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A Study on University Students/Graduates' Perceptions on the Importance of Professional Ethics

***Research Findings Report
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – Key Learnings and Salient Conclusions

This Section presents the key learnings and conclusions which emanated from the Research Study.

Study Respondent Profile

- in 5 survey respondents are female while 2 in 5 respondents are male
- 1 in 3 respondents is aged 25+ years
- 3 in 10 respondents have completed their first year of studies, 2 in 5 respondents have completed their final year of studies and 1 in 3 respondents have graduated in 2016/2017.
- 2 in 5 respondents indicated that they chose their current course of studies/profession because they find their field of study very interesting. Also, 1 in 4 respondents indicated opportunity for career progression as a reason for this.
- ✓ Of the 598 full-time University student respondents who participated in this research study, 3 in 5 respondents (59%) are females and 41% of the respondents are male.
- ✓ Furthermore, 31% of the respondents are aged 25 years and over while another 1 in 4 respondents (25%) are aged between 21 and 22 years. 19% and 19% of the respondents are aged between 19 and 20 years and between 23 and 24 years respectively. The remaining 5% of the respondents are aged between 17 and 18 years.
- ✓ Following, the respondents hailed from the different regions as follows: 26% from the Northern Harbour region; 23% from the Northern region; 20% from the Western region; 14% from the South Eastern region; 11% from the Southern Harbour region and 6% from Gozo.
- ✓ With regards to the level of tertiary education completed to date, 30% of the respondents have completed their first year of studies for a Bachelors degree, 38% of the respondents have completed their final year of studies (28% for Bachelors degree/ post-grad diploma and 10% for Masters degree) and another 33% graduated in 2016/2017 (21% with a Bachelors degree/ post-grad diploma and 12% with a Masters degree).
- ✓ The faculties with the highest percentages of respondents were: the Economics, Management & Accountancy Faculty (18%); the Arts Faculty (16%); the Health Science Faculty (11%) and the Social Wellbeing Faculty (10%).
- ✓ 2 in 5 respondents (39%) indicated that they have chosen their current course of studies/ profession because they find their course/profession as very interesting while another 1 in 4 respondents (24%) indicated the fact that their course/profession allows for career progression as one of the reasons. Another 14% of the respondents indicated that they chose their current course/profession because it allows for a good work-life balance while another 13% indicated the fact that their profession carries/ will carry a good financial package as a reason for this.

Students/graduates' understanding of professional ethics

- **'Ethics' and 'professional ethics'**

Conclusion 1: Most students/graduates define the term 'ethics' as 'moral principles'.

Conclusion 2: Students/graduates define 'professional ethics' as 'ethics at the work place' and therefore 'moral principles at the workplace'.

- ✓ Most respondents stated that the term 'ethics' is related to 'moral principles' and how one is expected to behave. Furthermore, some respondents also indicated that 'ethics' refers to a set of rules or guidelines which one should follow when making a decision.
- ✓ Furthermore, when asked to define 'professional ethics', most respondents indicated that this refers to the definition of 'ethics' being applied at the work place and therefore to the 'moral principles' at the work place. Other respondents stated that 'professional ethics' refer to a set of guidelines which are specific to a particular professional while others defined it as the correct and proper way of acting at the work place for a particular profession.

- ***'Code of ethics' and 'code of conduct'***

Conclusion 1: 3 in 4 students/graduates believe that 'code of ethics' and 'code of conduct' do not refer to the same thing.

Conclusion 2: Most students/graduates define the term 'code of conduct' as a set of rules by which one must abide.

Conclusion 3: 7 in 10 students/graduates believe they are legally obliged to abide by a legally enforced code of conduct when practicing their profession.

- ✓ 3 in 4 respondents (74%) stated that the terms 'code of ethics' and 'code of conduct' do not refer to the same thing while another 14% believe that these two terms refer to the same thing.
- ✓ When asked to define the term 'code of conduct', most respondents indicated that this refers to a set of rules by which one must abide while others stated that it is a set of guidelines for professionals.
- ✓ 71% of the respondents indicated that the practice of their profession comes with the obligation to abide by a legally enforced code of conduct while another 13% indicated their profession does not come with such an obligation.
- ✓ Furthermore, when respondents were asked to indicate the source from where they may obtain a code of conduct for their profession, the responses varied according to the profession in question. However, the most mentioned sources were online, Government institutions and the relevant institution for the respondent's profession.

- ***Professional ethics in students/graduates' course of studies and/ or profession***

Conclusion 1: 1 in 2 students/graduates have had specific modules related to 'professional ethics' in their course of studies to date.

Conclusion 2: 1 in 3 students/graduates disagree/completely disagree that there is/was sufficient training on 'professional ethics' in their course of studies.

Conclusion 3: 9 in 10 students/graduates agree/completely agree that 'there is value in having professional ethics in one's training'.

Conclusion 4: 1 in 2 students/graduates received a good/very good impression of professional ethics from their first contact with professionals in their field.

- ✓ Half of the respondents (51%) indicated that they have had specific modules related to 'professional ethics' in their course of studies to date. This was indicated by more than half of the students who have completed their final year of studies and who have graduated in 2016/2017 while only 32% of the first-year students indicated this. Another 42% of the respondents did not have such specific modules to date.

- ✓ Furthermore, 37% of the respondents agree/completely agree that there is/was sufficient training on 'professional ethics' in their course of studies while another 1 in 3 respondents (33%) disagree/completely disagree. 27% of the respondents were of a neutral opinion in this regard.
- ✓ A very high 91% of the respondents indicated a level of agreement for the statement, 'there is value in having professional ethics in one's training' while another 7% neither agreed nor disagreed. Only a mere 1% disagreed/completely disagreed with this statement.
- ✓ 1 in 2 respondents (50%) rated their impression of professional ethics as good/very good based on their first contact with professionals in their field while another 35% rated this as average. Another low 6% of the respondents rated their impression of this as bad/very bad.

- ***Ethics-related knowledge and information***

Conclusion 1: 3 in 5 students/graduates received knowledge and information about the code of ethics on their profession.

Conclusion 2: 2 in 5 students/graduates received knowledge and information about the code of ethics on their profession from lectures at University, while 1 in 5 students/graduates obtained such information by doing their own research.

- ✓ 3 in 5 respondents (61%) have received knowledge and information about the code of ethics on their profession to date while 33% of the respondents have not received such knowledge.
- ✓ Of the 364 respondents who have received knowledge and information about the code of ethics on their profession, 37% indicated that they received this knowledge and information from lectures at University, while another 20% obtained this information by doing their own research. Following, 19% and 17% received this information from their work placement and from their employer respectively.

- ***The relevance of ethics to students/graduates' profession***

Conclusion 1: 9 in 10 students/graduates believe that the relevance of 'ethics' to their profession is important/extremely important.

Conclusion 2: A high 93% of students/graduates believe that the relevance of 'ethics' when dealing with clients is important/extremely important.

- ✓ A positive 90% of the respondents indicated that the relevance of 'ethics' to their profession is important/extremely important while another 8% were of a neutral opinion in this regard. Only a mere 2% rated this as not important/ not at all important.
- ✓ A majority of 93% indicated that the relevance of 'ethics' when dealing with clients is important/extremely important. Another 3% were of a neutral opinion while a very low 1% indicated that this is not important/ not at all important.