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Working while Studying: a Follow-up to  
the Student Income and Expenditure  
Survey 2011/12

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RESEARCH

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

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# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>11</b>
1.1 Research aims .....	11
1.2 Findings from the main survey .....	11
1.3 Methodology .....	17
1.4 Final achieved sample .....	20
1.5 Report structure .....	21
<b>2 What work do students do?</b> .....	<b>23</b>
2.1 Current and previous work (all types) of students .....	23
2.2 History of paid work .....	28
2.3 Perceptions of the quality of work .....	28
2.4 Current jobs of new graduates .....	31
<b>3 Motivations for working while studying</b> .....	<b>33</b>
3.1 Reasons for taking on paid work .....	33
3.2 Motivations for undertaking work placements and voluntary work .....	37
3.3 Extent of real choice over actual work experiences .....	39
<b>4 Process of gaining work</b> .....	<b>42</b>
4.1 Finding work .....	42
4.2 Finding jobs after graduation .....	45
4.3 Areas of support received .....	46
4.4 Further support respondents would have liked .....	48

<b>5</b>	<b>Challenges of working whilst studying</b> .....	<b>49</b>
5.1	Difficulties of working while studying .....	49
5.2	Are students working too much?.....	55
5.3	Overcoming challenges.....	55
<b>6</b>	<b>Benefits to students of working</b> .....	<b>60</b>
6.1	Positive experience .....	60
6.2	Range of benefits .....	61
6.3	Developing transferable skills.....	64
6.4	Impact on current studies and future work opportunities.....	65
<b>7</b>	<b>Benefits for graduates of working</b> .....	<b>69</b>
7.1	Immediate benefits whilst studying.....	69
7.2	Benefits to career after graduation .....	70
<b>8</b>	<b>Summary and conclusions</b> .....	<b>74</b>
8.1	Introduction.....	74
8.2	Key findings.....	74
8.3	Recommendations .....	80
8.4	Final thoughts.....	82
	<b>Appendix: Topic guides</b> .....	<b>84</b>

# Executive Summary

This qualitative study examines in depth the work experiences of 59 respondents to the Student Income and Expenditure Survey (SIES) 2011/12, to build on findings from the survey and gain a deeper understanding of the motivations to work, the nature of work undertaken, and the challenges and benefits of working alongside studying in higher education (HE). The individuals sampled for the study were full-time students in the 2011/12 academic year and were known to have undertaken paid work. They were drawn from a range of backgrounds including those studying in English and Welsh institutions, in higher education and further education institutions, and those who received grant-based financial support and those who did not. Approximately half of those interviewed were still studying (current students) at the time of the interview in spring 2013, and half had graduated and were in the labour market (new graduates).

The research focuses on all types of work undertaken while studying. This can include both paid and unpaid work such as internships, placements<sup>1</sup> and volunteering; employment and self employment; work related to courses and wider work; and work that the university/college helped the student to get and work that they found for themselves. Paid work includes continuous work – jobs that students have throughout the year, and casual work – jobs that tend to be occasional and shorter in duration.

## Key findings

- Many students expect to work and indeed working whilst studying is common. Students often have a history of undertaking paid work prior to their HE studies and have a well developed work ethic.
- Students may juggle several work activities alongside their studies (and as such are portfolio workers). They work hard, with some working long and unsocial hours, but try to balance their paid and unpaid work experiences with their study commitments.
- There are four types of student work activity: **paid work** (*'student work'*) which tends to be part-time and generally un-related to the course and not regarded as a career job; **university-based work**, working with or for universities, this tends to be paid and easy to acquire yet sporadic and involve only a few hours; **voluntary work** which is unpaid, and tends to involve a regular commitment and to be organised by the student themselves; and **work placements**, again in the main unpaid, but these tend to be a compulsory part of a course and facilitated by the university or college.
- There are three types of work that graduates do: **stop-gap work** which mirrors or is a continuation of student work; **transition work** which tends to be full-time, offer networking and/or training opportunities and although not yet a graduate job may evolve to become so over time or lead to better opportunities; and **graduate work**, roles that

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the terminology can be used inter-changeably. However generally placements are longer (up to one year) and internships are shorter (two to six months work experience)

are related to the study discipline or intended career, tend to be full-time, better paid and offer more challenge, responsibility and opportunity to use and further develop graduate skills.

- The quality of paid student work is judged very differently to the quality of placements and the quality of graduate work. Good *student work* is about flexibility, convenience and ease; *placement work* is about relevance and practice; *graduate work* is about challenge, responsibility and opportunity.
- Where possible, students select work they can fit around their studies so flexibility is critical: with continuous work they look to flex their hours, with casual work they flex the jobs (picking up and dropping jobs when necessary).
- Students are proactive about finding student work (paid work) during their studies. Feeling this is something they need to do for themselves, they tend not to expect any explicit help or support from their universities and colleges to find paid work as students. However they do recognise that the development of job getting skills is built into some courses, as are opportunities to network with employers; and course tutors, particularly on more vocational or professionally oriented courses, can provide tailored information and advice about job roles and employers to target. Despite the apparent lack of need, universities and colleges could provide support to students, particularly those in the early stages of their courses, to identify and secure suitable opportunities. Where relevant activities and services are already provided by institutions, these need to be made more visible and acceptable.
- Where possible, students do try to target the paid work they do – looking for roles that would suit them (having the characteristics of a good student job) and that they would be suited for (fitting in with their experience or course). Students seek out specific jobs and vacancies using online resources, local papers, Jobcentre Plus and university job-shops. They also use informal networks of friends, family and fellow students, and make speculative applications direct to employers.
- Many students undertake paid work as shop assistants and customer service assistants, bar, catering and waiting staff, and care workers and these types of work meet students' needs for flexibility and convenience. They also work with their universities and colleges in these types of roles (on campus) and in other roles such as student ambassador, representative or mentor supporting other students and prospective students.
- Student work is driven primarily by financial need: to meet an immediate or critical need; to cover a shortfall in other forms of student support; to top-up income to provide a better student experience; or to help towards future goals. It also enables students to share the responsibility for meeting the costs of their study, provides them with a sense of financial independence, and develops skills in managing finances. Secondary motivations include taking time out from study, meeting new people, keeping busy and having new experiences. Employability considerations are part of the mix but for most students they are a secondary if not tertiary reason for undertaking paid work.

- However, employability considerations are key when taking on unpaid work placements, particularly if students have to give up paid work or juggle placements alongside paid work. Students need to plan ahead and can adopt a number of strategies to allow them to take on short-term unpaid placements: moving back home to reduce their expenses, and/or increasing their paid work hours for a short period to save up followed by reduced hours or suspending their paid work. Institutions and employers need to be aware that the ability to take up unpaid placements may therefore be hampered by existing work commitments or the need to maintain work income. Placements may be more accessible or appealing if they too are flexible: shorter, less intense (spread over more days) or taking place during vacations.
- Generally students appreciate the opportunity to undertake a work placement but not all students take up placements because they are not interested and feel placements would unnecessarily extend their course and delay graduation, they may feel that placements are not appropriate for their career goals, or they feel they already have sufficient work experience.
- Yet the main benefit of working, unpaid and paid, is seen as improved longer-term employability and improved opportunities for graduate employment. Students believe that employers want more than just academic qualifications and so work experience, regardless of relevance to course or career goals, shows them to be 'well rounded individuals' with a range of life and work experiences and interests, with labour market insight, able to cope in different situations and able to interact with people from a variety of backgrounds. Work is perceived to develop and demonstrate a number of attributes and transferable skills that students feel employers will value:

Transferable skills	Attributes
Team-working	Self confidence
Customer service	Self discipline, self management
Numeracy/handling money	Managing stress, coping under pressure, resilience
Communication skills and presentation skills	Independence
Interpersonal/personal skills, conflict handling and dealing with difficult people	Initiative, motivation
Organisational skills, time management and multi-tasking	Patience, tolerance and empathy
Decision-making	Assertiveness
Language skills	Responsibility, reliability
Leadership	Professionalism.

- Student work can also provide a number of practical outputs: prepared CVs, experience of an application and selection process, opportunities to develop networks and contacts, and employer references.

- All work provides benefits but relevant work (to the programme of study or intended career direction) is better as this can ease the transition between studying and working after leaving HE.
- Student work is not without its challenges, and students may experience difficulties in balancing their time between work and study and if this balance is tipped too far towards work, it can make them tired and can impact negatively on the quality of their studies and their student experience. Balance is therefore critical and students stress the importance of keeping a focus on study and of limiting the number of hours worked (to between 10 and 15 hours per week if possible), particularly in term-time and especially around exam periods, key assignments and in the final year of study.
- Tutors need to be able to spot the danger signs of over-work such as: missing lectures, late work, poor quality work, tiredness or ill-health; and recognise that these students might need additional help. Help here could involve: advice about the most suitable work to target and hours to work, advice on how to negotiate with employers to reduce hours, help with organising and managing time effectively, being flexible with assignment deadlines, and directing towards other sources of financial support.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Research aims

The aim of the research was to undertake a qualitative and in-depth follow-up of full-time undergraduate respondents to the Student Income and Expenditure Survey (SIES) 2011/12 and to interview a sample of those known to have been in paid work at some point during the 2011/12 academic year, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and views about paid work among full-time students who are also working. More specifically the research aimed to understand:

- Why students work while studying
- What kinds of work they do (including paid work and volunteering, work related to courses and wider work)
- How they choose or find their jobs
- What support their institutions provide in finding work and what support might have been helpful
- What are the immediate and longer-term benefits and challenges of working while studying full-time.

The research therefore contributes evidence about why students take up work in particular types of jobs while studying, and it allows for an investigation of the differences between the experiences of full-time students who have a 'continuous' or regular job and those who have a 'casual' job. It builds on findings from the main SIES survey (which took place in spring 2012) using qualitative research techniques with a range of current students and new graduates.

The research focuses on all types of work undertaken while studying. This can include both paid and unpaid work such as internships, placements<sup>1</sup> and volunteering; employment and self employment; work related to courses and wider work; and work that the university/college helped the student to get and work that they found for themselves.

## 1.2 Findings from the main survey

Before presenting the findings from the follow-up research it is worth setting out some of the relevant quantitative findings from the main SIES survey concerning the importance, prevalence and nature of the work that students do alongside their studies; and providing a

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the terminology can be used inter-changeably. However generally placements are longer (up to one year) and internships are shorter (two to six months work experience)

brief introduction to the main survey itself. For further information about the survey and the detailed findings about income from paid work, see the full report for England<sup>1</sup>.

### 1.2.1 A brief introduction to the SIES 2011/12

The Student Income and Expenditure Survey 2011/12 is the latest in the series of surveys which are the most detailed, comprehensive and authoritative assessment undertaken of the income and expenditure of students in higher education (HE) in England and Wales. Surveys have been undertaken at regular intervals since the mid 1980s to track the financial position of HE students and measure the impact of changes in funding and support. The latest survey in 2011/12 presents an objective and statistically robust picture of the financial position of HE students in the academic year 2011/12, collecting accurate estimates of income, expenditure and debt and how this differs depending on students' background and circumstances. This survey is particularly important as it provides a baseline for assessing the impact of the greatest changes in student finance for some considerable time, changes that were introduced in September 2012 for new starters in the 2012/13 academic year.

The survey covers both full-time and part-time English and Welsh-domiciled students at HE institutions (HEIs) and further education colleges (FECs) and includes Open University students. It covers students participating in designated undergraduate courses including first degree, Higher National Diplomas/Certificates, Foundation Degrees or in university-based initial teacher training courses. Students on a paid placement year or studying overseas during the 2011/12 academic year were excluded (but the sample will include those with placement activity built into their courses). Overall the study covered 96 institutions, and over 5,000 students<sup>2</sup> were surveyed between February and June 2012 (via online survey or telephone interview<sup>3</sup>).

### 1.2.2 Findings from the survey

The SIES survey captures detail on the income that students receive, so when exploring work it focuses only on paid work rather than covering unpaid work (volunteering) and placement activity. Students were asked a number of questions about earnings from paid work undertaken at any time during the academic year, including money from a part-time (or even full-time) job and money they may have earned casually or occasionally. They were asked about the number of jobs they have (or had), and for each the start and

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<sup>1</sup> Pollard E, Hunt W, Hillage J, Drever E, Chanfreau J, Coutinho S and Poole E (2013) Student Income and Expenditure Survey 2011/12, BIS Research Paper 115.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/209389/bis-13-P190-student-income-expenditure-survey-2011-12.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209389/bis-13-P190-student-income-expenditure-survey-2011-12.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> 2,986 full-time English-domiciled students, 927 part-time English-domiciled students, 914 full-time Welsh-domiciled students, and 180 part-time Welsh-domiciled students responded to the survey. The survey used a two stage sampling approach to select students: firstly institutions were selected randomly but roughly proportional to their size and stratified by region, type of institution and fee charges; and then students from these institutions were randomly selected from across all years of study.

<sup>3</sup> Most, 71 per cent, completed the 30 minute survey online, but 29 per cent took part in a telephone interview; and of these 53 per cent completed more detailed online expenditure diaries. Overall, the response rate to the survey was 36 per cent.

anticipated end date, the nature of the role, the number of hours worked, whether they worked during term-time, vacation or a mixture of the two, and how much they earned. Students were asked separately about paid work during the previous summer vacation, and only continuing students were asked these questions.

Findings from the survey are presented separately for English-domiciled students and for Welsh-domiciled students. Therefore the figures given in this section are for English-domiciled full-time undergraduate students only (the largest group of respondents), and in the main focus on earnings excluding the summer vacation.

### ***How much do students earn?***

Income from paid work contributed 15 per cent of the average total income of full-time students and is therefore an important and significant source of income. Indeed, income from paid work was the second most significant source of income for full-time students, behind support received from the government via the main sources of student support. Among full-time students, the average income from paid work was £1,662 (out of a total average income of £10,931<sup>1</sup>).

Comparing the contribution of work income to total income with findings from previous surveys shows that full-time students now rely less heavily on paid work than in previous years, but this is part of a continuing downward trend identified in previous surveys (2007/08 and 2004/05). Comparing levels of work income to previous surveys is more challenging given a significant change in methodology<sup>2</sup>, however a cautious comparison<sup>3</sup> suggests that for full-time students, their income from paid work has fallen in real terms (by 34 per cent). This is despite a similar proportion of students taking on paid work in 2011/12 compared to 2007/08. There are indications that the decline in earnings may be driven in part by a decline in the quality of the work that students find to do (see below).

### ***Who are the paid full-time student workers?***

Across all full-time students an average of £1,662 was earned from paid work over the 2011/12 academic year, but this figure includes students who work and those who do not. Indeed, just over half (52 per cent) of full-time students did some form of paid work at some point during the academic year; and among these working students, the average earnings were £3,201.

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<sup>1</sup> The total average income includes income from tuition fee loans and other student loans.

<sup>2</sup> Change in methodology is discussed fully in the main SIES reports but in summary includes: a) a move from an opt-in to an opt-out approach, and (where possible) direct sampling from HESA records to gather the student sample; b) a move from face-to-face interviews to shorter online and telephone surveys with an online expenditure diary; and c) the inclusion of part-time students on courses of lower intensity (measured in terms of Full-time Equivalence, FTE).

<sup>3</sup> Comparing full-time first year students in 2011/12 with full-time first year students in 2007/08 (as they would be operating under the same student support regime). Figures for 2007/08 have been up-rated by the Average Earnings Index (AEI) of 1.073 to reflect earnings growth.

Analysis<sup>1</sup> indicates that among full-time students, the student groups most likely to undertake paid work were: married or living with a partner without children, living at home with their parents, female, and of independent status<sup>2</sup>. Those least likely were: lone parents, from a mixed or 'other' ethnic background, studying medicine or dentistry, subjects allied to medicine, or science, engineering, technology or IT (STEM). Among full-time students who worked, the highest earners were: married or living in a couple, aged 25 or older (at the start of the course, ie mature students), independent, and studying at an FEC. Social class was not found to be significantly associated with likelihood of working and students from routine or manual work backgrounds were no more or less likely to engage in paid work than were those from other social class backgrounds.

### ***What work do full-time students do?***

The survey categorised work into two groups:

- **Continuous work**, these are jobs that a student has before the start of the academic year and is likely to continue until after the end of the academic year, and in the main is undertaken during term-times and vacations
- **Casual work**, these are all other types of paid work that tend to be more casual or occasional in terms of length of time that students worked in them. On average, casual jobs lasted 19 weeks<sup>3</sup>. This category could include short-term paid placements.

Across all full-time students, the majority of the earnings from paid work come from continuous jobs, averaging £1,143 per student, with just £518 from casual jobs. Roughly equal proportions of full-time students were in continuous work (28 per cent) and in more casual jobs (29 per cent)<sup>4</sup>; but the average amounts earned differ substantially. Focusing on those in paid work only, those in continuous work earned on average £4,020 whereas those in casual work earned on average £1,757 during the academic year. These patterns differ to those found in the previous survey where many more students had a continuous job than had a casual job (40 per cent and 20 per cent respectively); and suggests that continuous work opportunities for students have declined over time.

The majority of those working in continuous jobs worked different hours during term-times and vacations (Easter and Christmas), and they tended to work much longer hours during

<sup>1</sup> Multivariate analysis was undertaken using logistic regression to control for a range of study and student background factors.

<sup>2</sup> Independent status is defined as students who are: financially independent (or have been for at least three years prior to starting the course), or have children of their own living with them who are aged 16 or under (or 17/18 and in full-time education). All part-time students are defined as independent.

<sup>3</sup> Note that individuals could record up to six casual jobs, but the calculations for casual jobs quoted in this section are based on the first job described. Income from casual jobs is calculated across all the jobs described.

<sup>4</sup> Note that these two types of work are not mutually exclusive: five per cent of full-time students worked in a continuous job as well as one or more casual jobs during the academic year; 23 per cent worked solely in a continuous job; and 24 per cent worked in one or more casual jobs.

vacations: up from 11 hours on average during term-time to 22 per hours on average during vacations. Those in continuous jobs that did not change their hours between term-time and vacations, worked on average 15 hours per week. The majority of those in casual jobs also tended to work longer hours during vacations than term-time: up from seven hours to 16 hours per week. The remainder in casual work averaged 13 hours a week.

Again a cautious comparison with the previous survey would suggest that the average earnings among those in casual work fell by 57 per cent despite working a similar number of hours and on average working for a longer duration over the academic year.

Students reported a range of jobs (indeed they could report up to eight jobs or types of jobs). They were most commonly working as sales and retail assistants, bar staff, retail cashiers and check-out operators, kitchen and catering assistants, waiting staff, and care workers. These and other commonly described roles are shown in Tables 1.1 and 1.2 below. Initial analysis suggests that the majority of continuous jobs are in sales and customer service occupations, and jobs in these areas are more likely to be continuous jobs than casual jobs. The majority of casual jobs are in elementary occupations (jobs consisting of simple and routine tasks, requiring a minimum general level of education such as bar staff, kitchen and catering assistants, waiters and waitresses). Together these two categories (sales/customer service and elementary occupations) account for two-thirds of student jobs. However approximately 14 per cent of student jobs are in the top three occupational categories: managers, directors and senior officials; professional occupations; and associate professional and technical occupations (see Table 1.3). It could be that some of these higher level jobs, particularly those recorded as casual jobs, are paid short-term placements.

**Table 1.1: Most common occupations of English full-time students (first job reported<sup>1</sup>, frequency (N))**

<b>Occupation and 4 digit Standard Occupation Code (SOC)</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> job (N)</b>
(7111) Sales and retail assistants	269
(9274) Bar staff	193
(7112) Retail cashiers and check-out operators	89
(9272) Kitchen and catering assistants	74
(9273) Waiters and waitresses	73
(6145) Care workers and home carers	67
(6141) Nursing auxiliaries and assistants	31
(4159) Other administrative occupations n.e.c.	29
(6122) Childminders and related occupations	28
(6211) Sports and leisure assistants	27
(7219) Customer service occupations n.e.c.	24
(6219) Leisure and travel service occupations n.e.c.	20
(9233) Cleaners and domestics	19

<sup>1</sup> As noted above, students could report up to 8 jobs/types of jobs. Where students had more than one job during the academic year they were asked to describe the first, second, third etc jobs they had done.

<b>Occupation and 4 digit Standard Occupation Code (SOC)</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> job (N)</b>
(3442) Sports coaches, instructors and officials	18
(2319) Teaching and other educational professionals n.e.c.	16
(4215) Personal assistants and other secretaries	13
(6121) Nursery nurses and assistants	12
(9260) Elementary storage occupations	11
(3543) Marketing associate professionals	10
(6125) Teaching assistants	10
(9251) Shelf fillers	10

Note: the most common (21 occupations) listed in this table account for 77 per cent of students in work. This includes students in continuous and casual jobs. Occupations have been classified according to the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system

Source: NatCen/IES 2013

**Table 1.2: Most common occupations of English full-time students (second job reported, frequency (N))**

<b>Occupation and 4 digit Standard Occupation Code (SOC)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
(7111) Sales and retail assistants	55
(9273) Waiters and waitresses	29
(9274) Bar staff	19
(9272) Kitchen and catering assistants	15
(6219) Leisure and travel service occupations n.e.c.	13
(9233) Cleaners and domestics	9
(4159) Other administrative occupations n.e.c.	8
(7112) Retail cashiers and check-out operators	8
(2319) Teaching and other educational professionals n.e.c.	7
(3443) Fitness instructors	7
(3543) Marketing associate professionals	6
(9275) Leisure and theme park attendants	5
(3442) Sports coaches, instructors and officials	4
(4216) Receptionists	4
(6122) Childminders and related occupations	4
(6145) Care workers and home carers	4
(7211) Call and contact centre occupations	4
(4215) Personal assistants and other secretaries	3
(4217) Typists and related keyboard occupations	3
(6125) Teaching assistants	3
(6211) Sports and leisure assistants	3
(7215) Market research interviewers	3

Note: Only those reporting second jobs. This includes students in continuous and casual jobs. Occupations have been classified according to the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system

Source: NatCen/IES 2013

**Table 1.3: Major occupational code, for those in continuous jobs and those in casual jobs**

Major Occupation Group	Continuous jobs (1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> jobs)			Casual jobs (1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> jobs)		
	(N)	%	Rank	(N)	%	Rank
1. Managers, directors and senior officials	8	0.9	8	3	0.7	9
2. Professional occupations	25	2.7	6	17	3.7	6
3. Associate professional and technical occupations	89	9.6	4	49	10.7	4
4. Administrative and secretarial occupations	56	6.1	5	36	7.9	5
5. Skilled trades occupations	14	1.5	7	5	1.1	7
6. Caring, leisure and other service occupations	153	16.5	3	62	13.5	3
7. Sales and customer service occupations	304	32.9	1	122	26.6	2
8. Process, plant and machine operatives	8	0.9	8	4	0.9	8
9. Elementary occupations	268	29.0	2	160	34.9	1
Total jobs	925	100.0		458	100.0	

Note: These are jobs undertaken during the academic year only, it excludes summer vacation work. % refers to the % of jobs reported (not % of working students)

Source: NatCen/IES 2013

### 1.3 Methodology

This follow-up research focuses on full-time students only, but covers those studying in HEIs and FECs and those who had studied or still are studying in England or Wales. Only those known to have been in paid work have been selected for interview. The rest of this section explains the research methodology utilised, including how individuals were selected, and the total number of interviews conducted.

A combination of focus groups and depth telephone interviews were used to explore the issues around working while studying. Both these qualitative methods had the advantage of being relatively quick to set up and of reaching a range of individuals within a shorter time period than face-to-face interviews.

#### **Focus groups**

Focus groups (ideally between six to eight participants) provided the benefit of being able to generate group discussion about different views, with participants being able to compare and contrast their experiences of different types of paid work. They also provided a space to use enabling techniques such as sort cards to encourage reflection and discussion.

Focus groups were undertaken with current students: those who were in the early stages of their courses at the time of the main SIES survey and so at the time of this research tended to be in their third or fourth (final) year of study. These discussions centred on the motivations and process of gaining work along with the perceived challenges and the short and long-term benefits of working while studying, and also captured the totality of their

working experiences, ie all of the jobs and work experiences they had had during their studies. The target was to achieve four focus groups with current students clustered in different locations: Cardiff, Newcastle, Sheffield, and London, plus one extra focus group comprised of students who had received a Maintenance Grant.

The Easter vacation fell within the fieldwork period of the research which led to some difficulties recruiting individuals to participate in focus groups, and to some individuals dropping out of the research (after agreeing to take part). It was therefore agreed to supplement the focus groups with telephone interviews with current students. This allowed the research team to recruit from a wider pool of the main SIES survey respondents (those from different geographies across England and Wales rather than clustered within close range of the focus group venues).

Although the revised target was to consult with 24 to 26 individuals via focus group or individual interview, the research managed to capture the views of 30 current students.

### ***Telephone interviews***

Telephone interviews allowed for in-depth exploration with individuals and greater opportunity for probing around decision-making and impacts of paid work and, therefore, provided more detailed data about individual stories. These interviews centred on the perceived outcomes of working while studying along with the process of gaining work. The target was to achieve 30 depth interviews with new graduates, those who were in the final year of their courses at the time of the main SIES survey. Again the discussions centred on the motivations and process of gaining work while studying but also captured the experiences of looking for and gaining work after graduating and whether their student work experiences had been helpful in this regard, whilst also exploring (with the advantage of hindsight) the short and long-term benefits of working while studying.

The research managed to capture the views of 29 graduates.

### **1.3.1 Sampling**

Students were sampled from the main SIES survey pool of respondents. Their survey data were used to select an initial sample frame from among survey respondents who had agreed to be re-contacted and had provided contact details – this comprised a pool of over 2,000 students across England and Wales.

A purposive sampling approach was used to select participants. The key dimensions of interest informing the sampling were:

- **Stage in student journey:** whether the individual was still a current student and thus combining paid work with full-time study or whether the individual had completed their course and was now looking for work or working after studying: current students or new graduates.
- **Type of institution attended:** those who studied in HE institutions or studied in FE colleges (note that all individuals had or were studying at HE level regardless of the institution attended).

- **Quality of job:** primarily this was indicated by whether they have/had the same regular job throughout the academic year (referred to as a 'continuous job') or whether they have/had one or more casual jobs for shorter periods in the academic year (referred to as 'casual jobs'). Where possible the verbatim job description given was also used as an indicator of quality (whether it could be interpreted as higher status/occupational level or could be linked to the subject studied), as was the earnings level (above £5,000, between £1,500 and £5,000, and below £1,500).

These key dimensions were used in drawing the sample of individuals. Attention was also given to the following criteria to ensure the sample represented a range of individuals: age (under or over 25 years old at the start of their course), gender, whether classed as dependent or independent student, and whether in receipt of a maintenance grant. A sample matrix was developed to guide recruitment for the telephone interviews but there were challenges achieving the target number of students from FE colleges and the numbers with high quality jobs due to the low numbers of each in the starting sample.

Once selected, the sampled individuals were sent an email containing information about the study and inviting them to participate in the follow-up research. These individuals were then contacted by the research team by telephone within a few days asking them if they would be happy to take part and then setting up an appointment/inviting them to a focus group.

### 1.3.2 Topic guides

Two topic guides were designed – one for current students and one for new graduates. These were designed in discussion with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to explore the key areas of interest, and included:

- Additional details of current job(s) and previous work experiences (during and prior to HE study). This included details about unpaid work (either current or done during university study)
- Reasons for working and perceived benefits and disadvantages of working, including on studying
- Choice of job and how they found/secured it – degree of choice, reasons for taking that type of job (including skills, experience gained re: employability), and whether jobs had a link to their course/discipline
- Support received from universities/colleges in helping students get job experience/ supporting their decision-making around work
- Views about and satisfaction with job and earnings (including perceptions of quality)
- The impact of working. This included the financial impact (linked to perceptions around how well managing financially) and other impacts of working and studying
- Anticipated longer-term benefits (employability aspects)

- And what perceived skills they had gained, if any.

Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour, and focus group discussions took around an hour and a half. All interviews and group discussions were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Participants received vouchers as a thank you for taking part of £20 (interviews) and £30 (focus groups).

## 1.4 Final achieved sample

A total of 59 individuals participated in focus group discussions or individual telephone interviews. The tables below set out the characteristics of these individuals and of the jobs that they had at the time of the main SIES survey, in the 2011/12 academic year.

**Table 1.4: Current students**

Description	Number achieved
<b>Employment type<sup>1</sup></b>	
Casual	16
Continuous	14
<b>Age</b>	
25 and over	3
Under 25	27
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	17
Male	13
<b>Education sector</b>	
FE	3
HE	27
<b>Quality of work</b>	
High	8
Low	22
<b>Government grant</b>	
Full	9
Partial/none	21
<i>Total recruited</i>	<i>30</i>

<sup>1</sup> Employment type refers to the type of work recorded in the SIES 2011/12, so it refers to the work the student was doing in the 2011/12 academic year and may well differ from the work they are doing currently.

Source: NatCen/IES 2013

**Table 1.5: New graduates**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Number achieved</b>
<b>Employment type<sup>1</sup></b>	
Casual	13
Continuous	16
<b>Age</b>	
25 and over	10
Under 25	19
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	15
Male	14
<b>Education sector</b>	
FE	4
HE	25
<b>Quality of work</b>	
High	6
Low	23
<i>Total recruited</i>	29

<sup>1</sup> Note: Employment type refers to the type of work recorded in the SIES 2011/12, so it refers to the work the student was doing in the 2011/12 academic year and may well differ from the work they are doing currently.

Source: NatGen/IES 2013

## 1.5 Report structure

For ease of reading this report all participants, whether current students or new graduates, are referred to as students – as much of the discussion focused upon their activities and experiences when they were students. However alongside each quote or example, the status of the interviewee is given along with a few background characteristics.

- Chapter 2 looks at the types of work that students do while studying and what makes a good student job, and explores the current jobs of the new graduate sub-set of interviewees.
- Chapter 3 examines motivations for working while studying, and takes a separate look at motivations to undertaking unpaid work experience placements; in addition the extent of choice that students have over the type of work they do is explored.
- Chapter 4 provides an insight into the process of finding work and the support they receive.
- Chapter 5 explores the challenges of working whilst studying and how students' attempt to deal with, or overcome, the potential difficulties of balancing work and study.

- Chapter 6 looks at the perceived benefits to students of working and the perceived impact that working has on both the study experience and future work opportunities.
- Chapter 7 focuses on new graduates and examines the benefits this group feel they have had from working alongside studying, both immediate benefits at the time they were studying and the positive impact it has had on their careers since graduating.
- Chapter 8 presents a summary of the key findings and some conclusions on the role of working alongside studying.

## 2 What work do students do?

This chapter sets out what student work looks like, providing further details of the type of work that students undertake alongside their studies. It presents findings from interviewees who are still in HE (current students) and those who have left HE and are now in the labour market (new graduates). A broad definition of work is used and this includes: paid work, voluntary or unpaid work, formal work placements, sandwich elements or work experience sessions, and other activities which they felt had helped them. Work could be relevant to their programme of study or it could be completely unrelated. Interviewees were asked to describe the totality of the work they had undertaken and to provide brief details of the nature of this work including perceived relevance to their course, how long they had been in the job, the hours worked and pattern of working, and their pay (if appropriate). They were also asked for their feedback on the quality of the work they did, and particularly what makes a good job.

### 2.1 Current and previous work (all types) of students

Between them the interviewees had undertaken a wide range of work whilst studying. Respondents tended to have several jobs or work experiences over the entirety of their studies and often jobs were undertaken in combination, indicating that students can be portfolio workers. Students' pattern of working also varied: they reported a range of different hours (from just one or two hours a week to between 30 and 40 hours a week or more) – but there are indications that between 10 and 15 hours is the optimum for a student working week.

There were also no definite patterns in terms of whether they worked only weekdays, just weekends or a mixture of the two. However many seemed to increase their hours or do a different job (sometimes their only job) during vacations; indeed for some, vacation work was full-time. There were also examples of students working long hours during term-time and this could involve working night-shifts or very early starts (and putting in several hours before going to university). For example, one drama graduate had worked in a night club while studying, working three nights a week from 10pm to 5am; and two nights a week in a taxi office from 12am to 6.30am. Another worked in a supermarket two or three nights a week from 10pm to 7am or 9pm to 8am.

There appeared to be four different categories of work undertaken by students, which as noted above were often combined. Students undertook paid work, work with or for their universities, voluntary work, and formal work placements.

#### 2.1.1 Paid work

By far the most common category of work was paid work (which is unsurprising as the interviewees were sampled on the basis of having undertaken paid work at some point during the 2011/12 academic year). This work was generally part-time (although as noted above there were a few examples of students working almost full-time hours whilst studying full-time at the same time), but often students were able to increase the hours worked during vacations. It tended to be of a lower quality when assessed against Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) type job hierarchies and was also recognised by the students themselves as lower quality (see Section 2.3 below), in that it would not be

something they would want to do as a career. Indeed, these paid jobs are ones that individuals do as students and not when they finish their studies (see Section 2.4, Current Jobs of New Graduates below). This type of work also tended not to have any direct relevance to the student's course. There were only a few examples where the paid job could be seen to have some direct relevance to the student's course. One example was of a drama student working in the Box Office of a theatre; and another was of a medical student who worked in a pharmacy (which involved dispensing drugs), and a third was a creative arts student who was working as a freelance camera operator and photographer and who felt it was important to start building his experience and profile as early as possible. With hindsight, several graduates, when looking back over their experiences, felt it would have been useful to have worked in an area more closely related to their course, to get more directly relevant experience.

A wide range of paid jobs were described, but common roles included:

- working in a supermarket as a cashier, check-out assistant or customer sales assistant
- working in a call centre as a customer services assistant/advisor
- working in shops as a retail assistant
- working as bar or waiting staff in hotels, bars or night-clubs.

This links closely to the quantitative findings from the main survey (see Section 1.2.2).

#### Other work included:

\* working in a taxi office managing bookings for cars \* paid work as a relief or support worker for a charity \* working as a carer \* healthcare assistant \* nurse or paramedic \* DJ; factory assembly worker \* working on a production line \* live-in Nanny \* admin work and data entry \* making and selling jewellery \* Territorial Army \* nightclub photographer \* sports coach \* exam invigilating \* TEFL teacher \* working as a private tutor \* cleaner \* freelance Avon representative \* ride supervisor at a theme park \* grounds maintenance operative \* restaurant manager \* freelance cameraman and photographer \* Box Office ticket sales \* warehouse assistant \* freelance proof reader \* mystery shopper \* exotic dancer \* stone mason \* newspaper delivery, magazine distribution \* survey interviewer \*

It is perhaps worth noting that although the main SIES survey found that students studying HE in further education colleges earned more and/or worked longer hours than HE students, there appeared to be no discernable difference in the type of work or pattern of work among the small number of interviewees who had attended an FE college when compared to those who had attended a university. There were, however, some gender patterns noticed. Retail and customer service work in shops or supermarkets was undertaken by both male and female students whereas more males than females undertook bar and waiting work, and factory work; and more females than males undertook care work and worked in call centres. These patterns are indicative only as the research is qualitative not quantitative, and was relatively small scale.

Some students held these jobs continuously throughout their studies and often had these jobs before starting at university or college. Others changed jobs over their time at university, from one year to the next. Some tended to stay within the same occupational area such as care work, retail or hospitality (sometimes working through agencies); whereas others tried a range of different job roles over time.

Pay also varied from minimum wage (currently £6.19 per hour or £5.03 for 18 to 20 year olds) to quite high levels for those who were working freelance in specialist roles, or for intensive but relatively short duration jobs. Several received around the £8.00 mark per hour and a couple of students who received over £8.00 an hour considered this to be 'good money', particularly if they only had limited amount of working hours.

*'... if I'm going to work only a few hours at this job, I only work six hours but I get £8.30 plus holiday pay, so it's quite a decent rate of pay, and I think if they're only going to ask you to do a few hours, and they're not going to give you much more, it's not really worth it, because it takes up your time when you could be studying.'* (young female law student)

### 2.1.2 Working for, or with, universities

*'I mean the uni are very good at offering sort of, I think 'cos they're aware of the fact that we can't get full-time work, as vets, they are very good at sort of offering us part-time things, like we can bring in maybe £30 here and there just for doing little things.'* (young female veterinary science student talking about her work to help a PhD student with data entry)

Another category of work is the (largely paid) work that students do for or with their universities. As they are students this puts them in the ideal setting to find and access the work. Indeed, these roles were perhaps relatively easy to acquire as they are aimed at and tended to recruit students only, and would involve working in a familiar environment. However feedback suggests that although generally paid, this work can be sporadic and involve relatively few hours, and tends to be undertaken in later years of study. The work here included working as: Student Ambassadors which could involve helping out in open days for prospective students or visiting schools to talk to younger students and encourage them to think about going to university in the future, (unpaid) Campus Officer, Student representatives, Events Co-ordinator, (unpaid) Editor of the student magazine, Teaching Assistant, Note-Taker for disabled students, Student Mentor (for 6<sup>th</sup> form students). It also involved working on the university campus and working for the university 'job shops' to support university events or events in local venues. Examples here included working as a paid library assistant, bar manager, sales assistant in the university bookshop, conference steward at university hosted events, waiting staff in campus food outlets, working in the call centre during clearing, and helping a PhD student with data entry.

### 2.1.3 Voluntary work

*'I helped out in different theatre groups doing backstage work, because I've previously done a makeup course for stage makeup. I've helped out all theatre groups and directors that I've worked with on things like that, unpaid... That was mainly in the third year but I'd done little bits in the other two years as well.'* (young male drama graduate)

The third category of work is voluntary or unpaid work (which can overlap with working for or with universities if the role is unpaid). This could involve continuing with voluntary work that students had prior to their studies such as volunteering with St Johns Ambulance, however it could involve new work either to follow interests or values developed during their studies, or as a conscious move to develop relevant skills and contacts, show enthusiasm and to develop a 'reputation' within their chosen sphere.

Examples of the latter include: a medical student who talked of working for consultants to undertake hospital audits; an English student who took on the role of Editor of the student newspaper (leading a team of 30 students), moving up from sub-editor, whilst also running two student societies; a drama student who helped out in theatre groups mainly working backstage; and a Media and Creative Business student who was a volunteer with Orange RockCorps organising events which led to full-time paid vacation work that was closely linked to her course and her goal to undertake youth work. This type of volunteering blurs the boundary with formal work placements (see below), but tends to be shorter, researched and organised by the student themselves, and can lead to paid work opportunities.

*'... it was good fun. And I thought the hockey coaching was voluntary to start with and then they paid me at the end. And that's my passion really hockey so I enjoyed coaching yeah, good quality....About half way through, it just popped up in conversation because I assumed it was just voluntary because it was a women's hockey club and they don't normally just get guys doing it. And I just presumed that it was unpaid, it was voluntary.'* (young male sports science graduate)

Volunteering can involve students making a regular commitment throughout their studies, and examples include: database entry for a charity two evenings a week, volunteering for a mental health charity for a few hours a week, volunteering as a Classroom Assistant at a Special School, volunteering on the helpline for a charity working with those who self harm one evening a week, and volunteering as a cricket coach for a local youth team. It could also be the focus of one or more summer vacations such as undertaking youth work through Camp America, helping out at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and volunteering as a teacher in Cambodia.

#### 2.1.4 Work placements

The fourth and final category is work placements – and the term is used to cover internships, work placements and work experience (as students themselves tended to use these terms interchangeably to mean the same thing). There were numerous examples of students who had undertaken placements, and they included a mixture of students from all socio-economic backgrounds including those from semi-routine and routine occupational backgrounds, and those in receipt of a partial or full grant, as well as those from more advantaged backgrounds. This is also true of engaging in voluntary work.

In general the work placements described were unpaid and a mandatory part of the course. As a result they were felt to be directly linked to students' courses and provided a safe space to experience the role, and were perceived to build the practical skills needed

for their chosen profession. Work placements varied in length from several weeks to several months or even complete academic years (ie sandwich placements<sup>1</sup>), could take place in vacation periods or term-time, often involved working full-time hours, and students could have several placements over the entirety of their course. Placements were often facilitated by the students' universities and therefore limited the degree of choice that students had over allocation, but there were examples where placements were set up by the student themselves. The courses that tended to involve placements included: fashion/textiles, business/finance/management, law, veterinary science, medical science, Physiotherapy, nursing, teaching and social work.

For a full discussion of the motivations to taking placements (and indeed, the reasons why students might not want to, or feel able to, take on an unpaid placement) see Section 3.2.

Examples of placement activity included:

- A mature student who retrained as a social worker and described how she had had two placements on her course: one she felt was useful and led to her current role (now as a graduate) which involved working for an Asian community charity; the other was not so useful as this was working with older people whereas her goal is to work with young people. She explained how she had little choice over the placements particularly in the difficult economic climate with public sector cutbacks.
- A primary education student who had had paid work as a part-time Nursery Assistant and always thought she would work with this age group but she described how the last placement she did that was arranged by her university, involved her working with older children and she is now, after graduating, working with older children which she is very happy about.
- Another biological sciences student described taking, in his final year, an unpaid placement overseas in the field of scientific research, and that this led to his interest in photography and desire to pursue this as a career.
- A drama graduate who had a six week placement in a London theatre, as an assistant to a theatre producer, described how this had prepared her for working in the industry and showed she had relevant experience, and she is now working in an HR role in another London theatre.
- A biology and psychology student undertook a 12 week unpaid internship during one summer vacation working as the Assistant Editor for a suicide prevention charity producing their magazine.

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<sup>1</sup> Students who were on a paid sandwich placement year in 2011/12 were omitted from the overall SIES survey sample and thus were not included in this follow-up study. However those who were on a course that included a sandwich placement year – as long as it had occurred prior to or later than the 2011/12 academic year – could be sampled for the overall SIES survey and/or the follow-up research.

- A sports sciences student had an internship with a professional rugby club in his third year, this started as a placement but extended to an internship, and involves working two days a week during term-times (for 15 hours) monitoring injuries and doing gym work.
- Finally a law student described her placement as a pro-bono lawyer working in a law centre associated with the university, where she works on real life cases for clients (under supervision).

## 2.2 History of paid work

Many students had a history of undertaking paid part-time work prior to starting their HE studies, and so for these students it seemed natural to continue to work while studying: *'I have had a job since I was 16'*. They had an expectation that they would work (and/or need to work) during their studies even before starting their university/college course (see the next chapter for a discussion of the motivations to taking on work whilst studying).

There was no clear pattern of when students started their HE working. Some interviewees had had a job prior to starting HE and so were often carrying on work undertaken in the preceding summer (these would be categorised as continuous jobs in the main quantitative SIES survey, see Section 1.2.2). Other students sought and gained work after the first few months of studying. For these students, this delay appeared to allow them to settle into their courses, assess the local job market and work out their day-to-day finances. Some students appeared to pick up and drop or change their work as they moved through their course and as their commitments changed and if/when they found more suitable/enjoyable work. One English literature student described her thinking around her priorities and how she could fit work in with studying: *'in the first year it is all about making friends and being independent, the second year is about getting involved in things, and the third year is about buckling down'*. She took on paid work during the first year, did voluntary work in her second year, and did not anticipate working in her third year.

## 2.3 Perceptions of the quality of work

*'It is not particularly good quality work, just the kind of thing you do when you need money.'* (young male languages graduate)

### **Quality of paid work**

Perceptions about the quality of paid work were influenced by whether interviewees were assessing the work as a good 'student job' or as a good job. A good student job could be perceived as one that:

- is in a convenient location, not too far to travel
- is relatively easy to acquire (ie lots of vacancies)
- easy to do in that it is not too challenging, *'not having to think too much about the work'*, *'allows you to unwind'*, *'switch off from my course'*, but is not too boring (although one

student felt she wanted something that was intellectually stimulating ie more than just stacking shelves)

- has sufficient hours (this could be regular hours for some but more casual hours for others)
- has flexible hours and/or an understanding manager – ‘one that is workable around you’
- has a friendly environment and good colleagues (with or without fellow students)
- and (if possible) is relatively well paid.

Some of these aspects are illustrated by the following quotes about what makes a good job:

*‘I really like it because it's like, it's within the university, so as soon as I've finished, because I finish about one pm, I can go to the library, I can go and study and stuff. I don't have to like make my way to uni or anything like that, and it's on my campus as well, so it's really good.’* (young female law student talking about her work in the university bookshop)

*‘I kind of like the flexibility that the support worker role gave me. It's working on the bank and you pick and choose your hours, so you're not contracted. If I did something different I might have had to have been there on Saturday or Sunday, every single week ... my girlfriend lives in Spain, so I could maybe one weekend go and see her, or she could come over and see me. Or because I've been on placements, maybe if I'd had a hard week I could just have a Saturday off instead, and then work a long Sunday, or vice versa. I had it quite good with the flexibility that it afforded me.’* (young male physiotherapy graduate)

*‘... the job right now is really flexible. Like if I need a day off to go to university, they'll give it to me, or if my lectures have changed times then they'll change my shifts and stuff like that.... if I have exam dates and then I need to be able to change my shifts to go to my exams or if I need some time off 'cause I've got an assignment due in, they're generally quite good with that. I know there are quite a lot of students at my supermarket, so they sort of know how the students need help and stuff like that, really... And we get quite a lot of good bonuses; like we get a bonus twice a year and sick pay and pension pay and stuff like that. I just had my appendix out and I had to have two weeks off and luckily they paid me for it.’* (young female education student, currently working in a supermarket)

*‘... it's just a nice environment to be in really, and it's a lot of fun to be honest. It doesn't really feel like work.’* (young female veterinary science student, talking about her work acting as a steward at a conference for vets)

*‘I think the people you work with, whether you enjoy their company because obviously you're spending the majority of your day with them. And just a job that*

*fulfils some of your skill I suppose, a job you can feel useful and you tend to enjoy it if you're good at it.'* (young male physical sciences graduate)

*'In working on the bar, although it could be a bit stressful, it was not as stressful as some of the deadlines. So it was kind of a nice break from study, if you were sitting at home worrying about uni, it would be horrible. But if you're out on a bar and having a laugh with people, it's going to relax you from all the stress of [university] work.'* (young male marketing graduate)

This was often quite different to the kind of high quality job that they aspired to after graduating, and in many cases secured (see Section 2.4 below). In the main, interviewees were satisfied with their student work experiences (paid or unpaid) but there were a few examples where students had felt it to be somewhat lowering to be working in the roles that they were doing, such as working as a cleaner, that they sometimes felt looked down upon, and that they were sometimes bored.

Interviewees appeared to be making an assessment about whether the student job was financially worthwhile – ensuring that they earned more than the cost of travelling to work (involving balancing the location against the pay). Flexibility was particularly critical, as students talked of wanting to increase their hours during vacation periods and/or when their study commitments reduced so that they could increase their work income and savings. Conversely students wanted to be able to reduce their hours when they needed more time to commit to their studies, for example to complete specific assignments or in their latter years of study when they felt they needed to devote more time to their course. A couple of students noted how they were on zero-hours contracts and several others talked of having a base contract of a relatively small number of hours which they could and regularly did work beyond:

*'I work for [supermarket]. I work on the dot com department, you know for the online shopping and I pick the shopping for you when people order...I'm contracted to seven and a half hours a week but I always do like around 16. I am always in at 6am and I work Monday, Friday, Saturday and maybe Sunday...its like a flexi contract that I am on because I only have to do the seven and a half hours a week and then the rest is extra, but it is like there for me... like at the moment I've been working extra while I can get it in because it is Easter but if I've got a few different assignments like around the same time then I need to be able to concentrate on that rather than working.'* (young female law student at a FE college)

*'... it's zero hours contract, so right now I'm working six hours a week, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, but that's really because of my timetable. I wasn't able to work Mondays and Fridays, and it's depending on when my classes were. So it's negotiable with the manager... So if I have a lecture and it changes, then they just change the times around so that I'm able to work.'* (young female law student, talking about her work in the university bookshop)

Supermarket work, bar work and agency work were regarded as particularly suitable in this regard; and these types of work also appeared to be geographically flexible enabling students to bring their work home with them during vacations, or alternatively take their

work to university with them (as many students had regular jobs before starting their courses). One medical student spoke of her work at Sainsbury's where she could work near her parental home during vacations and also near her student accommodation during term-times (on the same employment contract). Similarly one male student was also able to transfer to working in a branch of a bar in his home town during the holidays, and one female education student was able to transfer her work to a branch near to her university:

*'I'd worked from being 16. I started working actually at the cash and carry in my hometown as soon as I left school and they transferred me to my area where I was at uni, so it kind of slotted in for me... they just offered to transfer me, so I just said yeah and carried on... all I had to do was go and visit the other branch for like a brief interview... I told them what days I was in uni and they fitted my shifts around it sort of thing.'* (young, female education graduate)

### **Quality of work placements**

The quality of placements was assessed quite differently. A good quality placement was felt to be one that was not only related to the course but related to the student's career goal as well as one in which the student felt they made a useful contribution, were valued and/or made to feel welcome, and enabled them to learn and perhaps provided them with a chance to practice skills learned on the course.

## **2.4 Current jobs of new graduates**

Those who had graduated since taking part in the main Student Income and Expenditure Survey described the jobs they were doing in spring 2013 – less than 12 months after leaving HE. There appeared to be three different types of work that graduates do: stop-gap jobs; transition jobs and graduate jobs.

### **Stop-gap jobs**

For some graduates, this work mirrored or was a continuation of the work they had whilst studying, and was not necessarily something they wanted or intended to do in the longer-term, but it provided them with income until they were able to find something that was more aligned to their preferred direction, or that provided the income and/or hours they needed. There were examples of graduates doing waiting and bar work, working in a call centre (as a Customer Service Advisor), and working as carers/care support workers. Several interviewees had gone on to further study or were planning to do so or were repeating a year, so were still working whilst studying or working to fund their studies: eg working in a call centre, as a sports coach, as a carer, and cleaner and check-out operator. For example, one graduate who was working in a call centre was doing so to help fund a Masters in scientific photography which is his career goal. Another continued working part-time for a supermarket after graduating, then moved on to working full-time as an administrator doing data entry, and sees this as a means by which to save money so that he can be financially stable when doing a Masters and PhD in English Literature.

### **Graduate jobs**

For many other graduates, their work was arguably of better quality in that it was related to their course and/or their career goals, was better paid than their student work, was challenging and/or involved some level of responsibility, provided opportunities for training or informal learning and to practice skills learned at university, and was full-time. Examples

here include graduates working as: a Cardiology Nurse, Design Engineer, Tax Advisor on a graduate scheme, Early Years Professional, Clinical Physiologist, Year 6 Teacher, Junior Doctor, Civil service economist, HR Co-ordinator for a theatre, Vet Technician, International Accounts Manager, Student Experience Team Leader in a university library, Graduate Trainee at an aerospace company, and Retail Advisor for a mobile phone company. Some of these individuals gained their positions on, or very soon after, graduating but others took some months to find and secure these positions.

### ***Transition jobs***

There were also examples of graduates who were in 'transition' jobs, ones that they did not yet feel were graduate jobs but could become so or lead to better opportunities:

- One marketing graduate described working full-time as a runner for a TV production company, which although was not felt to be a graduate job due to the low level of responsibility and low pay, he felt that it would provide him with opportunities to gain relevant experience and to progress within the organisation.
- Another English language and literature graduate who also felt he was not yet in a graduate job, was working as a full-time marketing executive for a small firm, but felt he was learning a lot and getting the chance to see a company grow.
- Another social work graduate was working as a team leader for a charity in which she had undertaken a placement, but she was not happy in this role which she felt was not challenging enough and was not in the work area she wanted to get into. However she was set to start a part-time job as a youth worker to work alongside this role which will provide her with experience to be able to build a career in social work.

# 3 Motivations for working while studying

This chapter sets out the reasons or motivations for working alongside studying. It explores differences in motivations towards different types of work, and also whether these motivations change over time as the student progresses in their course. In addition it looks at the degree of choice individuals had over their work, essentially the options they had, and particularly whether they had an option to undertake a work placement as part of their course or perhaps would have liked to have had this type of opportunity.

## 3.1 Reasons for taking on paid work

### 3.1.1 Financial dimensions

Finance was the key reason for engaging in paid work while studying, and virtually all interviewees mentioned finance when asked about their motivations. However there appear to be several dimensions to this financial motivation: necessity versus 'extras', and immediate versus long-term need.

#### ***Meeting a shortfall***

For a large group of students, earnings met an immediate need and their paid work earnings were critical, with some of these noting that they would have to give up their course if they were not able to work and gain additional income:

*'I would have struggled to finish the course, I know you get a good bursary but I would have really struggled financially to finish it.'* (mature, social work graduate who received a bursary)

These students felt that they did not have enough income from other sources to pay for their most basic requirements such as rent, bills, food etc.; even though many of these received grant or bursary support from the government for their living costs. There was one example of a nursing student who lost his NHS bursary in his second year, as he had changed his course, so he needed to work to help pay towards his rent and essential expenses. This group of students also tended to have a clear understanding of their finances. Some of these individuals were mature students with higher costs such as mortgages and childcare, who had worked prior to starting their studies and perhaps were used to having a regular wage:

*'I have no choice, I have to work. I worked full-time before I stopped working to go to college to do the foundation degree. And I knew, I'd sort of done the costings and the arithmetic and I knew that I needed to work 16 hours a week at at least minimum wage to be able to do that. Because I've got a house and I've got bills to pay, I couldn't just manage on student finance. So there was no choice.'* (mature female social work student)

*'The main reason I did it was to make ends meet, because, you know, I've got a nursing bursary, and I get, got the um, council tax paid for. I've got a flat, a*

*council flat, so I had to pay the rent, and I think the bursary was only about £600 a month, which is not enough to live on... to pay rent and bills and things ... It just made ends meet, because, you know. I'd say I was 50 what, 51, 52 when I started? So, you know, I wasn't relying on my mum and my dad helping me out, or anything.'* (mature female nursing graduate)

Others were younger students who felt they needed the extra money to help towards bills; several of these students spoke of how their loan did not quite or only just covered their rent. Also as the loan or grant money came in three termly amounts, their earnings were received more frequently (with students paid monthly or even weekly) which they found helpful. Examples here include a music and management graduate who had lived at home, but worked as she was expected to pay rent; an education graduate who in her second and third years moved into shared and more expensive accommodation with friends and needed work income to help pay the bills; and a biological sciences student who worked to help towards day-to-day living costs and felt he could not receive financial support from his parents as they had recently divorced.

### ***Topping up income or help with additional course costs***

A roughly equal sized group of students used their work earnings to top up their income rather than meet essential living costs. It is interesting to note that none of the students in this group were mature students.

These students tended to feel that the income they received – from Student Loans, Grants (indeed several students in this group received grant support), from their families, or money saved prior to their studies – enabled them to get-by but the additional income from paid work allowed them to have a better experience at university or college, essentially giving them spare cash or a little extra for treats or nice things. This income helped them to have a 'better' student lifestyle such as going out with friends, buying nice clothes, having a mobile phone, or in one instance to be able to keep a cat. It relieved them from money worries (having a little extra for emergencies) and helped with travel and leisure activities, such as going on holiday. Several students mentioned using their work earnings to keep and run a car.

*'I was getting by on student finance and savings that I'd previously made in jobs before university. And then, as I got older I wanted to go on more holidays. That was my main thing, I was going on holidays 2 and 3 times a year... I enjoyed going on holidays and I liked to dress well. It was just extra money really to give myself a better lifestyle. I'd rather work and afford nice things than not work and constantly be moaning I've got no money to go out and do things I want to do.'* (young male drama graduate, who received grant support)

To a lesser extent, the extra income from paid work also helped students with their other, often unexpected, course costs, enabling them to buy materials or engage in activities to enhance their study experience (see also Section 6.4.1). One fashion student mentioned using her earnings to buy books to supplement her learning and help her to fill in 'gaps' in her course; another drama student talked of using his earnings to attend the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and attending local theatres which ultimately helped him to decide which area of theatre he wanted to aim for after graduating; similarly a drama graduate talked about using his student earnings to attend shows:

*'I'd go to the theatre quite often, I'd visit London and see West End productions, which benefited the course as well as being a luxury as well. So things like that did benefit my acting, the more ... the more you know. But it was still a luxury at the same time because it was something I enjoyed to do.'* (young male drama graduate)

*'... because I do a fashion course, the cost of materials and everything, it is quite a lot. And my parents wouldn't be able to support me with that, so it is necessary for me to be able to do the course and get all the materials and stuff I need. I do need to work... I recently ordered a load of books but the books are quite expensive, they're like £50 each.'* (young female fashion student)

### **Helping with future needs**

For a smaller group of students, their paid work helped with their future needs. Here students talked of building up savings (during term-time and particularly vacation periods) to help with further years of study or help with other longer-term goals such as going travelling after their studies, buying a house, or setting up their own business. Several students also talked about working in order to attempt to minimise the debt they would graduate with:

*'I basically I wanted to finish uni with as little debt as possible so I was quite, kind of, keen to pay off as much as I could. I took all of my student loan but banked it so my parents helped me out with I think about £200 a month but were quite clear that I needed to help myself as well.'* (young female medical graduate)

Other examples include a fashion student who talked about setting aside some of her earnings towards her ambition to start her own business after graduating. Another textiles student spoke of earning during the term-time to allow her to take a month off each summer to go travelling, and to save up to allow her to take a three month unpaid placement in New York after graduating. A medical student talked about building up her savings in order to prepare for the next year of her studies when she would switch from the main student support package (of student loans for fees and maintenance) to NHS support which she felt would not be adequate, and when she would also embark on a series of unpaid placements which could involve considerable travel expenses.

### **3.1.2 Expectation and sense of responsibility**

Related to the financial drivers for undertaking paid work was the sense that students expected to work – either driven by the expectations of others (usually family), their own expectations and/or a sense of responsibility to contribute towards costs while in HE. Indeed, younger students mentioned a sense of shared responsibility for the costs of their studies, and there was a strong feeling that they should not or could not rely on their parents to *'help them out'*. This was linked to wanting to be independent which is often a key motivation for undertaking HE study, and students felt that helping to pay their way enabled them to have more control over their finances and gave them experience managing their finances:

*'Well, I'm living at home at the moment, so I wouldn't really say, "oh, it's because I'm desperate for money", but it helps me manage finances, and I have*

*managed finances on a monthly basis. Because I really don't like the way students' loan, um, the maintenance loans are given. You get a lump sum like every three months, and I think often people, like especially in my first year, being someone who's never had that amount of money before at one time, you find the need to splurge it and just get all the things you never had, that kind of thing. So having a job, I used my pay for any monthly expenses I have like travel, or my phone, and things like that. I mean it helps me learn to budget, and it just helps with shortfalls, like sometimes, you know, you run out of money and you need to buy a textbook or something, I know that I have got that extra money there; I don't have to worry too much.'* (young female law student)

Many students also had a history of undertaking paid part-time work prior to starting their HE studies, and for them doing so was part of a work ethic they felt their parents had instilled in them from an early age. For these students it seemed natural to continue to work while studying – often staying on in the same jobs if they studied close-by or if these jobs were 'portable' (see above). They had an expectation that they would work and/or need to work during their studies although for some students it proved difficult to find work (see Chapter 4).

*'I've had a job since I was 15. When I was 15 I was cleaning, cleaning a pub on a Saturday and Sunday mornings. I've never, even when I went backpacking, I've never been out of work. I think the longest I've been out of work in my life is a month... I don't think I really could have imagined life without work and having my own sort of regular income.'* (young female music management graduate)

### 3.1.3 Secondary motivations

Other often cited, although generally secondary, reasons for combining work with full-time study included: the opportunity to take 'time-out' from university – from the pressures of study and away from fellow students; for social reasons such as to meet new people, different perhaps to those they would meet on their course; to keep busy; and for enjoyment. These motivations link closely to the perceived benefits of working outlined in Chapters 6 and 7; and are illustrated by the quotes below:

*'Well, I just think, you know, we spend so much of our time kind of attached to a laptop, kind of, you know, researching and writing, you know, writing our findings. It's just nice to be firstly in the fresh air, and secondly doing a job which requires a completely different skill-set, really.'* (mature male youth and community studies student)

*'I think I like to be busy. Better to be busy than bored. I mean some weeks I'm run off my feet, and I wish I had a little bit of extra time here and there, but I think without it... for example, some of my flat-mates don't work and they don't spend that time doing anything else, they just sit on the sofa and don't do a lot, and me personally I can't do that. I can't waste a day, really. I mean now and again, obviously you have a day where you sit around and do nothing, but I will always be trying to find something to do.'* (young male IT student)

*'... students say they never have enough time, but actually I think that sometimes students have quite a lot of free time, and it can be frustrating not*

*really doing anything, and so the way I see it is, I'm not going to study 24 hours a day, I might as well use the time to do something else productive.'* (young female law student)

Relatively few interviewees gave employability considerations as their key or primary motivating factor in seeking paid work while studying, yet many reported these as positive 'bonus' outcomes from their work, and indeed most interviewees spoke positively about their student work experiences (see Chapters 6 and 7 below). Employability instead appeared to be among the secondary motivating factors, and many interviewees (both those still in HE and graduates) talked about how they had taken on work in order to help when they graduated and prepare them for the future. They talked about working to: improve their career prospects and skills; help secure a good job after university; give them an edge over the competition; enhance their CVs; develop reputation and contacts; and demonstrate that they had spent their time usefully whilst at university.

### 3.2 Motivations for undertaking work placements and voluntary work

It is interesting to note that when students talked of their work placements and/or voluntary work, employability considerations were the primary motivating factors. This is understandable given the lack of a pecuniary incentive. For example, one mature nursing student talked about how he took on voluntary work as a campus officer to bolster his CV, as he felt employers would look at how he had spent his time usefully whilst at university; another English student was particularly worried about her future opportunities when she graduated and so was steering her unpaid work experiences towards her career goal of publishing, and she became the Editor of the student newspaper; and a music management graduate talked of how she took up unpaid work that she felt would help her with her career after graduating:

*'Orange RockCorps just seemed like a really amazing opportunity. ...I've always wanted to do event management, since I started my degree, that was the area that I wanted to kind of specialise in, and I wanted to work on music events, and I knew that that would kind of give a way to do that with the gig opportunities, with the artist liaison opportunity that I was given, 'cause only a few people were picked to do that...I'd had all this bar work on my CV and nothing else, and thought, you know, at the age of sort of 19, 20, that that was the exact kind of experience, for a national programme as big as that, it'd be a fantastic opportunity.'* (young female music management graduate)

The employability motivation becomes particularly apparent when students talked of juggling paid work, study and unpaid work/placements or of giving up paid work to take up unpaid work experience in order build career relevant skills and experience. Some students were able to take on unpaid placements by moving back to their parents and reducing their costs or by increasing their paid working hours and essentially saving up prior to the placement period. Students therefore appeared more willing to take on short placements or those that took place during vacations. For example, one graduate talked about how his paid work in a hotel bar enabled him to take a year out to do a placement doing research work in the jungles of Malaysia:

*'I wouldn't have been able to have the opportunities that I'd have had either. Just for instance I wouldn't have been able to afford to do my [unpaid]*

*placement year if I hadn't been working beforehand... my placement year, I still had to pay my way while I was out there... I had the interview in December and got a place then, so from December 'til or from January really 'til June when we left, I was saving up a lot for that.'* (young male biological sciences student who spent his placement year working in the jungle in Malaysia)

Other reasons, particularly in the case of voluntary work, were to make a difference and do something they might not get the opportunity to do during their working life.

*'I knew that the help that I was giving them it's going to make, the result would be like the difference that that was going to make to, to people's lives in Africa. And so I was really determined to assist that charity in that regard.'* (mature male engineering graduate talking about his voluntary work)

*'... it can be quite fulfilling sometimes, when you, when you have some positive outcomes with service users. Maybe they get the best out of their abilities and reaching some of their potential. So that can be quite fulfilling, yeah. When you put a smile on their face it's pretty good.'* (mature male physiotherapy graduate talking about his voluntary work)

### 3.2.1 Reasons for not taking on a placement

As noted in Chapter 2 many, though not all, of the students and graduates interviewed had undertaken a work placement during their studies. Among those who did not, there were some who reported that these were not available to them on their course. However, there were several examples of students having the opportunity to undertake a placement (often a lengthy placement for example a Sandwich year) but deciding not to do so. Some of these did not really explore the option fully, thinking it was not really something they wanted to do. Others felt that placements were perhaps not appropriate for them, given their anticipated career direction, their existing experience in the labour market, and in a handful of cases, their age. They felt placements would not add anything and instead would just prolong the course and delay their graduation. Some reported that they were reluctant to take on unpaid placements as this might mean giving up their paid work or taking this on in addition to their paid work. The latter would mean increasing their workload or reducing their income which they could not afford. This also applied to considerations of unpaid internships after graduating: *'don't know if I can afford it [internship], only rich people do work for nothing'*.

*'I already have the experience. I don't think I'd have learnt anything by going to do a placement designed for an 18 year old when I'm a 28 year old, 29 year old and when I already have management experience...it wasn't really beneficial. It's just a delay of graduating. It's just taking another year before you graduate.'* (mature male business management student)

*'They said we could do a sandwich year if we wanted to, but it wouldn't help us kind of find a job, so no one really did it because we didn't think we'd be able to get a job for that year ... looking at it, it didn't seem very feasible. It'd just be a waste of a year otherwise, so I didn't want to take that risk... if they'd help you find a placement then that would've been an option, but finding it yourself can be quite difficult.'* (young female psychology graduate)

*'There was the opportunity to [do a placement] but I didn't take it. I think part of it was that I wasn't quite ready to go out there in like the real world quite yet, so I just stay at uni for a little bit longer and kind of I got into studying, so I didn't want to go out for a year to work and then have to get back into the mode of studying.'* (young female tourism management graduate)

*'... partly because obviously I've got a position, I've got a job already... like for someone that's never been in a professional environment, never had a job, that year out could be brilliant, it could give them that year of experience. But for me I feel like I've already got a job, and I've had a job for so long that I understand how all that works, and I'd rather just get my degree out of the way, obtain my degree before I kind of get into a proper profession that I really want to kind of excel in.'* (young male IT student)

There were a few individuals who were not offered the opportunity to undertake a placement but they felt this type of opportunity would have been useful to provide an insight into an area of work before committing themselves to a particular direction, to give experience in a professional environment, and allow for practical hands-on experience rather than pure theory. On balance however, those not taking up placement opportunities appeared to outweigh those who were not offered such experiences.

### 3.3 Extent of real choice over actual work experiences

There was a sense that students tried to choose or target the type of paid work they did. Some students tried to align their paid work to their studies, to find something that would have relevance to their course. However many others appeared to be targeting work that they thought would be suitable to do whilst studying (a good 'student job', see Section 2.3 above), that they previously had experience of, or that they felt they were most suited to (perhaps work that would not need previous experience or a regular commitment). They are not necessarily choosy about the type of work but are more focused on the location and hours offered. Retail work therefore appeared to be a popular choice.

Some students were able to gain the type of work they wanted, and were often in work before they started their studies whereas others had more difficulty and took the first job that they were offered which might be the '*the only thing around*' – as long as it largely fulfilled the parameters of what is considered to be a suitable student job:

*'Actually I told him I wasn't looking for cleaning. I said, if anything comes up I'll do it, and it was the first thing that came up. So I did it. I humbled myself enough to do it.'* (mature female education student)

*'I applied for lots of jobs but they're the only ones [supermarket] that really seemed interested... Like nursery nurses and like restaurants and stuff like that. I tried to get some sort of like based onto my education course but 'cause, like, you don't have experience they don't hire you... they try not to hire people that are that young.'* (young female education student)

Indeed, interviewees talked of limited opportunities in the university or college's local area, company cut-backs, and too much (local) competition for work including competition from other students looking for similar jobs:

- One mature social work student spoke of wanting to work in a supermarket but found that at the time she was looking for work, many supermarkets were cutting back on staff and were not recruiting; instead she noticed that there were lots of care-work jobs advertised and applied for these types of roles.
- Another English student spoke of looking for 'cushy' jobs like working in local cafes, small catering companies and bars ('where it is fun and you get tips') but found she was over-qualified, did not have the right training (ie level 2 food safety) or there was too much competition. Instead she took agency catering work where she could pick the shifts she wanted and so when and where she worked.
- Another fashion student talked of the difficulties she had in gaining work while studying as she had had no previous experience: *'it took me two and a half years to get a job'*; illustrating that some student jobs required applicants to have prior experience (see Chapter 4).
- A further marketing student reported that he would have liked a job in a shop with more regular hours (than the irregular bar work that he ended up doing) but was unsuccessful in his applications.

There was recognition that not all work (such as office/admin work) would be open to students given their study commitments: *'as a student I can't work 9 to 5, I can only work evenings and weekends. It is hard to get temping admin work'*. This also restricts the extent of choice that students have over their paid work opportunities. Chapter 4 provides more detail of students' experiences of trying to find work.

### 3.3.1 Choice of placements

In the main it appeared that many of those taking placements had little choice over whether to do them and indeed where to do them, as they tended to be a mandatory aspect to the course and to be organised by the university. However this was largely appreciated by the interviewees and the opportunity to undertake one or more placements was often the reason for choosing their particular course, and students appreciated that finding placements could be difficult, especially in the challenging economic climate.

*'... the course had a compulsory placement ... it was one of the sole, one of the key reasons why I chose to do the course. I could've gone to a lot of other universities that just did a straight three-year course with no placement. But I wanted to get a placement to secure a job offer and some experience in the field that I was studying in.'* (young male business graduate who had a sandwich year in industry)

However there were several examples of students choosing, finding and setting up their own placements. This either resulted from a perceived lack of support from the university or college in obtaining mandatory placements, because it was encouraged by the

university or college (such as 'elective' placements), or it was driven proactively by the student following up an interest or a potential career area. Finding one's own placement was largely, with hindsight, felt to be a beneficial experience:

*'I guess it would've been easier, you know, with the university basically allocating you a placement. But, you know, I think it's been good for me actually getting out there and finding a placement myself.'* (mature male social work graduate)

For example, a mature education student who, whilst doing a class observation in a Special School, became particularly interested in Special Needs teaching and arranged to undertake a more formal placement with the school by talking to the Head Teacher. Similarly, an international relations and politics student reported that he had been an Intern for four months during his first year, working for an MP on the run up to the 2010 election which involved working four days a week (including weekends) during term-time. He saw the post advertised on a website and applied as he felt this would be a good career development opportunity (see also Sections 2.1.4 and 4.3.3).

## 4 Process of gaining work

This chapter explains how students go about finding work and how they secure work; and explores whether students received any help with their job search and applications and if this or any other support would have been helpful. It covers both student work, graduate work and placements; and gathers the perspectives of both current students and new graduates.

### 4.1 Finding work

Students were very proactive about gaining work, and used a range of sources to find work. Informal networks were very common, with many students finding work through friends, fellow students, family members, or returning to former employers. Other students replied to job advertisements, often online adverts, some found work or placements via their universities, and a few were successful through speculative applications.

#### 4.1.1 Informal sources - friends, family and other informal contacts

Finding work through friends was relatively common, and this tended to be café, bar or nightclub work, or other shift-work. The friend was sometimes the initial contact and there was then a formal process involving an application form, CV or interview, but in other cases it took little effort on the part of the students to get these jobs:

*'My best friend works there [café] and then one of the members of staff left and she was like, "We need staff, come work for me" so I came and worked.'* (young female education student)

*'...just plainly because my friend that was at uni a year before me, he'd been working [at the nightclub], so he just told them that he had someone that wanted some work, and that's how I got involved in it really. There wasn't any kind of "want" to get involved with them really, it was just plainly because my friend had worked there previously and he said it was good ... and that's how it happened.'* (young female performance student)

Other students found work via wider word of mouth contacts outside of their circle of friends. One student did some nannying work for one of her lecturers after he'd sent an email round about the work, and another (education) student found a cleaning job because the pastor at her church had a connection with the cleaning company and told her that a vacancy had come up. One student found out about a vacancy with the local council through speaking to an acquaintance in the pub:

*'I actually spoke to somebody in the pub ... It was like a business associate really, you know, somebody that I'd sort of come across in the past. And actually he was, he was a local councillor as well, yeah, so he knew that they might be looking for somebody.'* (mature youth and communities studies student)

Family contacts were also mentioned by some students. A couple said that they had got jobs before starting university at companies that their fathers worked in, and had carried that work on during their studies, as summer jobs. In other situations family members saw jobs advertised or heard about vacancies and suggested the students pursue it:

*'Well, my auntie went to a Jobcentre and she saw [waitressing vacancies at a hotel] and she asked me to come along with her 'cause it was meant to be a Christmas temp job only but we went to an open day and we just had the on the spot interview really and showed our CVs and then we got it and we got asked to stay beyond the Christmas period.'* (young female business studies student)

*'Well really my mum suggested [working at the theme park] to me, 'cos quite a lot of people at her work who have university kids they were working there, quite a good job in the area for kids at university. The vast majority of people who work there are students on their break.'* (young female social sciences graduate)

A couple of (medical) students reported finding course-related placements through wider or family contacts. One obtained work experience shadowing a 'world famous' surgeon after coaching the surgeon's daughter in tennis; another organised a placement through a colleague of his aunt at the hospital:

*'... if you organise [a placement] privately, you get in touch with a supervisor ... so I got in touch with someone that I knew within A&E [at the hospital], and asked them if they were okay to be my supervisor for the six weeks ... It was, it was through family, it was a family friend, my auntie works with his sister, so that's how she knew him, and she put me in touch with him.'* (young male medical student)

Former employers were also a source of work for a few students. One nursing student found work during his studies as a relief worker at a former employer:

*'... essentially because I'd worked for the company before and had done really well with them, I was kind of trading off of an old reputation as it were so I could always get shifts, it wasn't really like I was having to phone some faceless person and go, "Could I have some work?" I would just ringing up someone I knew and go, "I need some shifts". And they would sort it out. Um, so that worked quite well for me at the time and it was pretty well paid.'* (young male nursing graduate)

#### 4.1.2 Formal job search activity

In terms of searching for job vacancies, many students used online searches using specific resources (eg NHS vacancy website) or specific searches (eg retail work), although some undertook more random searches and often ended up in jobs that they had not previously considered. One sports science graduate had found summer work as a technician at a manufacturing plant through online searching, which he would not have previously considered doing, but it improved his mechanical understanding. Another (creative) graduate found a job as a youth worker online, which she had not thought about getting into before:

*'I just saw it online ... I don't think I was looking for youth work ... I was job searching, 'cause I was in the sales job, and I thought, 'This is horrendous.' So I might have been looking for just about any job that wasn't sales, at the time.'*  
(young female music management graduate)

A mature social work student found caring work via an email alert for jobs having tried unsuccessfully to get supermarket or process operative work; most of the part-time vacancies on the email alerts were for care work and that persuaded her to apply for some. Other students found vacancies through local papers, Jobcentre Plus or shop windows and applied in the usual way.

### 4.1.3 Speculative applications

A number of students reported getting jobs through making speculative applications. Some took CVs round to shops, bars, restaurants and other employers likely to take on part-time staff:

*'I handed out 50 CVs or something. I just needed some work really ... Kind of anywhere, lots of bars, lots of restaurants. I wanted shift work and needed work that wasn't in the day so retail is out of the question because obviously I had to be in uni all day so it was kind of just an evening thing or a weekend thing ... And I think it was timing, I dropped my CV in this bar and the manager was there and it was quite a quiet day, and so they were like "oh do you want to have a chat now?". And then I went for a trial the next week and that was that really. Really quick, really easy.'* (young female textiles student)

Other students went around local employers asking about work: one (international relations) student asked about work at the student union bars when he started and then was successful after a recruitment and assessment exercise, while another (medical student) got a summer job with a stone mason rather by chance than by design *'I just happened to ask if they had any jobs going, and they said yeah'*.

### 4.1.4 Via the university

Some students found work through, or for, their university (see also Section 2.1.2). A couple of students reported using university 'job shops' to find casual or part-time jobs – *'a website and they just posted local part-time jobs on there. I suppose they're geared for the students mainly, the jobs on there'*. However others felt that the jobs available through the 'job shop' were unsuitable: because they were too specialist eg graphic designer; or not flexible enough eg long hours or daytime hours. One (veterinary science) student got some casual data entry work after seeing an email sent out by the university, she noted that *'we just get sent a lot of emails a lot of the time ... the uni are very good at offering us part-time things'*. There were also reports of universities advertising via social media (eg Queen Mary University advertises jobs on twitter).

A few students worked for their universities in 'ambassador' roles, which involved *'speaking to prospective students, showing them around the campus, answering any questions, speaking to the parents'*, or in some cases going out to secondary schools or community fairs. As noted in Chapter 2, this work was generally sporadic, taking up one or two days a term, although it was useful for developing contacts:

*'... a lot more opportunities open up just because you're involved in the university, so you get to hear a lot of what's going on and they're always really willing to help you kind of like enhance your career and all that kind of thing.'*  
(young female business graduate)

Finally, one (sports science) student said he was approached by the university to do some coaching for a women's hockey team. He initially thought it was voluntary and was very pleasantly surprised when he got paid for it.

#### 4.1.5 Working with existing employers

As noted in Chapter 2, some students gained their jobs prior to starting university and were able to continue with this work, although often in a different location, while studying. For example, one biomedical sciences student worked at a national gym chain as a tennis coach in the branch near his parental home and then transferred to the branch near his university six months after starting his course, and similarly a (primary education) student who worked as a cashier at a chain of cash and carry wholesalers moved branches when she started university (see also Section 2.3 about geographic flexibility).

Other situations where students stayed with existing employers included a mature engineering student who had been working to support his family and who stayed with his employer but dropped working hours when he started the course, and a couple of young students who studied at a local university continued in their part-time jobs they had started while at college.

#### 4.1.6 Student jobs as stepping stones

Several students noted how a one-off job could lead to further opportunities. One drama student spoke of how she was able to move from voluntary work to a paid position with the organisation. Another education student got a job on the tills at a supermarket after working as a cleaner there with an outside cleaning contractor; the cashier work was easier and gave her useful customer service skills. In another example, a student who worked for the university as an 'ambassador' was first in line to take up new jobs at the university library when it expanded:

*'... because it was kind of, it was a new start-up, so they went for people that had been student ambassadors and just to try and get an initial round of staff in ... The manager of the library was new in and then he went to my boss as the student ambassador just to send emails out and go through different contact routes to try and find as many people as possible, 'cause I think they did it during the summer holidays when the students weren't really around and I went through it that way ... We went through an interview process but it wasn't that competitive because I think everybody that applied got the job anyway.'* (young female business graduate)

## 4.2 Finding jobs after graduation

The methods used to find jobs after graduation, be they graduate jobs or non-graduate jobs, were very similar to those used to find jobs while studying, in that friends/word of mouth and formal job applications were the most common. There were some instances of

graduates continuing, or progressing, in their existing jobs, for example, in medical and related courses where placements are an important part of the course. Recruitment agencies were mentioned by a couple of graduates, and returning to an employer from a previous (non-medical) placement was also mentioned.

## 4.3 Areas of support received

### 4.3.1 University careers service

Students appeared to be aware of their university careers services, but no students mentioned using this service to help them in making successful applications for work (while studying); instead, there was a sense that students needed to be proactive and to be able to find and secure work for themselves. One graduate reported that the careers service was useful in helping her with a CV when she was successfully applying for a graduate job:

*‘... they helped me with my CV when I was applying for my permanent job ... I already had my CV, so they just kind of made it a bit better and redid it a little bit.’* (young female business graduate)

Other graduates also reported making more use of their university careers service as they approached graduation, although views on the quality of the service were mixed with some saying the advice was helpful – *‘gave me a good impression of what was out there’* – while others were less positive:

*‘There was a careers department, I went for a kind of a talk with them, but they weren’t very helpful. She kind of just diverted me to different websites, which I could’ve done on my own really.’* (young female social sciences graduate)

Students reported that there was some (limited) support available, for example:

- leaflets about how to apply for teaching jobs and what sort of questions applicants might be asked in interviews
- careers talks/lectures/online materials about CVs and interviews
- and workshops to raise awareness about potential directions/jobs/further study.

A common criticism of careers service support was that it was too generalist, and not course/subject specific enough for students’ needs. However, one student reported that their university had a ‘subject futures week’ where every subject had a guest speaker and an opportunity to hear about different jobs in the industry:

*‘... they had subject futures week, and every single subject across the entire university, as far as I understand it, had a guest lecturer every day for this week ... there was a lecture every single day on every facet of filmmaking, on every facet of design, every facet of fashion, which was such a fantastic thing for them to do, because you met these people who we know are probably who are going to hand off to us, hopefully, one day, the jobs that they are doing. So it was a*

*really interesting thing, and you got to know people who are important in the industry, and how they did it themselves.'* (young male film-making student)

### 4.3.2 Course tutors

Tutors could often be a source of support and were able to give more specific and specialised advice than students often obtained from careers services (but the feedback suggests this may depend on whether the course has a vocational focus). One (drama) student talked about how her course and her tutors had helped her in deciding about work (and which work to do) while studying, helping her to think about the work experiences she could do that might help her with achieving her career goals after university – the tutor recommended that she try working in a theatre to 'see how things worked'.

Other students said that they had lots of help on their course with:

- generic support with CVs, interview techniques etc.
- arranging short 'work experience' placements (see also Section 3.3.1)
- networking within their industry – taking students on trips to give them opportunities to meet employers, and also inviting industry guests in to speak.

Tutors could also provide advice about the optimum number of hours that a student should work. For example, one English student was told that 10 hours a week would be about right. There were also examples of tutors providing students with paid work either through bits of freelance work or paid placements:

*'... so I got a paid work for two weeks at the beginning of this year where I worked for the designer, helping her on a collection ... My tutor found it for me and it was someone that she knew who needed some help.'* (young female textiles student)

### 4.3.3 Support with placements

Some students mentioned that their university found placements for them; while others noted that although they found placements themselves, the university always made clear it would help any student who could not find one. However, some students were happier to arrange placements themselves as they felt it would be better quality experience than letting the university do it (see also Section 3.3.1):

*'I applied for them personally ... [the university] had links to some companies, that I did apply to also, but it had limited links. So it was all about sort of going out and me looking for the jobs that I wanted to do, rather than just taking what in effect was a path put in front of you.'* (young male banking, finance and management graduate)

### 4.3.4 External support

A few students also reported getting support from a range of external sources, including friends already working in their sector who could give specific advice on applications, friends and family who could give general advice on CVs and interview techniques, former graduates from their university/course, and online forums.

## 4.4 Further support respondents would have liked

Some students felt that their universities could have provided them with much more support. This additional support that students would have liked tended to focus around:

- Further general help with applications, such as writing effective and personalised CVs, and help with interview skills including mock interviews. Some suggested that this help should be made available earlier on in students' courses rather than just in final years.
- Further help with job search, including which websites to go to for jobs in particular sectors, and being kept informed by email of new job opportunities.
- Opportunities to network with potential employers: one respondent, who felt that there was not a careers person at their university, knew that other universities that his friends attended had companies coming in regularly giving talks.
- More course-specific information, including getting graduates to come in and talk to existing students.
- Advice on deadlines for placement applications or job applications in final year such as a timetable/calendar of what to do and by when.
- Help finding work-specific placements/jobs during course.

However, others felt that there was plenty of support available if students asked for it, and that students themselves need to take responsibility for improving their employability and looking for jobs or placements. When asked whether the university could have provided more support, one student replied '*other than write my application, no*'.

# 5 Challenges of working whilst studying

*'I've always said that if I didn't have to work, I would probably do better at university... because I would have more time to do reading ... more time to plan the assignments and do more of the reading that we need, do wider reading as well. I think a couple of assignments I've sort of had to rush because I've done them the day before because something's needed, like I broke my microwave or something, and I needed to work more hours just to buy a new microwave or something.'* (young female education student)

This chapter sets out students' perceptions of the downsides of working while studying, in terms of the challenges and difficulties faced by students combining work and study. It also explores the strategies used to overcome these difficulties.

## 5.1 Difficulties of working while studying

Most respondents reported that they experienced some challenges or difficulties caused by working while studying. Those who did not experience any difficulties were generally on courses with few contact hours, or had work which was highly flexible.

Feedback from the students and graduates suggests that there were two main areas of difficulty: balancing time between paid work and studying, and feeling exhausted; and two dimensions of impact: negative impact on their studies and disruption to their social life.

### 5.1.1 Difficulties balancing time between paid work and studying

Respondents spoke of having difficulties balancing their time between work and study, although nearly all prioritised study over work wherever possible. This balancing act was particularly challenging at key pressure points – starting their HE studies for the first time and making the transition from school/college to university life, exam periods or around other key assignments (often towards the end of term), and during their final year of study.

For example, one sports development graduate who kept the same part-time job throughout FE and HE study reported that the workload increased (and the work got harder) between college and university which made it more difficult to manage his time. Similarly, an English student noted how although she had undertaken paid work while at school and college and had coped well, she found the commitment required from university was far greater which made it much harder to juggle work and study:

*'It is OK to work when you are in school but it is much harder when you are at university. People don't recognise the massive jump [from college] to go to do a degree. There is so much reading, English is very reading heavy.'* (young female English student)

Examples of students having difficulties around key assignments included:

- An English language and literature graduate who worked full-time during vacations found it more difficult to juggle his time during the summer of his second year when he was working on his dissertation.
- An English literature graduate who had a shift scheduled the day before an exam, when he would have preferred to be revising as he liked to read through everything the day before the exam, so he had to prepare for it well in advance.
- A biology and psychology student who worked full-time over the Easter holidays before having exams in May, when in an ideal world he would have had time off to start revising for the exams.
- A drama graduate who described how balancing his time was particularly hard in the build up to his final performance when he needed lots of rehearsal time.
- And an ecology graduate who reported that balancing work and study became more difficult in his final year as the course became more demanding than it had been in the first two years, and once or twice left submitting work until the last minute. This sentiment was echoed by another student:

*'I think in the third year I would say [paid work is] getting in the way of my work a little bit now. I think last year I got the balance quite right, but this year I'm struggling a little bit.'* (young female music student)

In addition, a few respondents mentioned that the time taken travelling to work exacerbated the difficulties around balancing time, with some having long daily commutes to work on public transport (particularly in London), and others travelling long distances on a weekly basis to work in their home towns.

### 5.1.2 Feeling tired or exhausted

A second area of challenge or difficulty mentioned by a large number of respondents was that of feeling tired. Feedback here ranged from respondents feeling *'a bit tired at times'* up to being completely exhausted from working long hours or doing night shifts during term-times and missing lectures as a result:

*'I could get in some nights at one in the morning and then wake up too late to make the first lecture ... Your attendance levels do fall if you're working nights... Obviously if you're tired during the day, your attention span, your focus is going to go. And that was the main thing for me. I was always bloody tired.'* (young male marketing student doing bar work)

In a number of cases, being exhausted had an impact on the quality of respondents' university work (see below), affecting their concentration at lectures or when trying to do course work at home, or making it difficult to retain information:

*'I did [nightclub work] Monday nights and Thursday nights and then the taxi office I did Wednesday nights and Sunday nights ... But I did survive on very little sleep, which is hard when you're doing a dissertation and things like that.'* (young male drama graduate)

*'... when I get home after I've been to uni at 9 [am], then worked, then gone to another lecture, when I get in, I can barely remember what I studied that day, because I've had it in my head, then I've gone to work, lost it because I've been dealing with work.'* (mature male business and marketing student)

In a few more extreme cases, exhaustion affected respondents' general health and well-being. One information systems and technology student mentioned that doing a combined 50 hours a week at university and in his job, and trying to do course work and assignments around that, had made him ill in his first year, and he had to take time off work and university to recover. Another fashion student described how her shifts in a supermarket meant that she went straight from university to work, finished late and studied into the early hours, and then got up to go to university again at 7am which she felt affected the quality of her university work and her general well-being:

*'I'll go straight from uni to work ... finish work at 11.30, that's when I get home ... then for me, I find that I'm coming home, trying to do work, go to bed about maybe four in the morning, be up again for seven to get back to uni ... I know my quality of work wasn't as good as it could have been ... the late nights and stuff, you're always tired and it does make, well for me, when I get really tired, I get ill quite easily.'* (young female fashion student)

The cumulative effects of never having a break were mentioned by a few respondents who worked during the university holidays, so would be doing university work in term time and then paid work the rest of the time:

*'... it felt like you didn't really get a break when you're kind of studying for the year and then working for the summer as well. That was quite difficult.'* (young female social sciences graduate)

Other related challenges were stress and dealing with unsociable work, both of which added to feelings of tiredness. A few respondents said that their job carried a lot of responsibility, and so was more stressful and tiring than other jobs. Examples included a paramedic, a bank nurse, and a ride supervisor at a theme park. Some students also talked about how the work itself presented several challenges, in terms of long hours, unsocial hours, hard manual labour, dealing with difficult customers, and sometimes loneliness.

### 5.1.3 Impact on studies

The experiences of students balancing work and study illustrate how paid work can negatively impact upon studies by reducing the time available for study work, meaning that assignments have to be completed well in advance or alternatively handed in at the last minute. Indeed, some students (although not all) felt that working while studying did have a negative impact on their studies. This ranged from not having as much time as they would have liked for general reading or thinking about the course, right up to work directly affecting performance in exams or assessments and contributing to students failing. These challenges are illustrated by the following examples and quotes.

One (physiotherapy) graduate felt he did not spend as much time concentrating on his studies as he would have liked:

*'I wouldn't say I neglected my studies but, obviously I didn't have as much time as I would've wanted to, to study. So it was kind of a balancing act.'* (mature male physiotherapy graduate)

One arts student spoke about how working reduced the time and energy she had for *'creative thought'*. Similarly a nursing graduate reported that his paid work and unpaid placements took time away from studying which meant he was not able to do the depth of reading for the course that he wanted to and that he was always finishing course work at the last minute. A tourism and management graduate felt that her working hours had an impact on her study time:

*'I think sometimes because the shifts that I worked, I used to work three in the afternoon till seven at night and sometimes I found that like by the time I got into my [course] work, I had to stop to go into work or like I'd think about sitting down to do some studying but then I knew that I'd had to leave in a few hours, so I didn't want to sit down and get into it and then have to stop. So, it did kind of mean on days that I worked, I didn't necessarily do a lot of uni work.'* (young female tourism and management graduate)

One business and marketing student felt that he had to cram his final year assignments in at the last minute as he had not had enough time between studying and working and this had affected the quality of the assignments. This was less of an issue in the first and second years, when the workload was lighter:

*'As your assignments start coming in and you've got three assignments all on one day due in, it's hard to write three assignments in detail, proofread them multiple times around being in lectures and working ... to get it the depth you need and the clarity you need for the person marking your assignment is very, very, very difficult ... I get so tired and stressed that I just write and go off on a tangent so I end up wasting more time because my brain is telling me I need to rest. It's maybe twelve o'clock in the morning, you know you've got uni and work the next day so you're thinking I could just stop and go to sleep now or I could write as much as possible right now and come back and look at it. It sounds great but by the time you come back and look at it you're already tired again ... so you don't realise what you've wrote is useless.'* (mature male business and marketing student who was working 30 hours a week as a restaurant manager)

Some respondents reported failing exams or modules as a result of doing paid work. One physics student said that he had failed a couple of exams in his first year because he was not expecting the pressure that the job put on him as well as his studies, and he had to re-sit the exams. Similarly an ecology graduate failed a module in his second year because he had been working:

*'I hadn't been able to put the time into my studies as, as much so I did fail one of the modules in my second year, but I did get the chance to retake that and, you know I did pass it second time round. But still it's, you know it's not the ideal situation.'* (young male ecology graduate)

A drama graduate reported that with hindsight he wished he had not worked quite so much towards the end of his third year as he felt it had impacted negatively on his written work

and that he did not do as well in his finals as he would have if he had been able to spend more time on his written work:

*'I wish in some ways I'd not worked as much, just because I didn't focus enough on my written work in my degree, unfortunately ... I'm naturally good at the acting side and the more verbal examinations and things like that, but I struggle with written work so I needed to pay more attention to that, but with working I pushed the written work to the side.'* (young male drama graduate).

Similarly a student noted that paid work was affecting the grades of her fellow students:

*'... [paid work] changes the experience of the course, it changes it for the worse in many ways ... it's very interesting talking to my peers in my year group ... and then their parents for whatever reason don't financially put in to them and so they have to [work], there's at least two people who are working flat out full-time and their course work is very poor. And then there are others who are from well off backgrounds maybe, lots of support, who just float through, and can devote all their time and that makes a massive difference to your final grade.'* (mature female ceramics student)

A further challenge mentioned by a couple of students was finding the time to participate fully in group work because of work commitments. A couple of students mentioned that their paid work made it difficult for them to meet with others for group assignments, which caused tension within the group and could ultimately affect their mark:

*'... if you're doing like group work I have to try and find time to meet outside of college hours; trying to like juggle the two can be quite difficult and making sure that I can get the coursework done and the work done as well. It can kind of like create a kind of bit of tension during the group when I can't make, you know, certain meetings and that.'* (young female business studies student)

One international relations student mentioned that it was a struggle to fit an internship alongside their university work in the first year – the internship was quite intense, four days a week for four months, but the student felt it was worth *'risking it'* during the first year as university work is not so important then; he would not have done the internship in his second or third year.

#### **5.1.4 Impact on social/personal life**

Working while studying also impacted upon students' social lives in a number of ways. Firstly, it reduced the amount of time they had to socialise, and for those working summer jobs it caused them difficulties in meeting up with friends over the summer:

*'... in the first and second year, there, there's a lot of social activity that will be missed out on from working.'* (young male languages graduate)

*'... [I work] early mornings on a Saturday, I start at nine; quite a lot of people go out Friday, which I can't do, 'cause I've got work in the morning.'* (young male biomedical sciences student)

Secondly, working made them too tired to socialise:

*'... sometimes by Friday all my friends, all my flatmates are going out, and I'm just absolutely shattered, so sometimes it doesn't, it's not nice, and you do get really tired. Yeah, sometimes it doesn't benefit your social life whatsoever...it kind of just made it better because I was earning and then spending less as well.'* (young female performance student)

Thirdly, respondents sometimes undertook paid work at the times when most of their friends would go out (eg weekend evenings):

*'Socially in terms of, with my house mates and my friends, I found difficult because I was working usually Thursday and Friday or Thursday, Friday and Saturday which, especially in the first year when everyone was going out. And so I found it quite frustrating in that way occasionally.'* (young female textiles student)

A few respondents noted that a reduced social life also had a cost benefit, as they were spending less on going out:

*'I suppose when you work you don't spend any money so that was a good benefit.'* (mature male physiotherapy graduate)

Some respondents mentioned that working while studying had a negative impact on their relationships with partners, children and wider families. One mature engineering graduate with a family said that he did not always have time for his wife and daughter while he was studying and working, which was hard to do, but he felt it was better to do well in his degree and have time with his family in the future than risk getting lower grades and so not getting as good a job:

*'I would go to work, I would come here, I'd be sleeping, I'd wake up, I'd straight away go to the library and then I would come back from the library I'd be very, I'd be very late ... and in the morning I would be up, be going to school again, so it was really, really tough on us. It was tough on myself, it was tough on my daughter and it was tough on my wife.'* (mature male engineering graduate)

A few respondents reported difficulties spending time with their partners as a result of working, either because work took them away from their partners for days/weeks at a time, or that they did not have enough free time to travel to visit partners. A couple of respondents said that their relationships with their partners finished because of pressures of working and studying:

*'I broke up with my girlfriend pretty much because I was in [work], because I didn't have the time.'* (young male physics student)

## 5.2 Are students working too much?

There was an indication that students were working too much, as highlighted by their reflections on whether they would have done anything differently, and by their advice to new students. This was particularly the case amongst graduates, those who at the time of this research had left HE and were reflecting back on the entirety of their HE experience. They tended to advise cutting down on hours and stopping paid work completely if it is impacting on an individual's study, and, where possible, limiting working to holiday periods rather than term-time and avoiding working in the final year:

*'I'd have probably only done one job instead of the two, definitely. I would have spent a lot more time doing written work and things like that, because that's what really let me down... remember why they're at university. Make sure that the work they're doing isn't going to affect their university too much. Make sure that they're still able to do everything they need to do at uni to 100% without the work interfering. Obviously, if they've got time to spare then getting a job is great, but especially with what people are paying for university nowadays, they need to make the most of it while they're there. And make sure they can get the best grades they can get.'* (young male drama graduate)

*'... if you do a part-time job certainly I'd say your first year, second year you can get away with it. But if you wanna get good marks in the third year, there's not really the time; you don't have enough time to manage both of them.'* (young male banking, finance and management graduate)

*'... in terms of paid job, only do what's necessary because you don't want it to impact on your work as you've only got one chance to get through, you don't want to have to repeat because your work wasn't up to the standard that you know it could have been. So I would say don't do anything more than necessary.'* (young female fashion student)

However it is worth noting that very few wished they had not worked, or appeared to suggest that the challenges in working outweighed the benefits (see Chapters 6 and 7).

## 5.3 Overcoming challenges

Students adopted a number of strategies to overcome the challenges brought about by working while studying. The two most commonly reported strategies were negotiating some degree of flexibility in working hours and patterns with their employer, and building up their planning, time management and scheduling skills.

### 5.3.1 Flexibility at work

Students reported being able to be flexible with their working hours and shifts (although this was not an option open to all students), reducing working hours at key pressure points, and (sometimes) increasing working hours during vacations to help them to save money for periods when they could not work or work as many hours. It appeared that this strategy was one that students adopted as they settled into their courses and their jobs – as they became more appreciative of their study demands and more able to negotiate a

change in their hours. As noted in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3), flexibility was deemed to be one of the factors that students looked for in their jobs.

Some students reported that their employers were very flexible and they could juggle shifts around without too much difficulty, or were on zero hours contract so could accept or decline shifts as and when they came up:

*'... mostly all of the staff there are students, so they are really, really, really flexible with the shifts that they give, and it's quite a close network between the staff, like I said like before, we kind of help each other out ... if we say like we can't work for a week or so, then they seem to have no problem with finding someone else that can cover those shifts for you, because there's so many people that are working there.'* (young female performance student)

*'I think it was good the fact that you got to say how many hours you wanted to work 'cause it was like a zero-hour contract, so you can say if you like had loads of free time that you could do a load of shifts or you could say like, "I've got a load of work this week, so I can't work any".'* (young female tourism and management graduate)

Others reported that they could get particular shifts off if they gave notice in advance:

*'... they were quite good in a way if I had shows on and performances as long as I gave them enough notice. When I first found out the show dates, as long as I let them know, I could always get them off. But other than that, I pretty much worked set shifts.'* (young male drama graduate)

*'... three shifts most of the time and then around the deadline they were really good because they were very flexible with me. So I could go down to two shifts if I had a lot of work to do ... [the manager] was really good if I needed like, if one week I couldn't work at all because I had my dissertation or something like that, she was really great at being like yeah, that's fine. You could maybe have another shift next week to make it up, which was really good. Because I think if I hadn't had that, I wouldn't have been able to keep it for so long.'* (young female textiles student)

Some students were also able to temporarily drop their paid jobs while on work placements:

*'But then they give me the evening off whilst I was on placement because obviously I didn't want to leave school at say four and have to be in work from five until like eight or whatever, and so they were really good.'* (young female education graduate who had to do placement)

A good relationship with the manager was often important in having flexibility at work, and one respondent said that their manager gave them more general advice about coping with the pressures of working while studying:

*'... well [my manager] used to study as well and he went to the graduate programme and he's a manager. So, he gave me some advice on how to deal*

*with the coursework and how to prepare for exam and things like that, and how to recover quickly from all my nightshifts.'* (mature male engineering graduate)

An alternative strategy reported by some students was to do full-time holiday working only, so they could concentrate fully on their studies during term time.

### 5.3.2 Improved time management

Students also reported how they became very adept at juggling multiple activities – their work (sometimes several jobs) and learning – and through this experience gained the valuable life and employability skills of self organisation, forward planning and time management (see below).

*'... it was basically just trying to figure out what shifts I had at the job and then just trying to fit spare hours around that as well, it wasn't just switching shifts, it was late nights, like in the library and stuff, I'd say go to after I'd been to work and things like that. So it was just trying to get the workload spread out evenly.'* (young male sports development graduate)

*'I've divided the two [university and paid work]. So in effect, I've kind of said to myself, Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays I'm at [university]. Tuesdays and Thursdays I've got my paid work. So again, there's been a fair degree of discipline involved in kind of structuring the week. But, you know, so far so good, really.'* (mature male youth and communities studies student)

*'The main thing is time management; making sure that I find time to research and complete my reports, also making sure that when I do go to college and go to work that I put my full focus and effort into each one, try not to like merge the two or try not to complicate things. I think it's mainly time management and that can be quite difficult sometimes, but making sure that you keep to the schedule and structure I think it can be okay.'* (young female business studies student)

One student commented that modern technology made it easier to plan and structure their time (although they felt they were well organised anyway):

*'You have to manage your time well. I mean I'm a relatively organised person anyway, so I can do it, I can manage it, and I'm very good with my calendar, my reminders, and I know I can manage that ... I manage everything through my phone and my laptop. I have a really well-organised calendar with like a colour scheme system, so I know exactly when I'm doing what, and I can plan ahead. So like I might have shifts in for a couple of weeks' time, but I'll also have other arrangements, and I can plan things around that. So I'm just well-organised, that's how I manage my time.'* (young male IT student)

This individual also reported that he adjusted his sleep patterns or the amount of time he slept as part of his time management and scheduling:

*'I used to kind of think like I need this 10 hours sleep, and without this 10 hours sleep I won't be able to function. Then you realise that ... as long as you're healthy you can get away with a lot less sleep, and I feel like now I can easily*

*deal with kind of seven hours sleep a night; that's fine, and I've got enough time to do other things ... I just tend to think there's no point in sleeping extra than you actually need.'* (young male IT student)

Respondents who worked night shifts would try to grab some sleep when they could during the day:

*'... what I do is I make sure I get some sleep in the evening before I go to work.'* (mature female veterinary sciences graduate)

*'... when I finished uni I'd go home and I'd have an hour's power nap before I'd have to get up and ready for work ... And then if I had a spare day I'd just sleep constantly to try and catch up on the rest of the week.'* (young male drama graduate)

Other strategies here included adopting a healthy lifestyle and getting plenty of sleep in order to keep energy levels up; and (where possible) continuing with their studies whilst at work. For example, one drama student worked a night shift in a taxi office handling bookings and he was able to take his laptop to work and do his course work when it was quiet.

### 5.3.3 Help from university or tutor

Some students gained support from their institutions to help them cope with the challenges of balancing work and study. This support ranged from advice from tutors to more practical support:

*'I got help from my tutor on how to, on how to set up a task management plan ... To help me be in control and manage my tasks properly in an efficient manner.'* (mature male engineering graduate)

*'I did work with my [personal] tutor to try and you know, figure out timetables and stuff for myself, and in terms of... when I did fail the module, one of my lecturers managed to sort it, 'cause the retake period was when I was actually [overseas on placement] ... one of the lecturers managed to sort it so that I could take my retake [overseas] rather than having to fly back and fly out again.'* (young male ecology graduate)

In another example, one student noted how he had had an exam re-arranged from an evening when he worked to a later morning, so that he could continue with his paid work, although he said that it was not an important exam and he felt quite lucky that they had rearranged it for him.

One student who worked in the student union bar reported that the bar would not let staff stay on during their final term in the third year, so they could study for their finals:

*'... they stop you from working at a certain point so you can focus on your exams and stuff ... I think before the end of second term, so before Easter basically ... they ask you to pack it in, which is fair really.'* (young male international relations graduate)

However many more students reported that their university had not been supportive, largely because the institutions had not been aware of the challenges the students were facing. In most cases students did not consider asking their universities for support, either because they felt their university work was more important than paid work and so tried to rearrange shifts around university commitments, they viewed their paid work and university as separate parts of their life, or they felt that the issues were not significant enough to warrant asking the university for support.

## 6 Benefits to students of working

*'... it's worth it, if you want to work hard and play hard. Working also helps with time planning, much more so than just doing the degree.'* (young female textiles student)

*'I think it just helped me get something else out of my student experience, as opposed to just a degree. It made me more of a well-rounded student, as opposed to just somebody who's academically able.'* (young female law student)

This chapter sets out students' perspectives – those still in higher education at the time of the follow up study – on the positive aspects of undertaking work (paid or unpaid) whilst studying. Students were asked to describe the benefits of working (if they saw any) and to reflect on the ways in which their paid work at university or college had impacted upon their current situation. They were also asked what other activities or actions had helped them to develop their skills or career to date. Finally students were asked to look forward and gauge how useful their work experiences whilst studying would be to the development of their career. The following chapter provides feedback from graduates about the benefits of working and links their experiences of working while studying to their experiences in the labour market as new graduates.

### 6.1 Positive experience

In the main, both students and graduates appeared to be satisfied with the work they did whilst studying – finding their working arrangements and the work they did to have some beneficial aspects. Indeed, the vast majority of students were able to identify benefits in all the types of work they had undertaken, even those who spoke of the challenges of juggling work and learning, those who did not particularly enjoy their work, and those who felt their work was not directly related to their programme of study. Very few wished they had not worked, or appeared to suggest that the challenges of working outweighed the benefits – indeed their advice to other undergraduates would be to work (but, as noted above, to keep a focus on their studies and to ensure their working hours are 'manageable').

For example, one medical student who had worked as a stone mason during his summer vacation noted how this had given him exposure to death and bereavement, which he felt was an inevitable part of medicine. Another (law) student talked about how working as an Avon representative had given her the confidence to talk to people and interact with the public which she felt was important as she wants to be a police officer whilst another (medical) student felt that her role as a customer service assistant at Tesco had helped her develop skills in dealing with people in difficult situations (such as patience, communication, empathy), skills which she felt would be very useful for her future role as a doctor.

However a small number of individuals made a distinction between the different work activities or roles they did – enjoying some work more than other work. For example, one veterinary sciences student did not really enjoy her part-time paid holiday job which although well paid she found boring, whereas she found her unpaid internship very

rewarding. Another veterinary sciences student enjoyed all the part-time work she had done whilst studying but talked about regretting taking on paid data-entry work which she felt was not useful for the future.

## 6.2 Range of benefits

Students described a wide range of benefits; these were often linked to their motivations for taking on paid work or placements. The benefits could perhaps be categorised as: financial reward, insight, personal development, enjoyment, and the development and demonstration of employability/transferable or soft skills. These benefits are closely linked to the reasons students gave for engaging in work in the first place (see Chapter 3).

### 6.2.1 Extra income and feeling of self reliance

Several students talked about the money they received from their paid work and how this had helped them. For example, students mentioned how their earnings were: providing them with extra income to help towards specific goals such as running a car; enabling them to save up for when they graduate; helping them to feel financially independent and related to this, to be able to manage their own finances; and helping meet living expenses or provide a safety net in case of unexpected bills. A couple of students also mentioned that through their work they were able to get staff discounts, which helped save them money.

[what are the benefits?] *'Probably the money that I've earned and saved. Even though obviously I didn't save everything because I needed to spend it. I went travelling for a month last summer and the summer before that on that, all of the money that I'd saved. And I've saved money for this summer as well which means I'm much more comfortable financially– it's not kind of stopped me doing stuff because of money. Like if I hadn't been working I wouldn't be able to do this placement this summer because I wouldn't have the financial backing.'*  
(young female textiles student)

*'I guess the immediate benefit is that you've got that security of having a bit of money. You are not relying on others and that's more important. So you're not relying on the bank or family, as such, who provide for you... I think it is just an important part of growing up and learning how to handle yourself. In terms of money and, you know, you don't just go out and spend loads of money on, I don't know, a new game.'* (young male biological sciences student)

It is interesting to note that although financial reasons were overwhelmingly the primary motivators to taking on paid work, income was just one of many benefits cited by students. Some students didn't mention money at all.

### 6.2.2 Labour market insight

Feedback from the students indicates that the work they did whilst studying gave them an insight into the labour market and the world of work, and thus a chance to prepare for life after university. It helped them to appreciate the range of jobs that are available, the types of work that would interest them and also the type of work (or career) that they would not like to do beyond their student years.

This insight could be general – effectively what it is like to work – the discipline of getting up for work, working long hours, interacting with the public/customers, and dealing with senior people and those in authority; and also in seeing how a business is run:

*‘... you get an idea about the normal jobs that have to be done. Someone has to do these jobs... you learn so much about life from the world of work, you can build your own person.’* (young female English student).

*‘I got the experience of being able to know what it’s like to be in the working world, and being organised in that sense when you had to work, and just knowing how to be an employee, how you should conduct yourself in whatever you are doing, how to speak to people in authority like managers and stuff like that.’* (young female law student)

*‘... having just general work skills and understanding like the dedication to your work, that you’ve got to turn up for work, that you have responsibilities... I think it makes you grow up. It gives you that maturity, because you’ve got, you’ve got an actual job as opposed to just having money given to you. Because some people do not have a clue about the real world, and it gives you that insight into the real world... So just understanding the work, work ethics and how it works, so things like actually having to attend work... if you don’t go there, there’s consequences. Obviously the reason you’re going, you’re getting your money. Kind of it also allows you to understand where your money’s coming from, and it’s your money as opposed to just money being given to you. And you become better at managing your money as well, because you know that you’re earning it; self-efficiency, if you like.’* (young male IT student, working in IT retail)

Alternatively the insight could be specific to an occupation or career goal. For example, one biomedical science student talked about his voluntary work in Cambodia and how this would give him invaluable background knowledge if he decided to go into the area of public health. Another (drama) student who worked in a theatre box office after volunteering there spoke of how she had learnt about running a theatre company, something that she is now keen to do. Another (fashion) student felt her unpaid placements working in studios and with designers had given her an insight into the demands of working in her chosen field. A further example is of an IT student who worked as a sales representative in IT retail and is planning a career in this field and felt that his work had given him the opportunity to sample the appropriate working environment. A final example is of a sociology student who gained work in a call centre for a credit card company and now feels that working in the financial sector is not for her.

*‘At the beginning of uni, at the beginning of my course, I didn’t really know what I wanted to do as a career. So I guess that getting involved with a theatre kind of gave me a better sense of what I wanted to do in the industry.’* (young female performance student)

*‘... it taught me about the kind of working hours that are expected for that kind of job. And what to expect when I do graduate here and have to go and either work for myself or work for a studio or work for a bigger company.’* (young female textiles student)

*'When I started uni I wasn't sure what I wanted to do... I wasn't really sure and I thought it [banking] might be an option but I don't think it will be now. I don't think it is for me.'* (young female sociology student)

### 6.2.3 Personal development

Students spoke of work giving them a sense of self worth and of making a difference or, as noted above, being financially independent or self reliant. They also talked about how work was helping them to develop initiative and more commonly to gain self confidence. As one English student noted: *'I am now more confident and will just jump in socially'*. It also helped them to manage stress and multi-task. Other personal attributes that students felt work had helped to develop or strengthen in them included: work ethic and self discipline, patience, empathy, discretion, assertiveness, and responsibility. For example, one law student who had undertaken a range of paid and unpaid work felt that dealing with people in work helped her to be more outgoing and assertive. Another (biological sciences) student who worked during his summers in an engineering firm spoke about how his job helped develop initiative and his coping skills. Another (fashion) student who had worked as an exotic dancer felt this had helped her to develop self confidence and a thick skin which she felt would be useful for her chosen career

*'It was mind stimulating, so like you always have to think on the job, which obviously is good.... You can use that in the future, if you have problems you can think fast on your feet... Like experiences of being under stress. I guess that a lot of people that wouldn't have had any jobs won't have that experience. It will be maybe a shock to them of having some stress. Now for me, it's rather normal.'* (young male biological sciences student who had a summer job in an engineering company that he has been doing since he was 14)

*'I've become very thick skinned... and it's given me a real confidence boost because I was quite shy, quite quiet. And now I find it easier to talk to people and if somebody is rude to me I know how to handle them properly without getting upset...It takes a lot to upset me nowadays... I think it will help me because the fashion industry can be a bit crazy... and I feel like because I am quite tough now I will be able to take the criticism.'* (young female fashion student working as an exotic dancer)

### 6.2.4 Enjoyment

Many (though not all) students appeared to enjoy their work experiences, and this was often driven by their interaction with customers/clients or by their working relationships with colleagues. Through their work they were able to meet people, make friends, share their expertise, alleviate boredom (particularly in the vacations) and do something different from studying. Indeed, several students stressed the importance of the social aspect of working and how it provided them with a different set of social contacts away from the university environs. The social aspect of work appeared to sustain students through the challenges of working whilst studying and perhaps go some way to make up for the sacrifices they felt they had to make in their opportunities to socialise with university peers:

*'... the initial sort of making links around the university. I think the job is really enjoyable and because you have a lot of interaction particularly with people*

*younger than you that have maybe got the same interests.'* (young female veterinary sciences student who was working as a Student Ambassador)

*'I really enjoyed it. The people were lovely and it was really nice to do something that was completely abstract from what I was doing at university so it was quite nice sometimes to just go there and to be able to not think about anything. It was pretty mindless work so it was easy and it was sociable job but it was long hours... it was really fun and I really like chatting to people in a very kind of not having to chat about my work all the time or any kind of professional way, just chatting to people, it was very social, so that was good.'* (young female textiles students who worked in a bar)

### 6.3 Developing transferable skills

Students felt they developed a number of transferable or soft skills from their paid work or placement activity, in addition to the personal attributes noted above, regardless of whether or not their work was related to their course. The area of perceived skill development is interesting, particularly as students tended not to take up paid work while they studied in order to gain skills. Instead, as noted above, the development of transferable skills was regarded as a bonus. The skills mentioned by students included:

- team-working
- customer service
- numeracy/handling money
- communication skills (students were often quite specific here and talked about skills in communicating with more senior colleagues 'being able to get along with managers', with customers, and with fellow employees) and presentation skills
- interpersonal/people skills, conflict handling and dealing with difficult people and/or situations
- leadership and delegating
- organisational skills and time management
- decision-making
- and professionalism.

*'I think it's [paid work and placements] helped with confidence...when we graduate we're going to have a different client coming in to our room every 10 minutes, so we've got to have the confidence to communicate ... and just teamwork as well because you don't do any of these jobs alone really, like you have to sort of coordinate with other people so I think teamwork is probably quite important.'* (young female veterinary science student who worked as a student ambassador, a steward at a veterinary science event and has had placements in veterinary surgeries and farms)

*'I think if I was to sum it up [benefits of working], it would be professionalism really, because you learn to work a camera better, you learn to edit better, you learn to just pack gear away faster. You learn to not mind so much when you*

*are sat around still at eight o'clock in the evening in the middle of a field because it was bucketing it down with water and you're trying to put away a stand. You learn to just put up with these things...university can't teach you that, that's a skill you have to learn yourself.'* (young male film-making student)

Several students also talked of specific work-related skills they had gained. In some cases these had been gained via focused training (rather than on-the-job) and were certified. These specific skills included for example:

- health and safety procedures in the food industry and technical skills such as how ovens operate
- sports science research skills (gained via an internship)
- practical skills needed in the medical profession gained during hospital placements
- and innovative camera techniques.

Students tended to feel that these skills (soft and specific) would be valued by employers and so useful if not crucial for work after graduating and would be something they could highlight in job interviews. Students also felt that their paid work and their placement activities would demonstrate to employers their commitment and enthusiasm and their reliability and dependability, particularly if they held a job for some length of time.

## 6.4 Impact on current studies and future work opportunities

### 6.4.1 Impact on their current studies

Relatively few of the students interviewed felt that their work had any direct and positive impact upon their current situation beyond feeling 'better off' financially, which probably reflects the fact that only a few felt that their work (paid or unpaid) had some relevance to their studies. The feedback from this group of students suggests that work can provide students with opportunities to see how theories work in practice, can bring students into contact with a wider range of individuals with which to discuss ideas, and students can use their work experiences within their study assignments. One mature social studies student talked about how both his placements in youth clubs and his paid work in ground maintenance allowed him to bounce ideas off a diverse range of colleagues at work. Another (sports science) student felt that although his paid work in a supermarket warehouse had no relevance to his studies, his internship in a local professional rugby club had given him a chance to apply his learning in a practical environment. Another (computer sciences) student who was working in IT retail felt that although his work was not directly related to his course he saw some cross over. Another (drama) student spoke of how she could relate her experiences of volunteering at the Edinburgh fringe to her studies.

*'... having a role in the community is certainly good because it dovetails nicely with the course because a lot of what I'm learning whilst working or seeing while working I can kind of relate to the course as well. It adds value really and provides credibility to what you know, you are able to test out theories as much as anything... you can bounce ideas off colleagues in the workplace. I've been able to take some ideas and things that we have talked about during the lectures at college and I've been able to kind of discuss them with work-based*

*colleagues so that's been interesting ... picking up different viewpoints. Not everybody you meet has been to university and you know, just getting an understanding of different perspectives. I am writing my dissertation around community sustainability so getting people's perspectives on what makes a sustainable community has been really really interesting.'* (mature male youth and communities studies student)

*'I'd say it [internship] helps with my studies because it is sort of using skills and the knowledge I've learnt within uni and sort of then being able to go out there and apply them with the club...it terms of time it takes away but at the same time it's definitely helpful for my development.'* (young male sports science student)

*'... there's definitely things that cross over between my course and my work. For example, um, I'm doing this thing about servers at uni, and also I've just been given a role to assist in the managing of the server, and the managing of the, like the back of house and the install systems at work. So as much I'm still involved in the kind of front of house stuff, I'm getting involved in more of the technical side of things, which is something that my degree is also involved in. And also with the business, like I have a business module learning about management and different business ethics, and then at work again I can see the cross over. So when they're talking about management in a lecture, I can kind of relate to that from the two jobs that I've been in. Again, and marketing as well, like they're talking about different marketing strategies and I can see that live in action whilst I'm at work.'* (young male IT student)

*'I did a presentation in the first semester of the second year...I talked a lot about the shows that I'd seen in Edinburgh and my own experiences and stuff and I think that does get you a better grade because you know what you are talking about. If you have really experienced it yourself, then you are going to be able to explain it in a lot more depth.'* (young female performance student)

Paid work could lead to more course or career relevant work experience opportunities through the networks it enables students to develop. For example, one biological sciences student found a work experience opportunity to shadow a renowned surgeon through coaching his daughter in tennis through his paid work at a health and fitness club.

A small group of students were planning to go on to further study and felt that their work experiences had helped them to either identify the need for additional qualifications and/or would help them in their application for further study. For example, a music student felt that her unpaid work experience in a primary school will contribute directly to helping her get on a PGCE course. Similarly a mature student in youth and community studies felt his paid work in ground maintenance for a local authority and his placement experiences working with young people in various organisations such as youth clubs would help him gain entry to a Masters course in Social work.

### 6.4.2 Impact on employability

Generally, students felt that their work experiences enhanced their CVs and showed them, at a minimum, to be 'well rounded' individuals with a range of life and work experiences and interests, able to cope in different situations and interact with people from a variety of backgrounds; and, at best (where their work was directly related to their course or planned career), to have direct and relevant work experience. In addition, the process of finding and securing paid work or placements would help them in looking for work after graduating. Students will have prepared CVs and in some instances been through an application and selection process including a formal interview to gain their student work. There was a perception that employers want more than just academic qualifications and students commonly felt that their experiences of working while studying would make them more employable:

*'We often get told, especially in the law workshops, law firms are not just looking for people that are just good at law. They're looking for people that are doing other things, and so if you're part of societies, or you're doing an interesting job, or you're doing some sort of voluntary work, because I did some voluntary work as well, that it makes you more employable. It makes you seem like somebody who's got a lot more things going for them.'* (young female law student, did paid work in the university bookshop, summer work in a chemist, exam invigilator, note taker for disabled students, worked as volunteer mentor with sixth form students; and had not worked prior to university)

*'At the end of the day, a degree looks good, and it shows that you're academic, but if you don't have any skill in actually working, or have dedication to work, or have been in a working environment where you're with customers, dealing with colleagues, dealing with those situations in a professional environment, I think that you lack a lot of skills. And I think me coming out of uni with six years in, yeah it's retail, but six years in a pretty good retail store, having just general work skills and understanding like the dedication to your work, that you've got to turn up for work, that you have responsibilities, that on your CV alongside your degree is going to show that you've got the academic side of things but you've also got the practical skills and you know actually what a job entails. ... I know people at uni who've never worked, they've just been in accommodation and their parents have supported them through everything, and I think my CV would look better than theirs because I've obviously got the work on there as well.'* (young male IT student working in IT retail)

### 6.4.3 Opportunities to network

Students also reported how work could provide contacts which might be useful for future work – for finding more 'student jobs' whilst studying, transition jobs whilst they find more suitable work (some students planned to continue in their current student jobs for a short period after graduating), or even career-related jobs for when they graduate in the field they were aiming for. At a minimum their employers would be able to give them a good reference when they applied for jobs after they graduated. A film-making student felt that the camera work he did alongside his studies gave him the chance to develop his 'craft' and keep in touch with other industry professionals. Another (drama) student talked about the importance of developing networks through her paid and voluntary work in theatres

which she hoped would help her to break into the industry. Another (IT) student felt that his work in IT retail would provide him with useful contacts to progress in his career.

*'I think you become more in touch with...the industry as it were. It's sort of a strange little group of entities, it's all lots of little small companies who work together and you tend to freelance for a bunch of them or run one yourself. And the thing is it's stuff like what software are people using, what cameras do people like, who's doing new innovative things? You know this stuff because people talk and you become one of those people who's involved in the talk, and that's a thing you can never really achieve just in university.'* (young male film-making student)

*'Being involved in the theatre for our course is probably the most promising way of getting into the industry, because if people know your face and know who you are, and know that you are willing to work and volunteer for things it shows that you find enjoyment in it...just knowing people that work there and that are in the industry and have a successful career in it, and actually meeting the artists as well.'* (young female drama student)

*'... building up a network of friends and a network of contacts; not necessarily just within the company. Like you meet a lot of people being in retail, and they're all coming in there to buy their computers. You meet interesting business people, and all sorts of people that you can kind of keep as a contact... in the future, like a reference, like if I want to go for a job somewhere and you know someone within that company, it gives you a higher kind of chance. I know it's like the whole, "it's not what you know, it's who you know", can apply. If you know the right people you can get in the right places very easily.'* (young male IT student)

# 7 Benefits for graduates of working

Having discussed current students' views in the previous chapter, this chapter moves on to consider the key benefits of working for graduates. A consideration of graduate views provides longer term insights into perspectives on working and studying. On the whole, graduates reflected favourably on what they gained from working whilst studying. Benefits were felt in relation to one or both of two levels: in terms of immediate benefits whilst studying; and in terms of benefits to career after graduation. This chapter will deal with both of these in the sections that follow.

## 7.1 Immediate benefits whilst studying

The recurrent view amongst graduates was that working whilst studying had generally enhanced their student experience in one or more of the following four ways: financially; had helped them with their studies; had helped with personal development; and/or provided social benefits.

The level of financial benefits of working depended on the financial circumstances of individuals whilst studying. Accordingly, financial benefits varied from meeting pressing needs to long-term goals (as outlined in Chapter 3). This encompassed a wide variety of needs, including being able to afford to live on a day-to-day basis (eg paying for bills and food), to socialising and paying for extras (eg such as holidays), and to helping individuals prepare for life after university (eg minimising student debt and building up savings for a deposit on a house).

Graduates felt that work had also helped them with their studies, particularly if it was related to their course (eg placements). A placement was helpful in several key ways: a) it provided access to study materials (eg journals) and additional knowledgeable experts (eg qualified doctors) in the areas of study; b) it helped to bridge the 'theory/practice' gap by enabling individuals to put into practice what they had learned during the course and to learn directly from practice; and c) it motivated individuals to do well in their studies by exposing them to their chosen line of work. Placements and also paid work helped individuals to be more focused with their study time (as work limited the time they had available), or provided them with good working habits; and also provided a welcome break from studying. One business graduate talked about how he tried to apply the work routine he gained during his placement year to his studies:

*'I tried to apply my work experience that I had to my university and basically making sure that I did, I sort of worked the more nine to five whilst I was at university rather than sort of chilling out during the day and then having to go to the library to study in the evening. It was just get, getting that routine that I had whilst I was working and applying it to uni... it was just basically getting myself motivated, organised and just managing my time better whilst I was at university whereas it's, it's a lot easier to do that whilst you're in a work environment. But when you're at university and you've got so much free time, it's more difficult...it's just a case of as soon as, soon as I went back after working just getting into the routine of getting up early, putting, putting a few hours of work in the morning, going to lunch and a few hours in the afternoon and then having*

*the evening to sort of relax rather than worrying about deadlines coming up.'*  
(young male banking, finance and management graduate)

The personal development gained from working largely rested in helping graduates mature into adulthood, particularly those who were younger. This included giving individuals a sense of financial independence from parents; being able to afford to live alone; helping them learn about boundaries and discipline (eg turning up to work on time and not going to the Student Union the night before); being able to budget and manage on the income they earned; being socially confident and, where voluntary work was concerned, making them feel they have made a difference.

*'It [work] made me so much more sort of in control, the fact that I had a job rather than having to rely on my parents to give me money. I knew how much I had and I knew how much I'd have each week. It would be easier to budget whereas if I relied on my parents, it would have been much more sort of uneven when I got money and how much I got. It would be much more tough I think and it's just sort of, it was less stress knowing that I was in control of it and I had my independence as well.'* (young female economics graduate)

There were also social benefits of working whilst studying. Graduates spoke of work helping to alleviate boredom, particularly during the summer break, and as a gateway to meeting friends outside of their educational institution.

## 7.2 Benefits to career after graduation

There were three distinct views about the impact of working whilst studying on their career: that it directly or indirectly *had a beneficial impact* on their current career; that it *had a limited impact* on their current career; or that it *had no discernable impact* on their current career. All three of these views were discussed within the context of general benefits of working whilst studying and the skills/experiences gained, which will be covered below.

The recurrent view, however, was that the work done whilst studying had a favourable impact on current careers. It seemed that those who had placements particularly expressed this view, although not exclusively. Placements, but also paid and more casual work, offered graduates greater exposure to the working environment, skills and experiences directly related to their course and the career pathway they were on.

### 7.2.1 General benefits

Those who felt that they particularly benefited from the work they did as students drew attention to how it shaped their career decisions and also improved their ability to find work and their employability.

#### ***Shaping career decisions***

The work done directly impacted on shaping current career decisions and pathways in two ways. Firstly, it enabled individuals to arrive at decisions around the suitability of their chosen (often course related) career. Placements, in particular, were helpful as they exposed individuals to the everyday reality of the work they were training to do. These experiences sometimes made individuals more determined to pursue their chosen career after graduation. At other times, where the realities of the work were not seen to be

compatible with what the individual wanted, it led them to decide to pursue other career pathways. Having the perspective to view the positive contributions that difficult placements and other work experiences can make to career decisions may be one key point of difference between graduates and students. Students may be less likely to see the positive in such experiences as they may currently be too close to these experiences.

This was the case for one ecology graduate, who chose to pursue a career in scientific photography, rather than research, because of his placement experience.

*'It was an, it was an amazing year 'cause I did want to go into research before then but it made me realise that actually research isn't for me ...It [placement] gave me an insight into what a research scientist does and the amount of work that researchers have to do ...and the rewards in terms getting the message out... yeah it was great but there's not much communication from the actual work that gets done to the general public. And that made me realise that, if I'm going to be dedicating my life to a career I want it to actually make a difference you know rather than just do the work, do the science for its own sake... it made me realise that rather than doing that science I'd rather be in touch with other scientists, get their work and get their, get their work out to the general public.'*  
(young male ecology graduate)

Experiences of work placements also had a more subtle impact on decision making in helping graduates decide which aspect of their chosen career they wanted to pursue. This was particularly the case for medical, nursing, social work and teaching graduates. For example, one medical student felt that her time on placements helped her to decide on the medical speciality she focused on after graduation.

### ***Improved employability***

Working whilst studying was also seen by graduates as contributing (directly or indirectly) to them securing their current work (see Section 2.4 for a discussion of the jobs graduates had secured). It helped them with their job interviews. This included giving them experience of a job interview, honing their interview skills (eg how to present themselves professionally), having previous work experience to draw on during interview conversations and sometimes having references from employers and customers.

It also demonstrated their employability. The recurrent view amongst graduates was that a good grade in their course would not have been enough to secure the work they were currently doing and that employers are looking for individuals that could fit quickly into their organisations. Work experience was felt to demonstrate that individuals were capable of this by equipping them with key soft skills (discussed in the next section), giving them experiences of working in a relevant field with customer or client groups and demonstrating other desirable traits. These included signalling to employers that candidates were motivated, reliable and resilient (indicated by having the *stickability* to work and study at the same time), they were used to work routines (eg time keeping) and had experience of working under pressure.

## 7.2.2 Experiences and skills

A key difference between graduates who felt they benefited from working and those who felt it had limited or no impact was their views on the experiences and skills they gained. The latter (no impact) group felt that their work experience was: not related to what they wanted to do at all; did not sufficiently expose them to their desired career; or did not expose them to skills sets either directly needed for their career or which were transferable. For example, a graduate who currently works as a marketing executive felt that his work at an off licence whilst studying did not relate to his career or carry with it any transferable skills. He does not even cite this work on his CV. Graduates who were likely to feel this way had one or more of the following characteristics/experiences:

- their motivations for working whilst studying were largely financial
- they had not undertaken any formal work placements
- the type of work they did whilst studying tended to be low paid.

They also tended to be graduates who were not currently in their desired career or were starting off on a lower grade/level than they felt they ought to be. It is perhaps this frustration in entering their desired career which may have prompted them to reflect unfavourably on the work they did whilst studying for the above reasons. For example, one graduate who worked in retail as a student felt that they should have gone for a teaching assistant post instead. This would have been helpful in furthering their desired goal of being a teacher. It is worth noting that several graduates, when reflecting on their work experiences and thinking about advice they could pass on to other undergraduates, talked about how they wished they had looked for or been able to take up work (paid or unpaid placements) that was more closely connected to their course or to their chosen career. These graduates would advise current students to focus on placements, if possible over and above paid work, but to be aware of how relevant the experience they will be getting really is.

Conversely, graduates who reported benefits felt that the work they did gave them the necessary experience for their current career and/or provided direct or transferrable skills that enabled them to do their current work well. Experiences of either working directly in their chosen career and of the working environment in general were seen to be important as these experiences eased the transition between studying and working after leaving HE. This was particularly important for those on courses that had a definite professional pathway (doctors, nurses, social workers, and teachers). Relevant experiences helped ease the transition into a career in the following ways:

- **Helped to acclimatise individuals to the working environment.** Such experience gave graduates an idea of what it meant to work in their professional setting even before they graduated so that this did not come as a shock to them. This included: getting a sense of what it meant to work in their setting (eg hospital or office); getting used to the hierarchy of relationships that exist in that setting (eg the interaction between nurses and doctors and different grades of staff); and getting used to the routine of working full-time.
- **Learn about and experience their role in a 'safe' environment.** This was particularly important for medical and nursing graduates, for whom the prospect of being suddenly

thrown into challenging hospital situations could have been difficult. Relevant work experience ensured that they were exposed to such situations in a supportive learning environment before graduating and that their knowledge of their role went beyond textbooks. The importance of this is underlined by the reflections of one junior doctor below.

*'... on placement you learn how to do the things that you need to do as a junior doctor, how to manage patients, how to, the practical clinical skills. I spent time in operating theatres... I mean the final year you're basically playing at being at doctor with a lot of support which is great because otherwise you know you'd be going straight out into the workplace not knowing at all what you're doing so.'*  
(young male anatomy graduate)

- **Experience working with specific groups.** Relevant work experience also enabled graduates to work with key groups they would interact with in their careers, which again eased their transition. This included dealing with customers, patients, vulnerable groups (such as the elderly) and challenging adults.

In addition to experience, the development of skills needed to perform well in their chosen career pathway was also important for graduates. Graduates valued acquiring skills that were directly related to their current work as it enabled them to practice these prior to graduation. These varied between professions and included photography skills, till work, nursing and clinical skills, teaching skills and social work interventions.

Graduates also placed importance on learning other transferable skills during their work experience. These tended to be, but not always, the 'soft skills' acquired that were directly or indirectly related to their chosen career. Examples of such skills included:

- leadership (eg being able to make clinical decisions, delegate tasks)
- teamwork
- communication skills (eg being able to communicate with colleagues of all grades, clients/patients and organisations and being able to present publicly)
- patience and tolerance
- language skills (eg one graduate perfected her English whilst working as a student)
- and self-management (eg time management and working under pressure).

Sometimes these transferable skills were seen to be a sound platform for alternative careers. For example, one graduate felt that although the skills they had learned from being a cashier may not be relevant to her goal of being a teacher, these skills would enable her to pursue an alternative career direction should her teaching aspirations not be met.

# 8 Summary and conclusions

## 8.1 Introduction

Many full-time higher education students engage in some kind of employment whilst studying and the proportion doing so appears to have remained relatively stable over time, at approximately 50 per cent<sup>1</sup>. However the latest Student Income and Expenditure Survey (SIES) 2011/12 suggests that income from paid work is declining and that this may be driven by a change in the type or quality of paid work that students do rather than a change in the number of hours worked. Over a quarter (29 per cent) of all full-time students are working in casual, occasional jobs such as bar, catering and waiting roles which they start and finish within the academic year and which offer limited hours and lower pay. This represents a marked increase in casual working compared to the findings of earlier surveys. In contrast, fewer students are now working in regular jobs that they keep throughout the academic year (or indeed the entirety of their studies) such as sales and customer service roles. There are indications that students may be aiming for these good quality student jobs but in the difficult economic climate are finding fewer opportunities to do so and are facing increased competition.

## 8.2 Key findings

### *Student work*

The research finds that students are portfolio workers, often juggling different jobs and work experiences at the same time, and tend to have several jobs or work experiences over the entirety of their studies. They work hard but try to balance their work experiences (paid and unpaid) with their study commitments – where possible increasing their work hours when their study commitments reduce during vacations or in the early years of study, and vice versa. Balance is the key, and although students would advise others to work alongside their studies they stress the importance of keeping a focus on higher education studies and where possible of limiting the numbers of hours worked, particularly in term-time, to a maximum of 15 hours a week. Students often have a history of undertaking paid work prior to their HE studies and a well developed work ethic.

The findings indicate four types of student work<sup>2</sup>:

- **Paid work** – this tends to be part-time, not related to the course of study or seen as a career/graduate job, and involves: supermarket and shop work; working in call-centres; in bars, clubs, hotels or restaurants; or in caring roles. Where they can, students gain this type of work in readiness for their HE studies (both to start to earn and save prior to their studies and also to ensure that they have some sort of job when they start at university or college), and bring their work with them when they start their course.

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<sup>1</sup> 56 per cent in 2004/05; 53 per cent in 2007/08 and 52 per cent in 2011/12

<sup>2</sup> These are not mutually exclusive and can therefore overlap eg university work can also be voluntary work such as taking on the unpaid role of Editor of the student magazine.

- **University-based work** – this is work with or for universities and tends to be easy to acquire (particularly in later years of study), sporadic and involve only a few hours. Examples include: working as Student Ambassadors/Representatives/Mentors, Campus Officer, library assistant, campus bar manager, bookshop sales assistant.
- **Voluntary work** – this is unpaid, can involve a regular commitment or can be a vacation only role, tends to be organised by the student themselves, but can lead to paid work.
- **Work placements** – these are unpaid and are generally a compulsory part of the course and thus relevant to studies, they are of varied lengths (including lengthy sandwich placements) and often facilitated by the university or college so provide limited choice.

A good student job is one that is perceived by the student to be both convenient (in terms of location) and flexible, allowing the student to increase and decrease hours to fit around their study commitments. It also has a number of other characteristics: easy to acquire, easy to do, sufficient hours, friendly environment, and relatively well paid (at least £8 an hour, as paid work needs to be financially worthwhile). Large supermarkets, retail firms and restaurant and bar chains with branches around the country appear to understand the needs of students and can offer roles with the characteristics that students are looking for. A good placement however is perceived as one that provides a student with relevant experience, an opportunity to make a useful contribution, where they can feel valued, can learn and also practice the skills and knowledge gained on their course.

### ***Graduate work***

The findings also indicate three types of jobs that new graduates do:

- **Stop gap jobs** – these mirror or are a continuation of student jobs, providing graduates with an income whilst they look for something more aligned to their career goals or (save up) to continue with further study.
- **Transition jobs** – these are full-time, and offer networking and/or training opportunities. They are not yet considered to be graduate jobs but may evolve over time or lead to better opportunities.
- **Graduate jobs** – these are related to the study discipline or career; are full-time, better paid and more challenging than student jobs; involve some level of responsibility and offer opportunities for development and to use the skills and experiences gained at university or college.

### ***Motivations to work***

Many students expect to work alongside their studies and finance is the primary motivation by far to undertake paid work whilst studying. This applies to students of all backgrounds, including those who receive grant-based support. However finance as a driver has a number of dimensions:

- To meet an immediate or critical need as other means of student support are not sufficient to cover rent, bills and food costs (this is particularly an issue for mature students), and to gain a more frequent, regular income between the termly ('lumpy') grant/loan payments.

- To top-up income in order to have a better student experience: to pay for treats, to be able to go out and commonly to keep and run a car; and also to meet additional (unexpected) course costs (this is particularly an issue for arts students).
- To help towards future goals such as minimising the level of student debt, or increasing savings to be able to do unpaid work experience, go travelling, buy a house or set up in business.
- To share responsibility for the costs of study and in so doing, gain a sense of financial independence and skills in managing finances (this is particularly an issue for younger students).

Other secondary motivations are largely social and include: taking time-out from study, meeting new people, keeping busy, having fun, and having a new experience.

Employability considerations are also part of the mix; but for the majority of students are a secondary, if not tertiary, reason for undertaking paid work. Here employability is about looking to the longer-term (after graduation) to: improve career prospects, improve skills, help secure a good job, help compete in the labour market (given them an edge), enhance their CVs, and develop a reputation and networks.

### ***Motivations to placements***

Employability considerations are key when taking on unpaid work placements or voluntary work, alongside the opportunity to make a difference and feel valued, particularly if students feel they have to give up or juggle paid work with unpaid placements and study. Some students may therefore adopt a number of strategies to allow them to take on short-term unpaid placements: moving back home to reduce their expenses, or increasing their paid work hours for a short period to save up followed by reduced hours or suspending their paid work. Students need to plan ahead and having flexible paid work is particularly beneficial.

Not all students take up the placement opportunities available to them, particularly lengthy placements: either because they are not interested and feel placements would unnecessarily extend their course and just delay graduation; or feel that placements are not appropriate for their career goals. Some students, particularly mature, students feel they are too old for placements and already have sufficient work experience.

### ***Process of finding work***

Students try to target the paid work they do, for it to be relevant to their course or more commonly for it to be a good student job (having the characteristics noted above). They look for roles that would suit them and that they would be suited for (fitting with their previous experience). They tend to rule out office and administrative jobs, as these need a more regular and intensive commitment than students feel able to provide, and work that is too specialised and requires experience. Students are proactive in finding work and use multiple methods and a range of sources to find work such as informal networks, applying for jobs online, making speculative applications, and using university 'job shops'. It can be difficult to find work particularly in the first year of study: before networks are fully developed, before students gain an understanding of the local labour market, and before students get a sense of their study commitments (and time available for work activities). Despite trying to target particular employers and jobs, students may end up taking whatever they can get. Those who gain work before starting their studies and can bring

this work with them (either studying near home, or by moving to a different branch near their university) have a distinct advantage.

Students seek out specific jobs and vacancies, mainly using online searches, but also local papers, Jobcentre Plus and university 'Job shops'; and make speculative applications by taking CVs round to local employers for shop, bar and restaurant work. However, the use of informal networks (friends, family, tutors etc.) is a common and successful method of finding work. Work obtained through friends tends to be café, bar or nightclub work, or shift-work in other sectors; often the personal recommendation is enough for the student to get the job, but in other situations there is still a (semi-) formal recruitment process after the initial introduction. Family can help identify vacancies and family connections are sometimes instrumental in getting students employed eg where their parents work(ed). Students who are less targeted in their search often find themselves in rather unusual (for them) lines of work and jobs they had not previously considered, and sometimes one-off jobs can lead to further or better (higher pay, more regular) opportunities.

The methods used to find jobs after graduation are very similar, although graduates are perhaps more focused on the types of (graduate) job they are after than they had been as students.

### ***University support for finding work***

Students find paid and voluntary work during their studies with little or no explicit support from their universities (beyond information about potential jobs via 'job shops'). There is a view that support is there if needed but students do not expect any help or support. Instead they feel they need to find work for themselves, and feel sufficiently proactive and able to do this. Students recognise that the development of job-getting skills such as producing CVs and preparing for successful interviews is built into *some* courses, as are opportunities to meet and network with employers. In contrast, most students who undertake compulsory work placements get support to identify and arrange these experiences which is appreciated but may limit choice. Students who get involved in setting up their own work experiences feel this is challenging but ultimately beneficial, allowing them to follow an interest or potential career idea. Some students use university careers services as they approach the end of their courses and are starting to think of work after graduating, but may feel they need more specific help than is offered, and so can turn to course tutors for more tailored information and advice.

Few students therefore use or feel the need for support to find work; however, with hindsight, some graduates wished they had gained work that was more closely related to their studies or to their chosen careers. Feedback from this group indicates that some students might benefit from earlier support, more course-specific support (which some students received from their tutors) and greater networking opportunities to help them to find and secure more relevant student work (paid work or unpaid work experiences) and graduate work. Universities and colleges do offer a wide range of services, provided through courses, schools of study or dedicated careers or employability units, and perhaps these need to be made more visible to students. Universities and colleges may also need to think about how these services/opportunities are marketed to students, so that it is not seen as some kind of failure or lack of initiative to take advantage of the support available.

### **Challenges of working while studying**

Working while studying often causes difficulties or challenges for students, and for those working long and/or unsocial hours (approaching full-time work and working through the night) the challenges are particularly acute. The challenges focus around: balancing time between work and study, work negatively impacting upon the quality of their studies, feeling tired or exhausted, and disruption to social/family life:

- **Achieving an appropriate balance** of time between work and study is an issue at all stages of the HE journey. However there are particular pressure points where students need to devote more of their time to their study commitments: starting the HE course, around exam periods or key assignments, and in the final year and especially the final term.
- Working can impact on the **quality of study**: ranging from mild impacts such as not being able to read as widely as possible, have time for 'creative thought', or participate fully in group work; to severe impacts including students failing exams or modules.
- Working alongside studying (particularly week days during term-time) can leave students feeling **tired and exhausted**, which can additionally impact on the quality of their university work. Tiredness makes it more difficult for students to concentrate or retain information and in some cases students may miss lectures through over-sleeping. In extreme cases, students may become ill through over-work and exhaustion.
- Working can impact negatively on students' social lives by reducing the time they have to socialise, being too tired to go out, or by being at work when their friends are out eg weekends and evenings; although going out less, and thus spending less, has a beneficial effect on students' finances. Perhaps more significantly, for a small group of students, working while studying can affect relationships with partners and family, and in extreme cases may lead to the breakdown of relationships.

Students adopt a number of responses or strategies to deal with challenges: flexing their working hours and shift patterns (although this is not an option for all students); becoming adept at time management, planning, and juggling multiple activities; and looking for advice and practical support from their tutors or the university/college. However students can feel that their institutions are unaware of the challenges they face.

### **Benefits for students**

Students are generally satisfied with their work and are able to identify benefits in all the types of work they do, even those who report difficulties in juggling work and learning.

The key benefit is **employability** and students anticipate that working alongside studying develops and demonstrates employability traits and skills that will be useful when they graduate: it shows them to be well-rounded individuals, that they have used their time at university or college wisely, and that they will ultimately be more employable when they graduate and have the 'edge' over other graduates who do not have work experience. Through their work, they have experience of the working environment (and may have direct relevant work experience), have prepared CVs, often have experience of an application and selection process, have opportunities to develop networks and contacts, and can secure references from their employers. In addition, students develop a number of soft or transferable skills which they anticipate will be valued by graduate employers:

- Team-working
- Communication skills and presentation skills
- Organisational skills and time management
- Leadership and delegation
- Customer service
- Interpersonal/personal skills, conflict handling and dealing with difficult people
- Numeracy/handling money
- Decision-making
- And professionalism.

Other benefits are linked to the motivations for taking up work and suggest that these are fulfilled, and these include:

- Financial reward – this is not necessarily seen as the main benefit despite being the key driver.
- Insight into the world of work and preparation for life after university so that the transition to the labour market and full-time work is not such a shock.
- Personal development – work gives them a sense of self-worth and independence. It also develops a number of attributes: initiative, self confidence, self discipline, patience, empathy, responsibility and assertiveness. It also helps to develop coping skills such as managing stress and multi-tasking.
- Enjoyment – work provides students with the opportunity to interact with colleagues (both students and non-students) and customers, to meet new people, and alleviate boredom. The social aspect to work can sustain students through the challenges of working while studying.
- It can also help students to identify, prepare for and secure further study.

Among current students, paid working appears to have limited immediate benefits to their studies, possibly because many students are in jobs that are not felt to be directly related to their courses. However, where identified these benefits include: discussing ideas with a wider range of individuals (non students), seeing how theory works in practice, and using work examples in study assignments. Instead students look to paid work to give them longer-term employability.

### ***Benefits for graduates (does hindsight make a difference?)***

New graduates looking back on their work experiences whilst at university and college also recognise a number of benefits; however graduates experiencing difficulties in the labour market may not feel that their student work has been beneficial (often blaming its lack of relevance to either their course or career aims).

Where benefits are identified these are essentially the same as those identified by students still at university and college including: financial benefits, meeting immediate needs and preparing them for life after university; personal development and financial independence; and social benefits, such as alleviating boredom and meeting new people.

With hindsight, graduates appear more able than current students to see how their work, particularly their placements, had helped with their studies: providing them with access to study materials and knowledgeable individuals and the chance to learn from practice, motivating them to do well in their studies by exposing them to their chosen line of work, and exposing them to good working habits that they can apply to their studies. It also provides them with a break or outlet from the pressures of academic study.

Graduates, looking back, also feel that working alongside studying brings longer-term career benefits. They report how these experiences help to shape career decisions and direction, improve the ability to find work, ease the transition from study to work (acclimatising them to the working environment or specific work settings), expose them to working with different client or customer groups, and essentially improve employability. In terms of employability, graduates feel their student work and work placements provide them with experiences to draw on in interviews and employer references; demonstrate to graduate employers that they can fit into their organisations quickly; and signal to employers that they are motivated, resilient and reliable, used to work routines and able to work under pressure. Their work experiences also help to develop soft or transferable skills that enable them to gain graduate work and perform well in their work including:

- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Communication skills (and public presentations)
- Patience and tolerance
- Language skills
- And self management, time management and working under pressure.

These skill areas are almost identical to those cited by current students, although current students noted a few additional areas (customer service, conflict handling and dealing with difficult people, numeracy/handling money, decision-making, and professionalism) which with some distance from their student work experience graduates may have forgotten or deemed less relevant.

### 8.3 Recommendations

There are a number of relevant findings for **universities and colleges**:

- Providers need to be aware that working alongside studying is common, with at least half of all students taking on paid work at some point during their studies, and that some students work long and unsocial hours during term-time.
- Many students need or want to get paid work. Although they may feel able to find work independently, some struggle to do so and they may well benefit from support to identify and secure suitable opportunities (in terms of convenient location, flexible hours and working patterns, and relevance to course and/or career aims), particularly in the very early stages of courses and in highly competitive local employment markets. Actions here could include: helping them to understand the different types of student work available, notifying students of student job opportunities (those that meet the

characteristics of a good student job) or of appropriate places for job-search, opportunities to network with potential employers, help with preparing CVs and speculative applications, and interview preparation and practice. Where these activities and services are already provided by institutions, they need to be made more visible and acceptable (ie they are a useful tool rather than a signal of failure/lack of independence).

- The ability to take up unpaid placements may be hampered by existing work commitments or the need to maintain work income. Placements may be more accessible (and appealing) if they are shorter, or less intense (spread over more days), or take place during vacation periods. Students may appreciate support in identifying and securing suitable placements that will provide relevant experiences, and in fitting these in around paid work. Older students with existing work experience may not feel the need for placements unless they provide experience that is directly relevant to their career goals.
- Tutors need to be able to spot the danger signs of over work: missing lectures, late work, poor quality work, tiredness or ill-health. These students may need additional help to balance their work alongside their studies, this could include providing advice about the most suitable work to target and hours to work, how to negotiate with employers to reduce hours, help with organising and managing time effectively, and being flexible with deadlines. They may also need to be directed towards other sources of financial support.

There are a number of relevant findings for **students**:

- Your university/college will provide a number of services to help find student work, work placements and graduate work, so find out about these and tap into them as early as possible. You may want to start your job-search in your home location before you arrive at university/college, as you may be able to set up vacation work in advance and some employers allow students to move their jobs to branches close to where they study.
- Family, friends and even tutors can be a good source of information about job opportunities. As a new student, talking to existing students can provide an insight into the local labour market and can help to identify potential employers. You can then target these employers with speculative applications.
- Where possible look for work that has some relevance to your course or your career goals, either by exposing you to the type of role and/or work environment that you aspire to, or the type of people you would be working with (colleagues or clients). This may help to shape your career decisions by providing a taster of what it would be like, provide direct experience to use in job applications and provide useful contacts for finding future work; and also may enhance the quality of your studies by providing material to use in assignments, and provide access to knowledgeable experts. This could be paid work but is more likely to be a short unpaid placement.
- Large national chains can provide paid employment that is particularly suitable for students. These companies have experience of employing students and understand the

need to increase and decrease hours across the year. Some companies may offer contracts with built-in flexibility.

- Be aware of the need to balance your work alongside your studies, and do not lose focus of your study goals. Where possible find the number of hours and working pattern that suits you and the demands of your course. Many students find weekend work and vacation work more manageable, and when working during term-time try to keep working hours to a maximum of 15 hours. You may find that the university you attend or the course you do may mean that working during term-time is not an option.
- Where possible reduce your working hours around key pressure points: key assignments, exams and particularly your final year of study (when study commitments and the weighting of study outputs increase). If you are working excessive hours or finding it difficult to cope with your studies, talk to your tutor and/or the welfare/pastoral staff at your institution, they will be able to provide strategies to help you cope and direct you towards sources of additional financial support.
- Work can provide a number of benefits beyond providing a regular source of income. Through finding, securing and undertaking work, students can develop useful CVs, experience of the application and selection process, build networks and contacts, and employer references. It can also develop a number of transferable skills that employers value, which can be highlighted when applying for jobs in the future (particularly after graduation).

## 8.4 Final thoughts

The students and graduates interviewed in this research were dedicated and motivated, and worked hard to fit working alongside their studies. The nature and the amount of the work that they combined with studying could change over time on their course – as their finances changed (a change in support package and/or change in expenses), as their savings diminished, and as the perceived study hours/commitment required changed over the course of their student journey (within and across years of study). They appeared to be very knowledgeable about their finances and the income they needed, and made work decisions with little or no university or parental support within this context. Students were often able to identify benefits from their work beyond the purely financial, particularly in terms of the skills they developed which indicates that they were able to reflect on these experiences and frame them in positive and helpful ways.

It is worth noting that the students at the heart of this research are a sub-sample of HE students – those who undertake paid work at some point alongside their full-time studies. The sample selected reflects the range of student characteristics associated with working while studying and the types of jobs undertaken, and so captures a diversity of viewpoints and experiences among working students. However, these students may well be different from those students who do not work while studying, both in terms of measurable background characteristics (such as living/relationship arrangements, gender and student status as indicated by the main SIES study) and in terms of characteristics which cannot easily be observed such as self motivation. It could be argued that these working students have a different approach to studying and to work, and are more proactive, self-starters. It would therefore be useful to explore the views and experiences of those who have not

undertaken any work (paid work and/or unpaid work experience) and to track their transition into the labour market to see if and how they differ from the working group and whether their experiences of finding work after graduating and perceived success differ.

# Appendix: Topic guides



## ***P10385 Working and studying: follow-up to SIES STUDENT Focus Group/Interview Topic Guide***

### ***Research aims:***

To explore and understand:

Why students work while studying full-time

What kinds of work they do and how they choose/find their jobs

What support their institutions provide in finding work

What are the immediate and longer-term benefits and challenges of working while studying full-time

**All students will have taken part in the Student Income and Expenditure Survey and at that time they told us they were doing paid work (between Sept 2011 and June 2012).**

### ***Introduction***

- ***Thank you*** for agreeing to take part
- Introduction to ***researcher***
- Explanation of research: ***BIS***, the Government department in charge of helping people gain skills for employment, would like to understand people's views about ***working while studying full-time, the benefits and challenges***
- They have asked ***NatCen /IES*** to carry out this research on their behalf – NatCen / IES is a social policy research organisation and is completely independent of BIS
- As part of the research we are ***talking to people who told us in the survey that they were doing some paid work while studying full-time***
- Participation is ***voluntary***:
  - × You can withdraw from the discussion at any time
  - × If you don't want to share something you don't have to
- Participation is ***anonymous and confidential***
  - × We will not tell BIS ***who has taken part***
  - × It will not be possible to ***identify*** anyone in the report from what they have said

- × *We would be happy to send a link to the report when it is published if you are interested (collect details at the end)*
- *We will be **recording** the group discussion so that we have an accurate record of what is said (**check** consent to recording)*
- **Data storage**
  - × *Recorder is **encrypted** and files are stored in **secure folders** in line with the Data Protection Act*
  - × *Only the research team will have **access to the recordings***
- *The discussion will last 60 to 90 minutes depending on how much you have to say*
- *We will send you **£30 shopping voucher** at the end of the discussion to thank you for taking part*
- *Ground rules – there are no right or wrong answers, we would like to hear all views and ideas, everybody’s views are of equal importance. Please speak one at a time and allow people to make their points.*
- **Questions?**

## 1. Background

- Take in turns to say
  - × Name, course studying (qualification subject, sandwich course or PGCE), how long they’ve been studying

## 2. Details of work experience

- What work (if any) are they doing at the moment – cover all jobs
  - × Any paid work: brief details of nature of work, hours and earnings
  - × Any voluntary/unpaid work: nature of work and hours
  - × Any formal work placements integral to the course
  - × Any course ‘relevant’ work
- How long have they had these jobs (*probe before or since started course*)
- Details of other jobs done while studying
  - × Include paid and unpaid work, holiday jobs and term time, sandwich course placements, work experience overseas
  - × Any variation during their student years?
- Views about the ‘quality’ of these jobs - probe around 2 or 3 of the jobs mentioned (if more than one)
  - × Were these ‘good’ jobs

- × What makes a job 'good'  
*Ask for examples/ provide hypothetical examples*
- × Probe: hours, responsibility, pay, training opportunities, challenge, prestige, helpful with course/future employment/networking links, term time/holiday jobs

### **3. Motivations for working while studying**

- Reasons/motivations for working while they were a student. Probe in detail how/why:
  - × Help with finances/living costs - probe extent of need
  - × Improve career prospects and/or further study
  - × Improve specific skills
  - × Social reasons
  - × Personal development
  - × Build contacts with employers

*Use SORT CARDS of different reasons and ask students to place in order of importance – encourage debate around the ordering*

- Did these reasons change – over time? For different jobs?  
*Encourage students to move SORT CARDS around and to add any further reasons if appropriate – encourage debate around the re-ordering*
- Did they have a choice to do a work placement as part of their course
  - × If so, reasons why did/didn't choose
- Did they have a choice to do course 'relevant' work
  - × If so, reasons why did/didn't choose
- How much choice did they have about what job they did
  - × Why did they choose the job(s) – type of job, hours, term/holiday, location
  - × How easy to get the job they would have liked; why
  - × What other options were there

### **4. Process of gaining work**

- How did they find their current/most recent job
  - × How did they obtain it (application process etc)
- What kind of help have they had in finding work and from whom. Probe help with
  - × Job search and career direction
  - × Applications and matching skills to jobs
  - × Interview skills
  - × Placements/work experience

Probe sources of support/advice – University/College, other

- What help would they have liked from their University/College if they didn't have this?
  - × Probe as above

### **5. The challenges of working while studying**

- How easy or difficult is it to work while studying
- What did they find difficult about working while studying. Probe impacts on
  - × time/quality of studies
  - × social or leisure time
  - × well being/quality of life
- Have these challenges changed over time; why
- How did they deal with these challenges
  - × Any support from University/College or elsewhere?

### **6. The benefits of working while studying**

- How satisfied are they with their current job/previous jobs
- What are the benefits of working. Probe impacts on
  - × finances/living costs, ability to manage financially
  - × social life
  - × personal development
  - × skills gained or contribution to career development – probe **what** skills

*Probe across different jobs*
- In what ways has their paid work at University/College impacted on their current situation
  - × Choice of current job or job sought
  - × Ability to gain job through skills developed. Probe range of skills, for example
    - technical/subject skills, employability skills, personal development/confidence, career management skills
  - × Links or networks made

*Fully probe reasons why helpful/not helpful*
- What other things have helped them develop their skills or career to date
- Have they used their Uni/College careers service; if not, why not

### **7. Looking back and forward**

- Career aspirations for the future - where would they like to be in 5 years time?
- Overall, how useful will their work experiences be to the development of their career

- Looking back, what if anything would they have done differently in terms of work or work experience while studying; why
- What skills would they still like to gain/wish they had gained
- What advice would you give to a fellow student considering getting a job/work experience
- Anything else to add?

- × Thank the interviewee for their participation
- × Hand out £30 vouchers and receipts for signing
- × Explain that they're welcome to contact research team if they have any questions about the research
- × Reassure about anonymity
- × Fill out monitoring form

**SEND CATHY THE SERIAL NUMBER OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

UPDATE THE RECRUITMENT LOG AND SAMPLE MONITORING TOOL

**P10385 Working and studying: follow-up to SIES  
GRADUATE Interview Topic Guide**

**Research aims:**

To explore and understand:

- × Why students work while studying full-time
- × What kinds of work they do and how they choose/find their jobs
- × What support their institutions provide in finding work
- × What are the immediate and longer-term benefits and challenges of working while studying full-time

**All students will have taken part in the Student Income and Expenditure Survey and at that time they told us they were doing paid work (between Sept 2011 and June 2012).**

**Introduction**

- **Thank you** for agreeing to take part
- Introduction to **researcher**
- Explanation of research: **BIS**, the Government department in charge of helping people gain skills for employment, would like to understand people's views about **working while studying full-time, the benefits and challenges**
- They have asked **NatCen /IES** to carry out this research on their behalf – NatCen / IES is a social policy research organisation and is completely independent of BIS
- As part of the research we are **interviewing people who told us in the survey that they were doing some paid work while they were full-time students**
- Participation is **voluntary**:
  - × We can **stop** the interview at any time
  - × If you don't want to answer a question we can **move on**
- Participation is **anonymous and confidential**
  - × We will not tell BIS **who has taken part**
  - × It will not be possible to **identify** anyone in the report from what they have said
  - × We would be happy to send a link to the report when it is published if you are interested (collect details at the end)

- We will be **recording** the interview so that we have an accurate record of what is said (**check consent to recording**)
- **Data storage**
  - × Recorder is **encrypted** and files are stored in **secure folders** in line with the Data Protection Act
  - × Only the research team will have **access to the recordings**
- The interview will last **up to 45 minutes**
- We will send you **£20 shopping voucher** by recorded delivery to thank you for taking part
- **Questions?**

### **1. Current activity and last 9 months (keep brief)**

- Background question about what they're doing at the moment
  - × Any paid work: brief details of nature of work, hours and earnings
  - × Is work related to the HE course they completed?
  - × Any voluntary/unpaid work: nature of work and hours
  - × Is this related to the HE course they completed?
  - × Studying part-time: nature of studies and hours
  - × Looking for work: broad type of job looking for; f/t or p/t
  - × Is this related to the HE course they completed?
- (Can we ask here specifically what their job title is? and other related questions to enable us to establish whether they are in a professional job or not). Can we also establish whether they are in a graduate job?
- When did they finish studying (check summer 2012)
- Overview of any other jobs since finished studies, and why these ended

### **2. Work done while they were studying**

- Details of jobs done while they were a student
  - × Include paid and unpaid work, holiday jobs and term time, sandwich course placements or other formal work placements or work relevant to course or choice of career
  - × Any variation during their student years?
- Views about the 'quality' of these jobs - probe around 2 or 3 of the jobs mentioned (if more than one)
  - × Were these jobs 'good' jobs
  - × What makes a job 'good'
 Ask for examples/ provide hypothetical examples

- × Probe: hours, responsibility, pay, training opportunities, challenge, prestige, helpful with course/future employment/networking links, term time/holiday jobs
- × Is current job (if working) a 'good' job? Is it what they want to be doing?

### **3. Motivations for working while studying**

- Reasons/motivations for working while they were a student. Probe in detail how/why:
  - × Help with finances/living costs (probe extent of need)
  - × Improve career prospects and/or further study
  - × Improve specific skills
  - × Social reasons
  - × Personal development
  - × Build contacts with employers
- Did these reasons change – over time? For different jobs?
- Did they have a choice to do a work placement as part of their course
  - × If so, reasons why did/didn't choose
  - × If not, would it have been helpful and why
- Did they have a choice to do course 'relevant' work
  - × If so, reasons why did/didn't choose
- How much choice did they have about what job they did
  - × Why did they choose the job(s) – type of job, hours, term/holiday
  - × How easy to get the job they would have liked; why
  - × What other options were there

### **4. Benefits and challenges of working while studying**

- What did they find difficult about working while studying. Probe impacts on
  - × time/quality of studies
  - × social or leisure time
  - × well being/quality of life
- How did they deal with these challenges
  - × Any support from University/College or elsewhere?
- What were the benefits of working. Probe impacts on
  - × finances/living costs, ability to manage financially
  - × social life
  - × personal development
  - × skills gained or contribution to career development
 Probe across different jobs

Probe range of skills, for example

- In what ways has their **paid work at University/College** given them skills or advantages for current or future working?
  - Probe for range of different skills
    - technical/subject skills, employability skills, personal development/confidence, career management skills
    - links or networks made
  - Fully probe reasons why helpful/not helpful
    - × Which of the skills were perceived to be most important for current job if have one (if any)
    - × Did they feel they had an advantage in the job market because of them
    - × If have a job now which of these skills are they using/putting into practice
    - × What skills would have been useful to have gained working whilst studying
    - × In what ways, if any, did work at Uni/College help get their current job
- What other things have helped them develop their skills or career to date

### **5. Process of gaining work**

- If currently working, how did they choose and find their current job
  - × How did they obtain it (application process etc)
- What kind of help have they had in finding work after studying. Probe help with
  - × Job search and career direction
  - × Applications and matching skills to jobs
  - × Interview skills
  - × Placements/work experience

Probe sources of support/advice – University/College, other
- Thinking back, what help did they get from their university or college in finding work while studying
- What help would they have liked while at University/College and since
  - × Probe as above
- What help would they like now in terms of developing their job-related skill and their career

### **6. Looking back and forward**

- Career aspirations for the future
- Views on what makes it difficult to develop their preferred career; what would help them
- Looking back, what if anything would they have done differently in terms of work or work experience while studying; why

- What advice would you give to a current undergraduate student considering getting a job/work experience

- × Thank the interviewee for their participation
- × Explain that £20 voucher will be sent to them in the post , need to return receipt
- × Explain that they're welcome to contact research team if they have any questions about the research
- × Reassure about anonymity
- × Fill out monitoring form

**SEND CATHY THE SERIAL NUMBER OF THE INTERVIEW**

UPDATE THE RECRUITMENT LOG AND SAMPLE MONITORING TOOL

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