

# How Generative AI Is Changing Job-Hunting Students' Criteria for Choosing a Career

To Solve the Labor Shortage Problem (Vol. 11)

March 26, 2026

## Introduction

Driven by an awareness of the labor shortage problem, Xymax Research Institute has been releasing a series of reports entitled "To Solve the Labor Shortage Problem" since 2023. In this series, we categorized occupations as either "desk work" or "non-desk work," and noted that the labor supply and demand gap is likely to widen, particularly in non-desk work, potentially having a serious impact on society's functioning.

The shortage of non-desk workers stems from structural factors such as the decline and aging of the population. Meanwhile, in the desk work sector, advances in digital technologies—particularly generative AI—are rapidly driving the automation of tasks, regardless of whether they are routine or non-routine. Among U.S. IT companies and others that are leading the way in digital transformation (DX), there are clear signs of workforce adjustments and hiring freezes as they determine future labor demand. In Japan, against the backdrop of a severe labor shortage, a "reverse phenomenon" has begun to emerge in some sectors, where wage levels for blue-collar occupations such as automotive mechanics and construction workers are exceeding those of general office workers,<sup>\*1</sup> indicating a shift in the relative value of job types.

Until now, Japanese employment practices have been based on a membership-type employment system and the mass hiring of new graduates, effectively steering many university graduates toward career paths centered on desk work. However, if uncertainty surrounds the future demand for desk work, and the social and economic value of non-desk work, which is relatively difficult to replace with digital alternatives, is reevaluated, this could lead to changes in the career choices of young people. It is fair to say that the long-held assumption in Japanese society that university graduates engage in desk work is now beginning to crumble.

In fact, a survey of office workers conducted in September 2025 revealed that a significant number of respondents are considering non-desk work as a realistic option in light of societal changes.<sup>\*2</sup> This trend is particularly pronounced among younger generations, who are experiencing the impact of DX firsthand, suggesting that technological advancements are directly transforming individuals' career perspectives and risk perceptions.

This report presents an analysis based on a survey<sup>\*3</sup> of job-hunting students (undergraduate and graduate students), who are the potential workforce at the forefront of these structural changes. Clarifying how they perceive the impact of DX on their work and what interests and barriers they feel regarding non-desk work will likely provide important insights for considering the future of a sustainable labor market.

\*1 Source: *Changes in 'High-Paying Jobs'—The Polarization of Wage Growth Among Blue-Collar Workers*. Recruit Works Institute

\*2 *Views of Future of Work by Age Group: Insights from the Office Worker Survey: Comparing the Impact of Digital Transformation and Interest in Non-Desk Work—To Resolve the Labor Shortage Problem (Vol. 10)*, published on December 8, 2025  
[https://www.xymax.co.jp/english/assets/pdf/news\\_research/20251208.pdf](https://www.xymax.co.jp/english/assets/pdf/news_research/20251208.pdf)

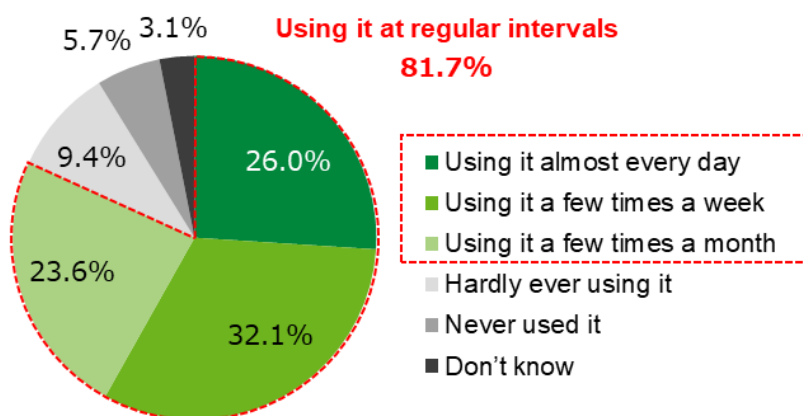
\*3 *2026 Survey on Job-Hunting Students' Attitudes Toward Company Selection in Greater Tokyo*, published on March 12, 2026 (in Japanese only)  
[https://soken.xymax.co.jp/report/2603-job\\_hunting\\_students\\_survey\\_2026.html](https://soken.xymax.co.jp/report/2603-job_hunting_students_survey_2026.html)

# 1. The Impact of Digital Transformation (DX)

In this chapter, we will focus on the impact of DX on individuals.

First, when we asked respondents about their typical use of generative AI, a total of 81.7% indicated that they use it either "almost every day," "a few times a week," or "a few times a month" (Figure 1). It is fair to say that today's job-hunting students belong to a generation that uses generative AI on a daily basis even before entering the workforce.

**Figure 1: Frequency of Generative AI Usage**

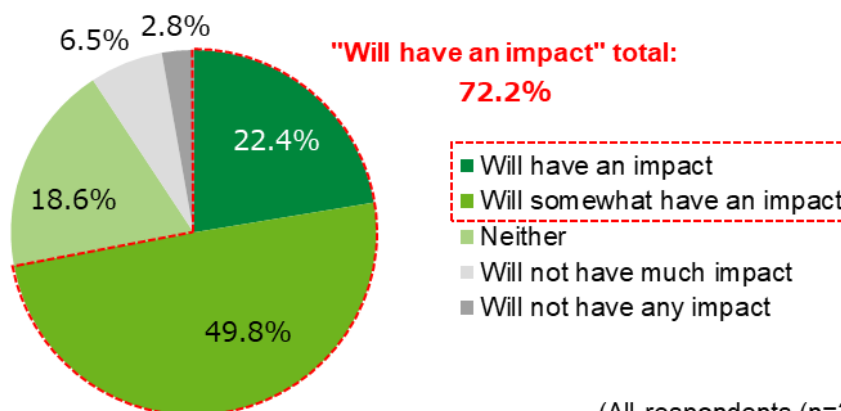


(All respondents (n=300))

All charts in this report are weighted to reflect the composition ratios of the same survey conducted in 2024. The number of respondents is 300 both before and after weighting. See Survey Overview for details.

Next, we asked whether respondents believed DX (e.g., the use of generative AI and the introduction of robots) would affect their work or career after starting a job. The results showed that 72.2% of respondents answered that they believed DX "will (somewhat) have an impact," significantly exceeding the 9.3% who said DX "will not have much/any impact" (Figure 2). It can be said that the vast majority of job-hunting students feel that it is difficult to predict how their careers will unfold due to societal changes, even before they begin working.

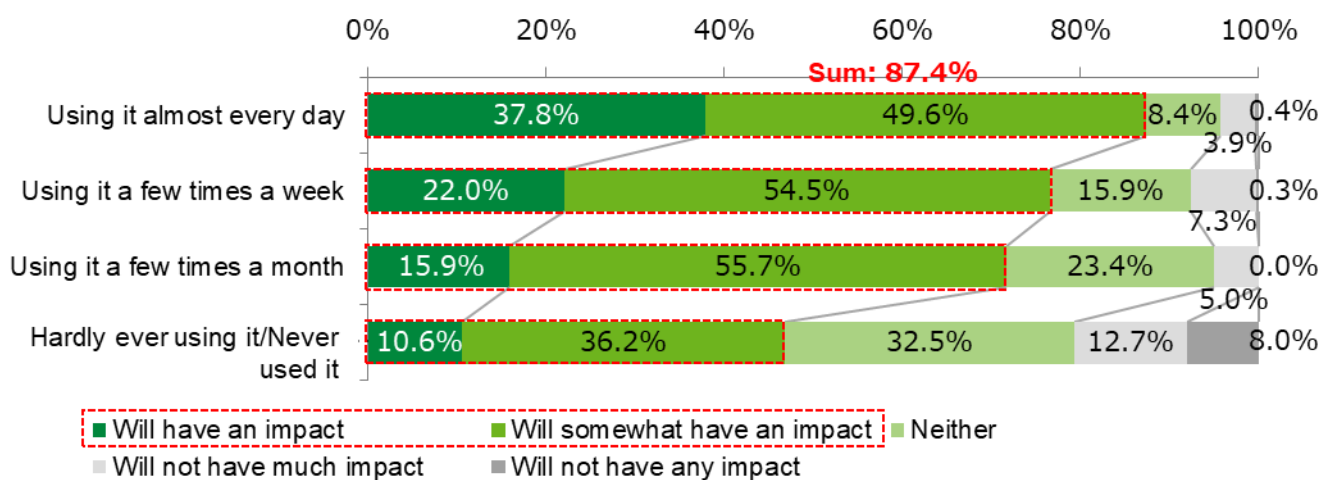
**Figure 2: Impact of DX on One's Work and Career**



(All respondents (n=300))

When comparing the perceived impact of DX on one’s work and career by generative AI usage frequency, as shown in Figure 1, we found that the proportion of respondents who answered “Will (somewhat) have an impact,” is higher among those who use generative AI more frequently (Figure 3). Among those who reported using generative AI “almost every day,” 87.4% answered “Will (somewhat) have an impact,” showing a significant difference compared to the group that answered “Hardly ever using it/Never used it” (46.8%).

**Figure 3: Impact of DX on One’s Work and Career – By Generative AI Usage Frequency**



(Excluding 'Don't know' AI usage frequency)

When we asked respondents who answered “Will (somewhat) have an impact” in Figure 2 to describe the specifics in an open-ended format, we identified several different types of responses. The most common response was about job losses caused by technology. Although this survey did not identify the specific industries or job types that respondents were targeting in their job search, it is reasonable to assume that many of the respondents were expecting to secure desk work positions, given Japanese employment practices. Consequently, it appears that they have a strong sense of urgency regarding future changes in labor demand driven by advances in digital technology.

The following are typical examples of responses for each type.

**Specific Impacts and Changes to Work Due to DX (Open-Ended Responses, Excerpted)**

- **Fears of job loss:** The most common response relate to the automation of jobs by technologies such as generative AI, leading to unemployment or reduced pay. There are also concerns that overreliance on technology may lead to a decline in human capabilities.

Examples: “I will lose my job or see my salary decrease as my work is replaced by AI or machines,” “Staff reductions due to operational efficiency improvements,” “The skills I’ve specialized in will be replaced by AI,” “Job options will become limited,” “Younger employees will become redundant,” “One’s ability to think independently will decline,” “The efforts I put into research will become obsolete,” “My workload will decrease, leading to fewer opportunities for growth,” “AI provides answers that are smarter than mine.”

- **Impact on specific job types:** There were references to the direct impact on specific job roles (such as accounting, development, and reception).

Examples: "The accounting field is seeing a massive influx of AI, and in a few years, AI will likely take over almost all of our jobs," "I plan to pursue a career in development, but if AI starts writing codes, I might have no choice but to switch to consulting or similar roles," "Receptionist duties will be handled by machines," "I'm hoping to work in an accounting role, but while accounting software is likely to become more convenient, I think eventually human involvement will no longer be necessary."

- **Expectations for improved operational efficiency and productivity:** There were also positive views regarding the reduction of the workload on human workers as a result of streamlining, labor saving, and time saving of work.

Examples: "Time savings," "Productivity will increase," "I think mistakes will be reduced and I will be able to engage in more complex tasks," "Reduced work hours will let me prioritize my personal life," "Since I work in a clerical role, I wonder if AI might take over some of my tasks," "Costs will be reduced due to improved operational efficiency and productivity," "DX will be a catalyst for lifestyle changes such as remote work."

- **Increasing complexity of job duties and higher workload:** While accepting that more sophisticated and creative tasks will be required and that workloads will increase, they also feel anxious about this. There are also concerns that as digitalization advances, corporate control will become stricter.

Examples: "Systematic tasks will disappear, and creative thinking will be required," "There will be more work that relies on ideas," "More advanced skills will be required," "Work will become more demanding as we're expected to achieve results that surpass those of AI," "Production speed will increase, making work more strenuous," "I think tasks that anyone can do just by reading a manual can be replaced by AI," "Working hours and labor will likely be strictly managed."

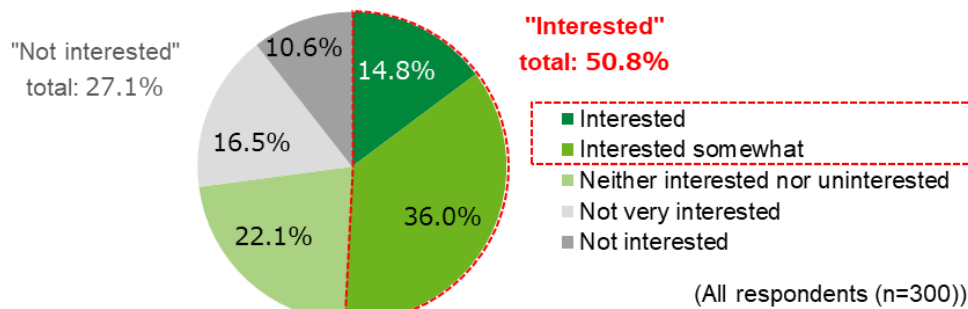
- **Changes in Skill Demand and Career Structures:** There is a strong recognition that the ability to effectively utilize AI will make a difference in one's career, with mention of the possibility of changes to promotion models and evaluation criteria. Some respondents also noted that human-specific qualities, such as interpersonal skills, will become increasingly important.

Examples: "We're heading toward a society where you can't get promoted unless you adapt to digital technology," "Mastering generative AI will become essential for career advancement," "Evaluation methods will change," "Competition among humans in areas where DX cannot be implemented will intensify, and you won't be able to secure a management position or a high salary unless you have high abilities," "Interpersonal skills will be in demand," "Since the focus of work is shifting toward 'interpersonal relationships,' I think you can build a career by continuously honing your interpersonal skills," "As labor-saving measures advance, greater emphasis will be placed on specialization."

## 2. Changes in Job Selection and Interest in Non-Desk Work

When we asked respondents about their level of interest in engaging in non-desk work in the future, a total of 50.8%—a majority—said they were “(somewhat) interested,” significantly outnumbering those who said they were “not (very) interested” (27.1%) (Figure 4). In a survey of office workers conducted in 2025, the percentage of those who were “(somewhat) interested” was 35.3%, lower than the percentage among job-hunting students.

**Figure 4: Level of Interest in Engaging in Non-Desk Work in the Future**

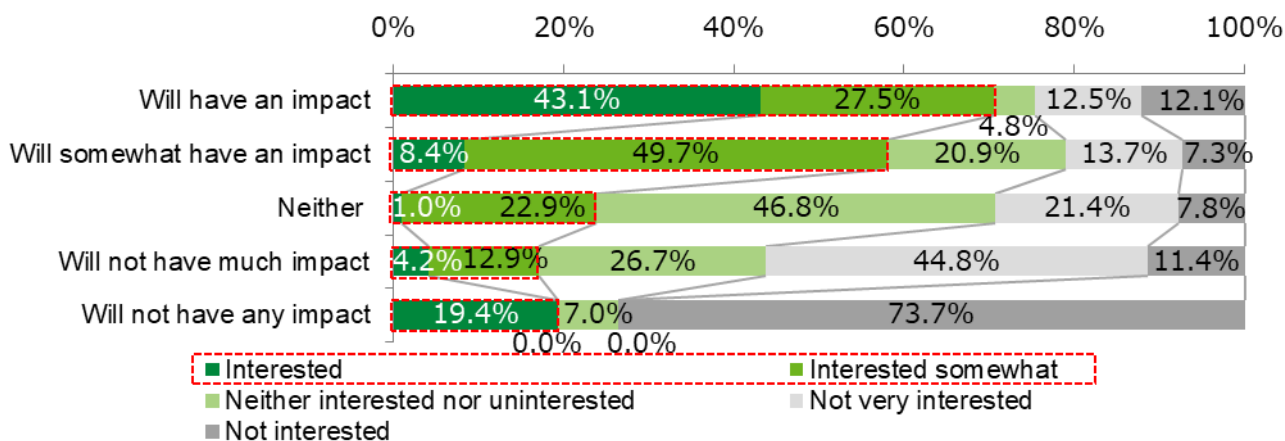


**Full text of question:** An increasing number of people are working past the age of 60 due to a decline in the labor force and an increase in healthy life expectancy. In particular, non-desk work\* is facing a severe labor shortage compared to desk work, which is becoming more efficient due to AI, and is expected to see an increase in demand for labor. A rise in demand is expected to improve wages, and in the United States, there has been a reversal in wages between some non-desk work and desk work. Given these social situations, are you interested in doing non-desk work in the future? Please select the one that most applies to you.  
 \*Non-desk work: Refers to occupations primarily performed in on-site or face-to-face settings. They include a wide range of occupations in sectors that support everyday life and society, such as healthcare/nursing care, childcare, facility management, logistics, sales, service, security, cleaning, and construction. They are characterized by the ease of acquiring specialized skills through practical on-site experience, which can be developed into long-term, marketable expertise.

When comparing these results by the impact of DX on work and career (Figure 2), we observed a trend in which the groups that felt the strongest impact of DX were more likely to express interest in non-desk work (Figure 5).

Advances in digital technology have the potential to transform the structure of labor demand for desk work by streamlining and automating knowledge-based tasks. It is reasonable to believe that job-hunting students who are keenly aware of this trend are less likely to be bound by traditional career views and are instead considering jobs that involve on-site or face-to-face operations as options for their future.

**Figure 5: Level of Interest in Engaging in Non-Desk Work in the Future – By Impact of DX on Work and Career**



(Excluding 'Don't know' AI usage frequency)

To explore the values underlying the interest in non-desk-based work, we then asked respondents to provide open-ended explanations for their level of interest in non-desk work and reviewed their responses.

When analyzing the responses by interest in non-desk work, the group that expressed interest had many responses indicating that they had a concrete vision of what working in non-desk roles would entail, based on reasons such as having originally aspired to such work or having prior part-time experience. On the other hand, among the group that expressed no interest, the most common reason cited was that they could not visualize what non-desk jobs or work styles would be like. In other words, this suggests that whether or not one can visualize what non-desk work actually entails may be a factor influencing one’s level of interest. Below are typical examples of responses for each type.

**Reasons for Level of Interest in Non-Desk Work (Open-Ended Responses, Excerpted)**

**[Interested in non-desk work]**

- Preferred job type or career path is non-desk work:** Many respondents expressed interest in non-desk work as a natural choice, as the job they originally aimed for or their current part-time job falls under the category of non-desk work.

Examples: “Because the career I want to pursue involves non-desk work,” “Because I am applying for a position in psychology, which involves non-desk work,” “Because I want to pursue a career in the medical field,” “Because I currently have a part-time job that involves non-desk work.”
- Expectations for future prospects and a risk-averse mindset:** Against the backdrop of uncertainty surrounding the demand for desk jobs, there is a noticeable tendency to choose jobs that are relatively “less likely to disappear.”

Examples: “Because it’s unlikely to be replaced by AI,” “Because it’s a job that won’t disappear,” “Because it’s needed everywhere,” “Because desk jobs seem likely to disappear,” “I’d be willing to engage in a non-desk job if I could expect a pay raise commensurate with the risk,” “I think jobs that involve communicating with people will remain in the future.”
- The appeal of “marketable expertise” and continuing to work after retirement:** A segment of the respondents seeks to acquire specialized skills and build careers centered on professional

expertise. The possibility of continuing to work for a long time after retirement is also recognized as an attractive feature.

Examples: "Having a specialized skill set sets you apart," "Non-desk work allows you to hone specialized skills," "It's the kind of work only that person can do," "I read reports that there's a shift from white-collar to blue-collar jobs in the U.S.," "You can continue earning even after retirement, providing both fulfillment and income," "You can continue working for a long time."

- **Lifestyle-oriented, burden-averse:** Some respondents highlighted the appeal of flexibility—not being tied to a specific location or time—or prefer non-desk work based on the impression that the option seems less burdensome. These include responses based on vague impressions.

Examples: "I think I'll be able to work more freely," "I will be able to work from wherever I want," "I'll have more free time," "I think I'll be able to enjoy a more fulfilling personal life," "I'll probably be able to work more efficiently and achieve a better work-life balance," "I won't have to go into the office," "I think I'll be able to work in a way that suits me," "I want to prioritize my own time," "It looks easier," "It seems less tiring," "I won't have to interact much with others," "I will be able to work without worrying about others."

- **Health and on-site-oriented:** Some respondents considered physical activity and on-site work to be valuable. This is partly motivated by a desire to avoid the physical strain of desk work.

Examples: "I want to be physically active," "For my health," "It's a nice change of pace," "Because I like field work," "It doesn't seem likely to cause stiff shoulders or worsening eyesight."

- **Curiosity and positive interest:** Rather than rational judgment, there was also an interest in the unknown and novelty.

Examples: "It sounds interesting," "I want to give it a try," "It's something new to me," "It made me feel excited," "I thought the idea of not being tied to desk work was fresh and appealing."

**[Not interested / Neither interested nor uninterested in non-desk work]**

- **Lack of concrete understanding:** The most common response was that respondents could not visualize the specific job duties or work style, and therefore lacked the information needed to make a decision. This suggests the existence of a group that lacks sufficient information and understanding, regardless of whether they are interested or not.

Examples: "It's hard to imagine," "I don't really understand it," "I can't picture how the work would be done," "It doesn't seem very realistic," "It doesn't cross my mind," "It doesn't resonate with me."

- **Mismatch with desired job type, preference for desk work:** Some respondents indicated that the job or career they are aiming for is primarily desk-based and that they are not considering non-desk work as an option. There are also a number of respondents who simply do not want to engage in non-desk work.

Examples: "I want to do desk work," "I don't think desk work will ever become obsolete," "I have bookkeeping certification, and I want to try my hand at accounting," "It's not the type of job I want to do," "I'm not interested in the nature of the job," "I don't feel like doing it."

- **Concerns about poor working conditions and physical/mental strain:** There is a sense of unease regarding the "3K" (*Kitsui* (hard), *Kitanai* (dirty), and *Kiken* (dangerous)) and other negative

stereotypes associated with non-desk work, as well as vague concerns about the heavy physical and mental demands and low pay.

Examples: “The pay isn’t good at the moment,” “The pay seems low for how physically demanding the work is (though I think I could be satisfied with a lower salary if the work is rewarding),” “The work seems harder than desk work,” “Standing all day is tough,” “It’s an unstable job,” “It has a strong reputation for being exploitative,” “It seems physically and mentally demanding.”

- **Concerns about suitability:** Some responses cited a mismatch between one’s personality or traits and the job, such as a reluctance to engage in customer-facing work or physical labor.

Examples: “I don’t think it suits me,” “I don’t think I’m cut out for customer-facing work,” “I’m not good at jobs that involve interacting with people,” “I feel that physical labor isn’t for me,” “I don’t have the physical stamina.”

- **Uncertainty about the future and a wait-and-see attitude:** Some respondents indicated that, while they cannot yet fully assess the future job market or their own aptitudes, they do not actively rule out the possibility of engaging in non-desk work; rather, they wish to make flexible choices based on changes in social conditions and their life stage.

Examples: “I don’t know what the future holds yet,” “I won’t know until I start working and see how things go,” “There are pros and cons,” “I can’t really say either way,” “I might do non-desk work when I’m older, but I don’t think I need to while I’m young.”

## Summary

In this report, we examined the impact of DX—and, in particular, the widespread adoption of generative AI—on the career choices of young people. This survey revealed that today’s job-hunting students belong to a generation that has been using generative AI on a daily basis even before entering the workforce, and they perceive the potential of digital technology to transform the nature of work not as an abstract concept but as a tangible reality. The open-ended responses revealed numerous concerns about job displacement and the obsolescence of skills, as well as the recognition that one’s ability to master AI will determine their future. This suggests that the traditional assumption that graduating from college and joining a company guarantees a stable career is no longer a given.

This shift in mindset has also led to an interest in non-desk work. As the outlook of demand for desk work becomes uncertain, traditional career paths are being called into question, and jobs that require on-site experience and specialized skills—which are relatively harder to replace—are emerging as realistic alternatives. The interest in non-desk work observed among young people can be interpreted as a reflection of their awareness of the risks associated with technological advancements and their preference for job stability.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Japanese employment practices have long been based on a system that integrates university graduates into desk work. However, as advances in digital technology are changing the very nature of labor demand, that assumption may need to be reevaluated. The labor market may be approaching a structural turning point, as evidenced by the reversal in wage levels between certain

blue-collar and white-collar positions. The shift in career attitudes among young people observed in this survey can be seen as one indication of this trend.

Xymax Research Institute is currently calculating the likelihood of jobs being replaced by generative AI and robotics across various occupations in order to gain a more quantitative understanding of these structural changes. By doing so, we are exploring strategies to address labor shortages in non-desk work sectors. We plan to continue providing insights to help forecast the future of the labor market.

### Survey Overview

<b>Survey title</b>	2026 Survey on Job-Hunting Students' Attitudes Toward Company Selection in Greater Tokyo
<b>Survey period</b>	December 26, 2025 – January 6, 2026
<b>Target respondents</b>	Third-year undergraduates and graduate students living in Greater Tokyo whose job-hunting status is: "Have secured a job and ended job search," "Currently job hunting," or "Plan to start job hunting soon." *Target universities: A total of 39 universities located in Greater Tokyo (Keio University, Sophia University, The University of Tokyo, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Institute of Science Tokyo, University of Tsukuba, Hitotsubashi University, Yokohama National University, Waseda University, and others), as well as graduate schools located in Greater Tokyo
<b>Sample size</b>	300 responses collected; 300 respondents after weighting For details of the weighting methodology, please refer to the <i>2026 Survey on Job-Hunting Students' Attitudes Toward Company Selection in Greater Tokyo</i> , published on March 12, 2026 (in Japanese only).
<b>Survey method</b>	Online survey

The percentage mix in the charts contained in this report is rounded to the first decimal place and, therefore, may not add up to 100%.

### For further inquiries, please contact below:

**Xymax Research Institute**

<https://soken.xymax.co.jp> | E-MAIL: [info-rei@xymax.co.jp](mailto:info-rei@xymax.co.jp)