

China's 11.6m graduates face a jobs market with no jobs

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. In pairs or groups, brainstorm jobs that require each level of education.

a secondary-school diploma	trade-school certification	an undergraduate degree	a postgraduate degree

b. Do you think the education requirements for these jobs are appropriate? Why (not)?

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

abandoned

burden

bureaucratic

diminished

frustrated

hostile

labour market

pretentious

qualifications

recruiter

recruitment

resigned

scholar

subsidy

trainee

- _____ is the process of finding people to join a company, organisation, or the military.
- A _____ person feels annoyed or impatient because something is not happening as expected.
- The _____ is the number of people who are available to work compared with the number of jobs available.
- Someone behaving in a very unfriendly or threatening way towards someone else is being _____.
- Someone who studies a particular subject and knows a lot about it is a(n) _____.
- Someone who behaves to impress people but does it in a way that seems fake or deliberate is _____.
- _____ are abilities or qualities needed to do a particular job or activity.
- A _____ is a serious or complex responsibility that someone must deal with.

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9. Something that is _____ is reduced in amount, size or importance.
10. Someone whose job is to get someone to work in a company or join an organisation is a _____.
11. A _____ is someone who is learning how to do a particular profession or job.
12. Something that is _____ is left empty or no longer used.
13. Something that is _____ involves a lot of complicated rules, details and processes.
14. A _____ is money that the government or another organisation pays to help to reduce the cost of a product or service.
15. When you are _____ to something, you accept that something unpleasant must happen, and you cannot change it.

b. Use some of the key words from the previous task to complete these sentences.

1. They always mention important or famous people they've met when we hang out. It's so _____!
2. What are the _____ listed in the job description for the Marketing Manager position?
3. After she dumped him, he felt very _____ toward his ex-girlfriend.
4. I felt very _____ after going through five interviews and then being rejected for the job.
5. At the careers fair, I spoke to a _____ from the banking industry about possible jobs and gave her my CV.
6. The department manager started the _____ process to hire a new administrator for the team.
7. The _____ must go through six online courses to complete the training process.
8. That old, _____ house is creepy. Nobody has lived there in years.
9. He's almost done with his PhD. He's quite a _____!
10. After he lost his project files, he was _____ to starting all over again.

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With youth unemployment at a record high, the problem of overeducated young people is acute

Amy Hawkins

31 May, 2023

- 1 With a master's degree in applied linguistics from one of Australia's top universities, Ingrid Xie did not expect to end up working in a greengrocer's. But that was where she ended up after graduating from the University of Queensland in July 2022.
- 2 Xie did her undergraduate degree in China, studying English in the shade of palm trees at Hainan Tropical Ocean University. She went abroad for her master's because she thought that would help her find a better job.
- 3 But after working at a Korean supermarket in Brisbane for several months after graduating, in February, she decided to return to her home city of Kunming, in the southwest province of Yunnan, to find a job as an English teacher.
- 4 Xie soon discovered that "a lot of people studied abroad and want the same thing". She says a friend in the same city recently sat an English teacher recruitment test, along with about 100 other people. Her friend did not get the job.
- 5 Youth unemployment in China hit a record high in April, with 20.4% of 16- to 24-year-old job seekers unable to find work. Xie is 26 and has not managed to find a job in China since leaving higher education. "It makes me really frustrated," she says.
- 6 Nearly 11.6 million students are set to graduate in June, facing a labour market that looks increasingly hostile.
- 7 The problem of overeducated unemployed youths has become so severe that people have started comparing themselves to Kong Yiji, a fictional character from a story by Lu Xun, one of the greats of Chinese literature. Kong is a scholar-turned-beggar who is mocked by the locals at a tavern he drinks at for his pretentious ways.
- 8 State media has criticised these memes, accusing them of being self-centred and excessive. In March, the state media made a statement that said youths were "unwilling to engage in jobs that are lower than their expectations".
- 9 China's economy is suffering from a poor match between the jobs available and the qualifications of job seekers. Between 2018 and 2021, the number of graduates studying sports and education increased by more than 20%, according to Goldman Sachs.
- 10 But in 2021, the government suddenly banned for-profit tutoring, damaging an industry that had previously been worth \$150bn. That eased the homework burden for schoolchildren but destroyed jobs for young graduates, including Xie, who had previously looked at tutoring as a way of getting teaching experience.
- 11 The country is also struggling to fill jobs in the right places. Xie has seen job advertisements that require the teacher to work in a rural school for a year. "I don't like the idea of teaching in a rural area as it is hard to survive in that environment, especially for girls," she says.
- 12 Eric Fish, the author of a book about Chinese millennials, says the value of an international degree has diminished in China's jobs markets. "Some recruiters think that students might have inflated expectations or are too westernised."
- 13 The government is aware of the problem. In April, it published details of a set of policies designed to stimulate the jobs market, including subsidies for companies that hire unemployed university graduates. The government wants state-owned companies to recruit 1 million trainees in 2023 and has set an overall target of creating 12m urban jobs in 2023, up from 11m in 2022.
- 14 In 2023, the government also abandoned the use of the employment and registration certificate, a document that was used for decades to approve a graduate's transfer from a university to an employer.
- 15 Although the certificate was mostly bureaucratic in nature, its cancellation would "make it more convenient for university graduates to seek employment", the ministry of human resources and social security said in a notice on 12 May.

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- 16 China is not alone in struggling to rebalance its economy after the Covid pandemic. Researchers at Goldman Sachs noted that, in 2021, youth unemployment in several European countries was more than 20%, while in the US, it was close to 10%.
- 17 But the lack of opportunities also creates pressure to take any job regardless of interest, says Xie. "You don't even know what you want to do when you're 25." For now, she is resigned to spending a long time with her parents and looking after her cat, Shrimp. "What I'm looking for is enough free time and a job with a good work-life balance, but I can't find that."

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Where did Ingrid Xie work after graduating from the University of Queensland?
2. Why did she pursue her master's degree abroad?
3. What was China's youth unemployment rate in April 2023?
4. How many students will graduate in June 2023?
5. What is the story of the fictional character people are comparing themselves to?
6. Why is China's labour market suffering?
7. What are two effects of the ban on for-profit tutoring in 2021?
8. Why does Eric Fish think the value of an international degree has been reduced?
9. What are three policies the government created to help solve the problem?
10. What does Goldman Sachs' research say about youth unemployment in other countries?

4 Key language

a. Complete each sentence with one of the phrases from the article.

increased by

hit a record high

overeducated

lower than their expectations

1. The hybrid model has _____ 2% in 2023.
2. If you apply for an entry-level job with a PhD, they will probably say you are _____ for the role.
3. Remote work _____ during the pandemic.
4. After investing so much in their education, students don't want to take a job that is _____.

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b. Replace the word in each phrase from task a to create its opposite.

1. _____ by
2. hit a record _____
3. _____ educated
4. _____ than their expectations

c. Choose four of the phrases above (the original phrases or their opposites) and write personalised sentences using them.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Youth unemployment is not a problem because young people have many options and few responsibilities."
- "There should be more government policies to help young people find good jobs."
- "Studying abroad is worth it because it will help you find a better job."

6 In your own words

a. Use an internet search engine to find more information about the youth labour market in your country or another country.

- What is the unemployment rate for 16- to 24-year-olds?
- How does this compare to China?
- What do you think can be done to strengthen the labour market for recent graduates?

b. Report your findings to the class and share your opinions about the issue.