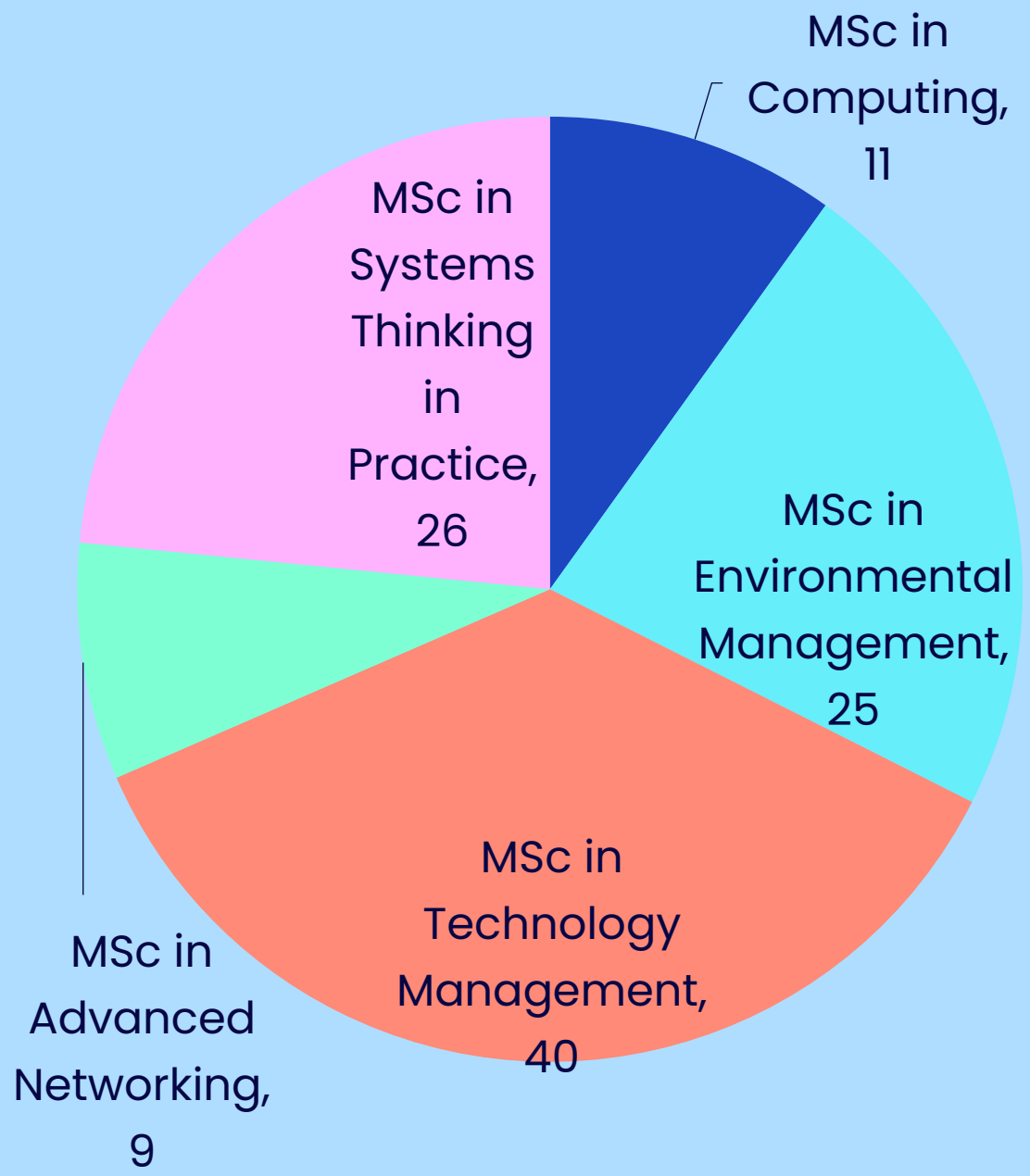
Findings - questionnaire

There were 264 requests sent out and 111 respondents (42% response)

Of these 111 respondents, 29 were female and 82 were male

Respondents came from a range of the 5 Masters Qualifications



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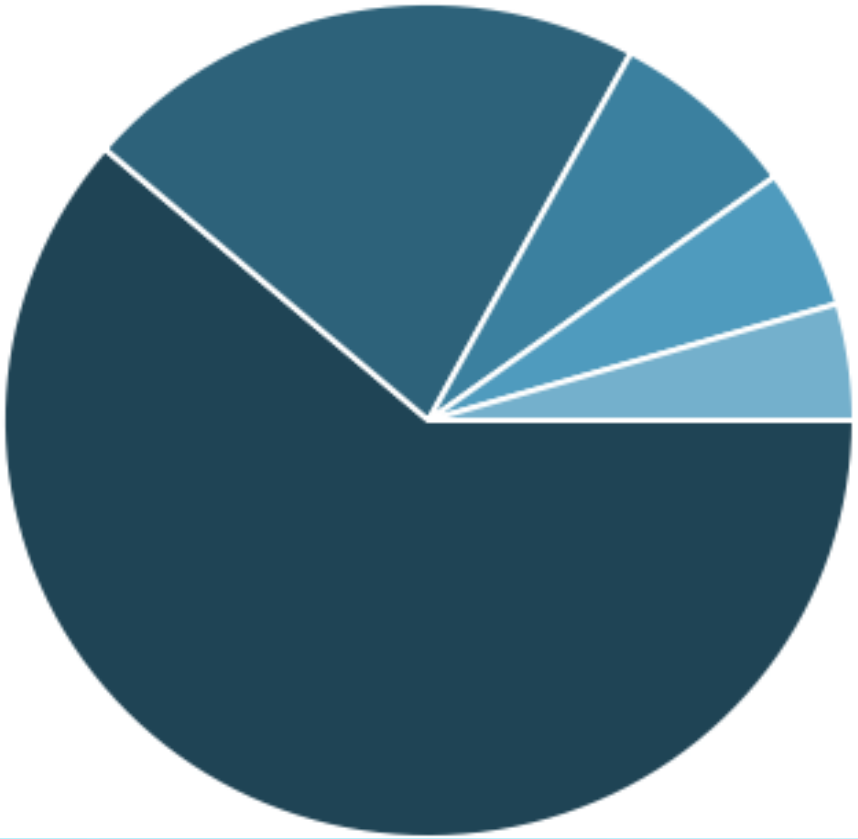
Respondents by sector / cohort



- Private sector (for-profit) **68** (61.3%)
- Public sector **24** (21.6%)
- Education sector **8** (7.2%)
- Voluntary sector (non-profit / charitable organisations) **6** (5.4%)
- I am not currently employed **5** (4.5%)
- Prefer not to say **0**

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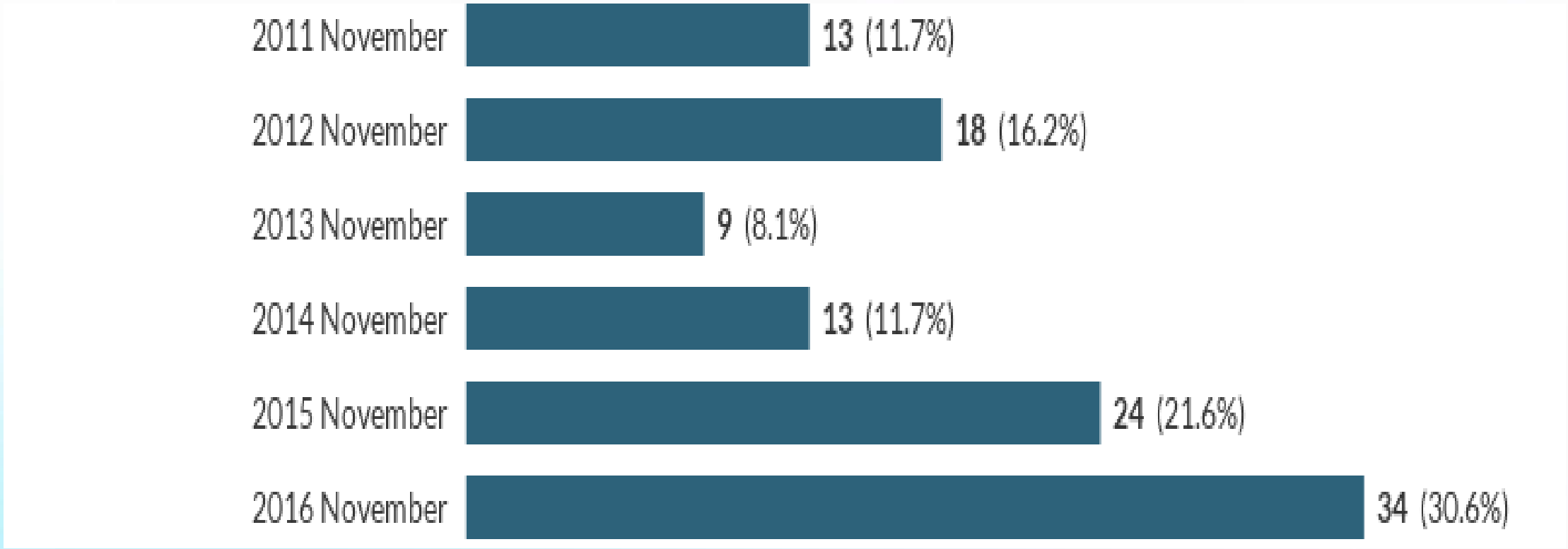
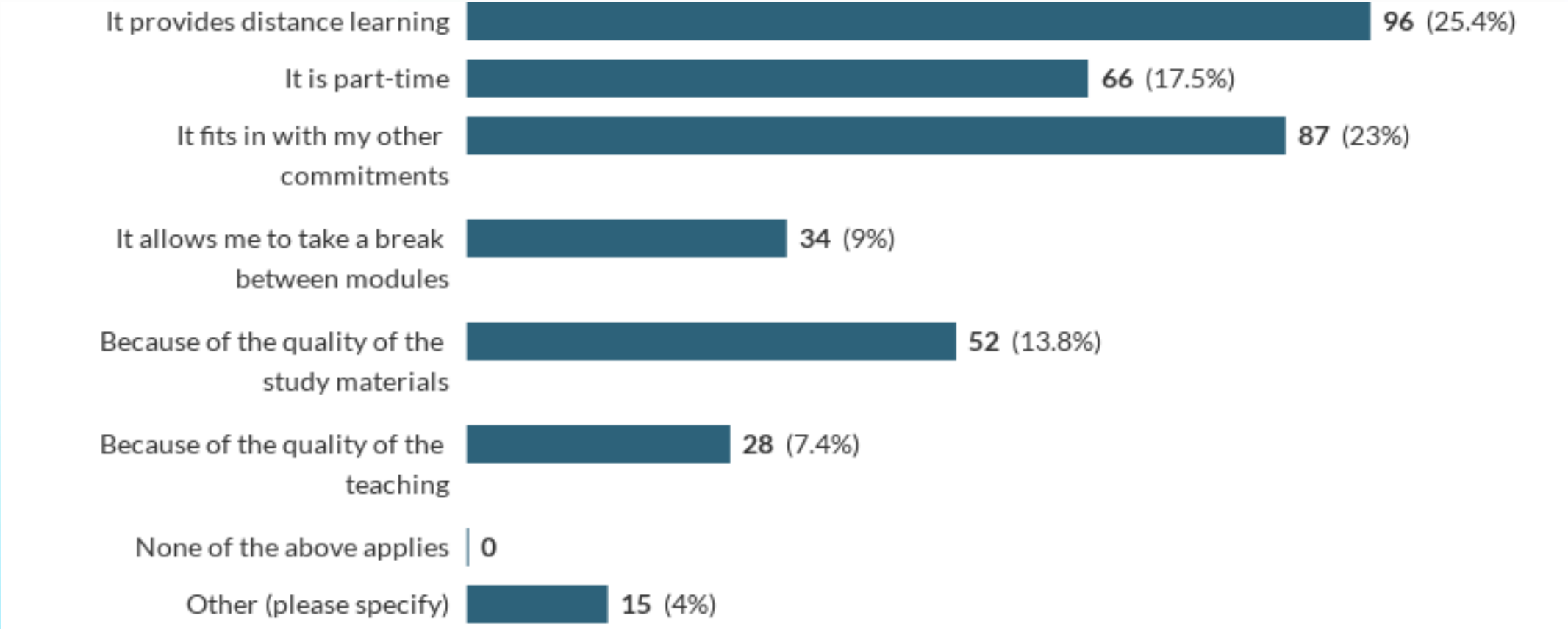

2011 November
13 (11.7%)
2012 November
18 (16.2%)
2013 November
9 (8.1%)
2014 November
13 (11.7%)
2015 November
24 (21.6%)
2016 November
34 (30.6%)

Why did the informants choose the OU



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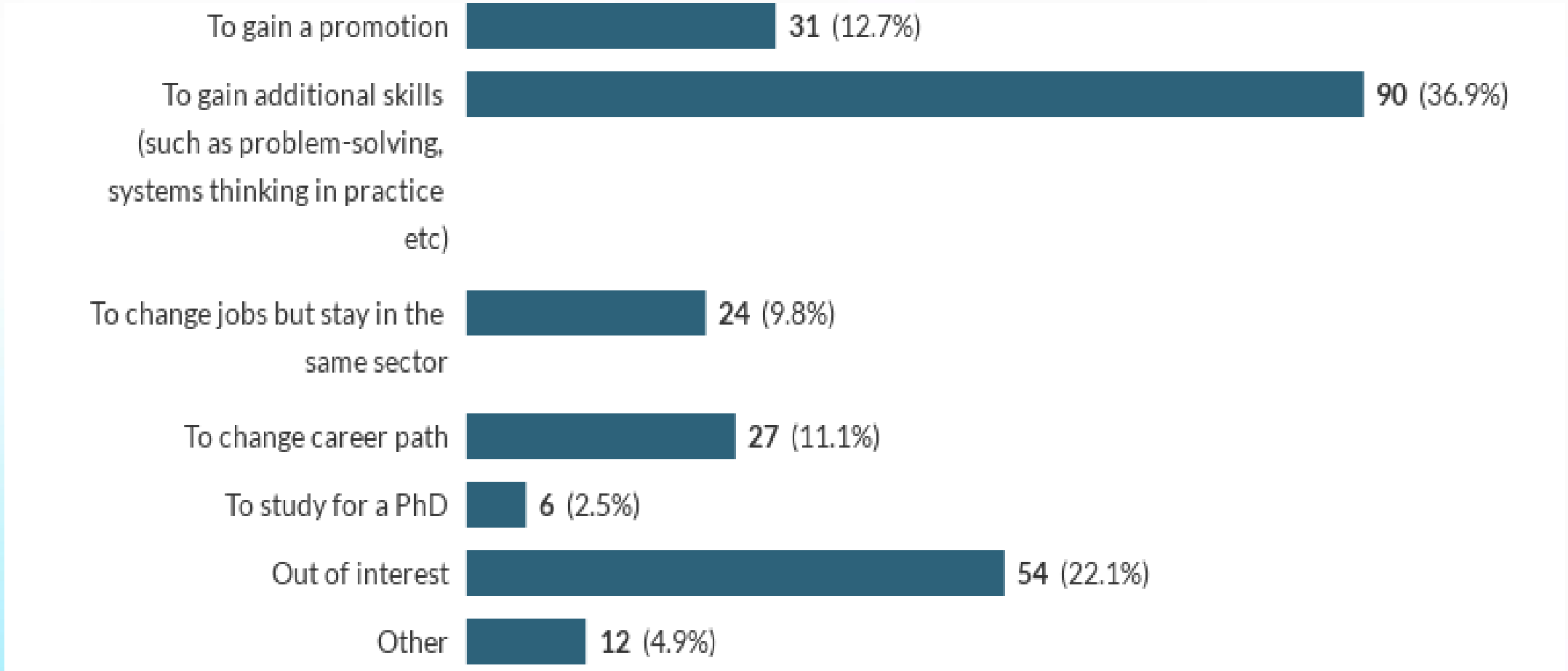
Reasons for choosing to study for a Masters degree



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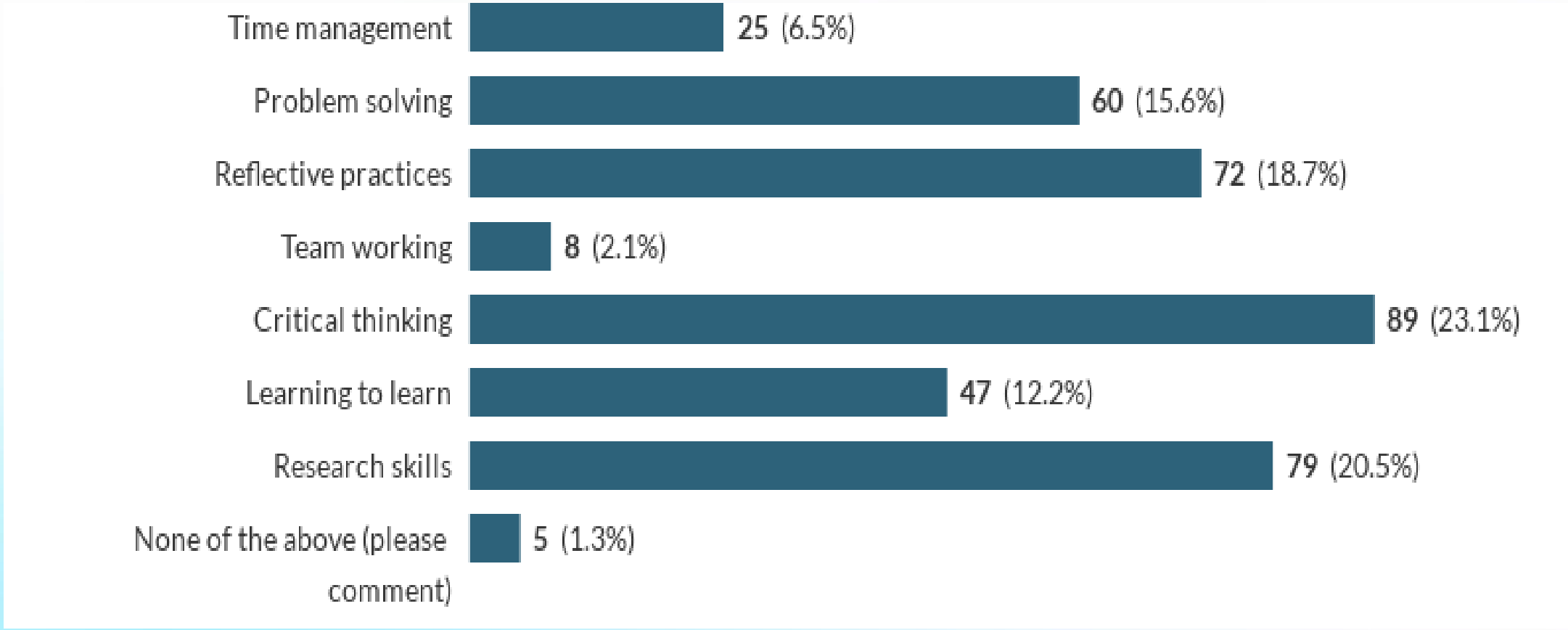
Additional skills gained from studying a Masters degree



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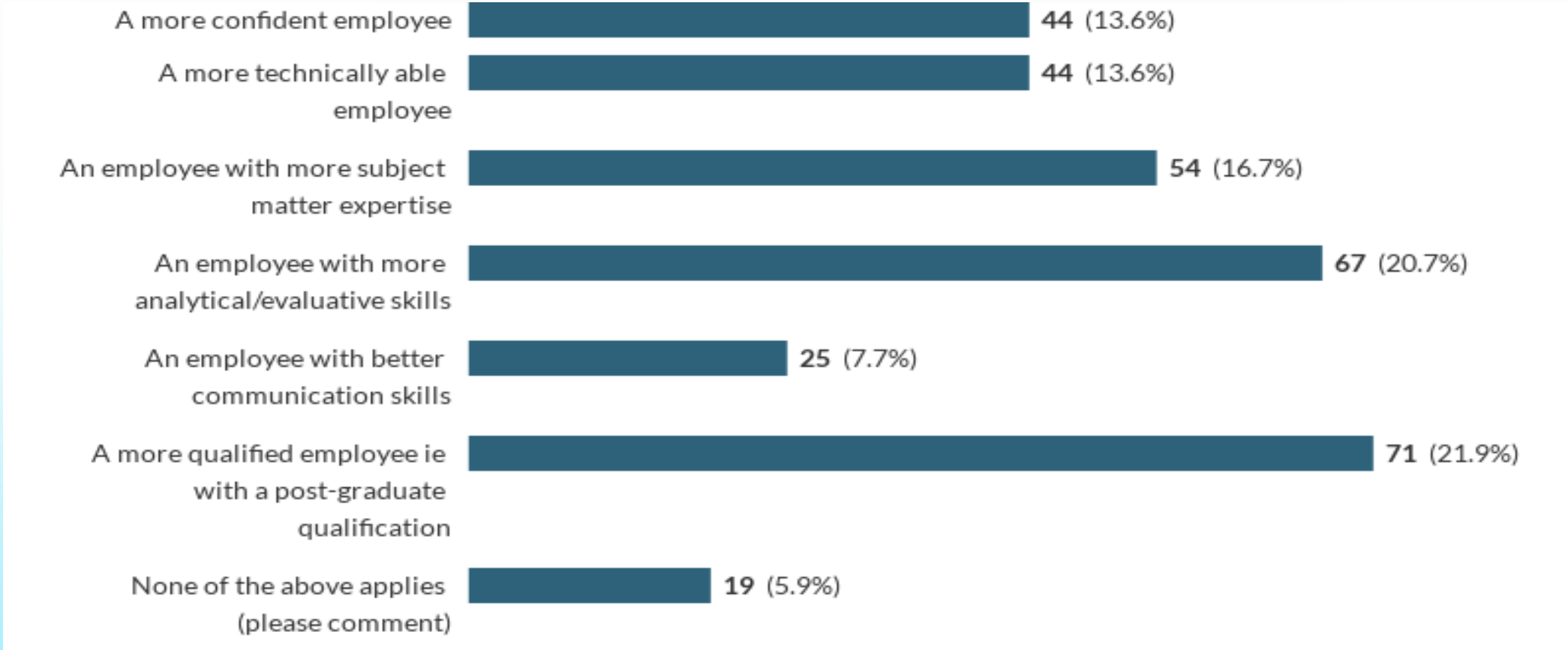
What did the employers gain?



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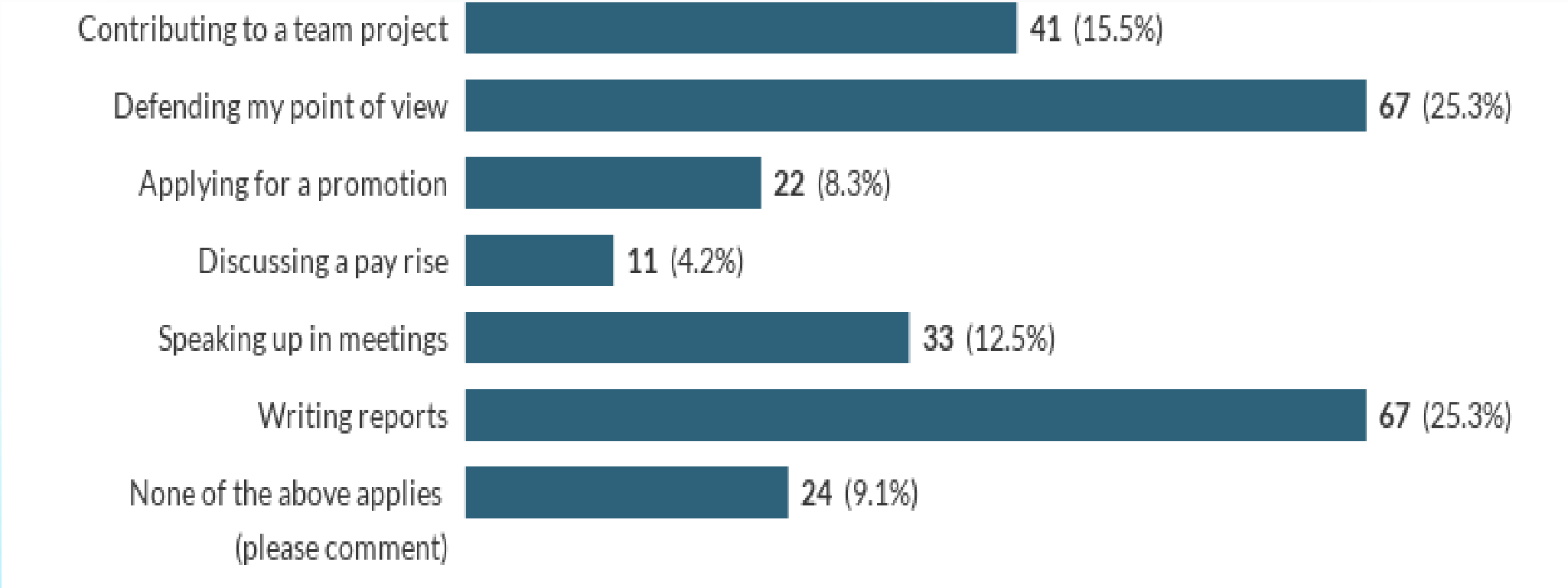
What did the respondents gain from their Masters degree?



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Sample quotes

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I have a whole different attitude to both my work and the other people I work with.... I am much more confident in my thoughts and being able to express them better to my colleagues.

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.....being able to challenge and debate and convince and influence – in short, it has enabled me to become much more influential in most settings...

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People come to me as somebody they know could solve a complex problem.

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I got a huge sense of satisfaction in doing it and it say it bolstered my self-esteem. I has benefitted me in my career, although that wasn't my intention in doing it.

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Early findings - interviews

- Our students come from diverse backgrounds
- Studying for a MSc is a positive experience
- TM/EM/STiP students benefit from skills taught in TU871/TU872
- Eng/Computing students benefit from critical thinking/analysis
- Although many students embarked on the MSc with careers progression in mind, they have also talked about personal growth and positive impact on family
- Life-long learning is an important outcome for students
- Few of female alumni reported a Master degree is a good ‘badge’ to have
- Both male and female graduates found the gaining a MSc have given them confidence and useful theories for validating their views/standpoints

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Tentative conclusions

- MScs have changed our PG students as people
- Some came to OU PG studies because they were life-long learners and some became life-long learners because of it
- Students value what ‘University’ is about
- ‘Value’ of PG education is appreciated over a period of time, which might be different or more from what was perceived when the degree was first gained

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Reflection

- Employability' is defined by the institution and employers. How does this correspond with learners' conceptualisations/experiences
- The research was phrased to focus on learners; hence the respond rate
- There might be some value in carrying out the same research on T802 students and on other STEM PG capstone modules

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Thank you

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