



## **FUTURETRACK: PART-TIME HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS - the benefits of part-time higher education after three years of study**

A Report to the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU)  
by

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All the views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

This report is based on the findings of a follow-up survey conducted in 2010 of 261 UK domiciled part-time undergraduates who were originally surveyed in 2008 when they were nearing the end of their first year of HE study. We examine how these individuals have progressed two years after they were first interviewed, when they were in their third year of study. Specifically, we focus on their experiences of study, and what impact their course has had on their career development. The study was conducted for the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU), and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and undertaken by Prof Claire Callender, Birkbeck and the Institute of Education, University of London and David Wilkinson of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

A third of all UK undergraduates study part-time. Part-time higher education (HE) study is central to the UK's skills and employability agenda. It has a particularly significant role to play in raising, updating, and improving the skills level of people already in employment and ensuring they possess the skills and qualifications required by employers. It can help to fill skill gaps, and by combining work experience with study, it can increase the supply of highly- educated people with the types of 'employability skills' widely sought by employers. Moreover, as the 2011 White Paper *Higher Education: Students at the heart of the system*<sup>1</sup> confirms, part-time study can further the government's wider higher education policy objectives. It can provide educational opportunities throughout people's lives, increase social mobility, and help create a more diverse and responsive higher education sector while giving students greater choice and enhancing their higher education experience. The introduction of student loans for new part-time undergraduate entrants, for the first time in 2012/13, also can be seen as a commitment to part-time HE study.<sup>2</sup>

This study is one of only a few longitudinal studies of part-time undergraduate students in the UK, which has tracked student progression over time. While the number of students surveyed in this part of the study is small and may not be representative of all part-time students, the survey confirms the importance of part-time study and demonstrates its positive effects for employers, employees, and the wider economy and economic prosperity. The skills respondents learn on their part-time undergraduate courses are used effectively in their jobs and bring real, sustainable benefits to the individuals concerned. Among the respondents, part-time study contributes to quantifiable changes such as job moves, higher salaries, and promotion. It also leads to less tangible, qualitative changes to individuals' working lives which are felt by both respondents who do, and do not, change employer or job. But above all, these benefits start to take effect well before the part-time students surveyed had completed their studies, and graduated. However, there are some worrying early warning signs that part-time students employers' may be unable or unwilling to meet all of the large increase in tuition fees to be introduced in 2012/13, especially because of financial constraints due to the economic recession. This might restrict opportunities to participate in part-time study, especially for those wishing to re-skill or update their existing skills. Investing in skills development throughout a person's lifetime is at the heart of skills policies, and part-time higher education study is integral to that. Higher education funding policies need to support that ambition.

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*, Cm 8122, London: Stationery Office.

<sup>2</sup> Note none of the students surveyed in this study will be affected by the changes in student funding to be introduced in 2012/13.

## The characteristics of the students surveyed

- **The students surveyed are typical ‘non-traditional’ undergraduates but with high level, mostly full-time jobs.** The majority of students surveyed are: aged 25 years or over; female; White; living with a partner and have children; and are considered ‘non-traditional’ students as none of their immediate family had a higher education qualification. Most are up-skilling and raising their skill levels, these are people who are aiming for a qualification higher than their entry qualification, who start their part-time course with a low-level qualification, who have had no prior experience of higher education, and who are taking advantage of what could be termed ‘second chance’ educational opportunities. In addition, well over a third are reskilling and updating their skills, these are people with some prior experience of higher education, and who start their part-time course having already gained a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Although there are some differences in the profile of the students surveyed compared with national data on all UK domiciled part-time undergraduates, many of these are small which lends some confidence to the representativeness of the overall demographics of the students under scrutiny in this report. Most have full-time paid jobs and work in managerial and professional occupations. The majority are aiming for an undergraduate bachelor’s degree, unlike the majority of all part-time students nationally, and are studying at a higher education institution rather than at a further education college.

## Students’ patterns of study since 2007/08

- **The majority of students surveyed are still studying, while most of those who are not, intend to return to study in the next three years, so it is impossible to say if they had dropped out or stopped out of study. This is easier to do when accumulating credits on a part-time basis for those on modular courses, and likely to be a useful option for students who have other substantial and fluctuating work and family responsibilities.** Over half of the students surveyed who had started their undergraduate course in 2007/08 are still studying the same course in 2010/11 with a further one in ten had taken a break but returned to the same course. An additional one in ten who are still studying in 2010/11 had changed course. This leaves a quarter who had ‘dropped out’ or ‘stopped out’ and taken a break from their studies, primarily for personal reasons. However, defining exactly which students dropped out and which had stopped out is problematic as most of those not studying in 2010/11 intend to return to study in the next 3 years.

## Students’ employment patterns since 2007/08

- **The students surveyed have very stable patterns of employment, high levels of employment continuity, and are not very mobile.** The vast majority (84%) of students surveyed in 2010/11 are employed, mostly full-time. Only around one in ten had either switched from full to part-time employment or from employment to unemployment since their course started in 2007/08. The vast majority (77%) of respondents who were employees both in 2007/08 and 2010/11 are still working for the same employer.
- **Most respondents having managerial and professional jobs, and their full-time median earnings are in line with the national pay but there is a large gender pay gap.** The same proportion of respondents is employed in the public and private sectors but most work in the service sector, especially in Business services. Most have permanent jobs they

have worked in for 2-10 years with employers employing 100 or more people. The majority have managerial and professional jobs, especially men, and the median annual pay of £25,000 for full-time employees is slightly below the national average of £25,882. There is a large gender pay gap of 32% among full-time workers: men's median full-time earnings are £29,000 while women's are £22,000.

- **The majority of students surveyed have satisfying jobs with lots of interesting and challenging work.** Some 76% are satisfied with their job and 58% have jobs providing 'a lot' of interesting and challenging work but those working in the private sector tend to rate their job conditions more highly than those employed in the public sector.
- **Respondents' jobs are related to their long-term career plans while their course and qualification aim are related to their current job enabling them to use the skills they learn on their course in their job.** The proportion of students surveyed whose job is related to their long-term career plans (72%) and whose course is related to their current occupation or employment (63%) has not changed since 2007/08 because so few had changed jobs. In 2010/11, most (61%) respondents claim that their qualification is related to their job and they are able to use the skills learnt on their course in their current job (68%). However, most do not think they need their qualification to do their job (53%), probably because they had been in the same job before starting their current qualification. Yet, the majority (67%) think their job is appropriate for someone with their level of qualification, which suggests a good 'fit' between their job and qualification aim.

### Experiences of studying part-time

- **Respondents' part-time courses are delivered via 'blended learning' involving a mixture of face-to-face teaching and distance learning.** Some 90% of students surveyed have some or their entire course delivered face-to-face at their university or college, 53% are taught through distance learning, and 12% are taught at their place of work.
- **Not all part-time courses are tailored to the needs of part-time students or delivered 'flexibly'.** Nearly a half of students surveyed are taught alongside full-time students rather than exclusively with other part-timers which may be a more cost-effective way of delivering part-time study because it rarely demands additional resources for 'out of hours' provision. Most frequently, the part-time students surveyed attend their course during the daytime rather than in the evening, making the courses less accessible for those in full-time jobs.
- **Despite most part-time students having full-time jobs and family commitments, those surveyed spend an average of 13 hours a week on independent study, which is about the same amount of time their full-time peers, spend on independent study.** Part-time students surveyed taught face-to-face, have a further 6 hours of teaching a week.
- **Unsurprisingly, the students surveyed are pressed for time.** Their biggest challenges are juggling study with respondents other commitments (75%) and the pressures of being busy at work (67%) and at home (61%).
- **Yet, the majority surveyed are very positive about their teaching and learning experiences although it is rather impersonal.** The students surveyed have a positive university experience (81%); overall, are satisfied with the quality of the course (80%); receive excellent learning support (66%); have adequate library resources (67%), and

they have sufficient access to web-based facilities (60%). Their individual daily experiences of being a student are more mixed. Although most respondents get good feedback on their progress (66%), just over a quarter think that the amount of personal/pastoral support they received is inadequate (27%), and most believe that hardly any of the academic staff know their name (51%).

### **Tuition fees and the costs of study**

- **Between 2007/08 and 2010/11, respondents' who continued studying saw their average tuition fees rise by 27%, well above the rate of inflation (4.4% Retail Price Indexed).** In 2010/11, their average tuition fees were £1,467 a year and they spent an additional £483 on books, computing travel etc.
- **Both students and employers shared the costs of these fee increases, despite the recession.** However, our evidence suggests that employers were less likely to pay all of the respondents' fees and that more students were making a contribution towards their fees.

### **Students' career plans and use of careers information, advice and guidance**

- **The majority of students surveyed are very satisfied with their careers and have fairly stable ideas about their career plans.** However, for a minority, their higher educational experiences have been transformational - both their career plans and the clarity of their ideas about their careers had changed since starting their course.
- **The part-time students surveyed most often rely on their employer or someone at their place of work for careers information, advice, and guidance.** This also is the most helpful source of assistance.
- **Only a third of respondents use their university's career service because most know what they want to do and have the experience and knowledge to steer their career plans.** Those using their university careers service are younger and in part-time poorly paid jobs, and probably have less access to employer support. Nonetheless, most (71%) are very satisfied with help they received.
- **Little seems has changed since 2007/08, in students' use of their university's careers service although more students surveyed are aware of the service now.** There remains scope for university careers services to provide impartial or broadly informed careers information, advice, and guidance for older students with labour market experience who want help with career progression and career change.

### **The impact of part-time study**

- **The part-time students surveyed start to reap the benefits of studying long before they complete their course and graduate.** Such developments are largely overlooked in studies on the outcomes and impact of higher education study.
- **Part-time study has very positive impacts on respondents' working lives, their productivity, and their approach and attitudes to work.** Many of these qualitative benefits are just as valuable, but less tangible and quantifiable, than those usually associated with the outcomes of higher education such as job moves, higher salaries, and promotion. The majority of respondents believe, that because of their course, they

are more confident about their work (69%); their ability to do their work has improved (69%); they are better qualified to do their job (64%); have a deeper understand of their work (62%) and take on more responsibilities at work (50%). For a substantial minority, these improvements in job performance are rewarded by their employer through a pay increase (29%) and promotion (28%).

- **Most students surveyed use what they learn on their course in their job but other skills they use at work need to be developed further through their courses.** The skills students' use 'a lot' in their job but which are not developed 'a lot' in their course include: team-working; interpersonal skills; and communication skills.
- **Respondents reap wider benefits from their learning in addition to any employment and financial advantages.** The majority of part-time students surveyed believe that, because of their studies, they have developed as a person (81%); they enjoy learning more and are more aware of its benefits (79%); their self-confidence has improved (70%); and their overall level of happiness has increased (55%) too.
- **A sizable minority of respondents intend to take another course once they finish their current course.** Those who drop out or stop out of study are more likely to report this than those who continue their studies (82% compared with 68%).
- **Most students surveyed want to change jobs once they complete their course.** Three in six want to change jobs, especially with a different employer (33%) rather than staying with their current employer (26%).

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

In 2008, 31% of the workforce had a Level 4 qualification or above placing the UK in 12<sup>th</sup> position in international rankings<sup>3</sup>. To improve the UK's competitiveness and its economic strength, this proportion needs to increase and the workforce's skill levels raised. The importance of skills to the UK's economic future and the improvement of skills to build sustainable growth were reiterated in the Westminster coalition government's November 2010 document *Skills for Sustainable Growth*.<sup>4</sup> Part-time higher education (HE) study has a particularly significant role to play in raising, updating, and improving the skills level of people already in employment and ensuring they possess the skills and qualifications required by employers. It can help to fill skill gaps, and by combining work experience with study, it can increase the supply of highly- educated people with the types of 'employability skills' widely sought by employers. Another attraction is that part-time study minimises absence from work, with individuals investing their own time in work-related study<sup>5</sup>.

As the 2011 White Paper *Higher Education: Students at the heart of the system*<sup>6</sup> confirms, part-time study can further the government's wider HE policy objectives and is integral to their vision of HE. It can provide educational opportunities throughout people's lives, increase social mobility, and help create a more diverse and responsive HE sector while giving students greater choice and enhancing their HE experience. Moreover, the introduction of student loans for tuition fees for new part-time undergraduate entrants, for the first time in 2012/13, can be seen a commitment to part-time HE study, given the forthcoming rise in part-time tuition fees.<sup>7</sup>

However, just increasing the proportion of the working population with an HE qualification may not necessarily meet our skills needs. As a recent OECD<sup>8</sup> report reminds us, skills need to be used effectively and bring real, sustainable benefits to the individuals concerned. Indeed, UKCES argues: *'Skill acquisition which does not enhance employability, earnings, labour market progression or which does not bring other economic and social returns, is a waste of public and private resources.'*<sup>9</sup>

Yet a review of existing research on the benefits of part-time HE published since 1999 noted that: 'research on the impacts of part-time study on graduates and any benefits that accrue to the individual or society...is still rare'<sup>10</sup>. However, this literature review, like much of the broader literature on the returns of HE, which focuses on full-time students, concentrates exclusively on what happens to students post-graduation. Such a focus in turn, highlights how existing studies on

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<sup>3</sup> UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2010) *Ambition 2020: World Class Skills and Jobs for the UK*, London and Wath-upon-Deare: UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

<sup>4</sup> Department for Business Innovation and Skills. 2010. *Skills for sustainable growth*. Crown Copyright: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

<sup>5</sup> Mason, G and Hopkin, R (2011) *Employer perspectives on Part-time Students in UK Higher Education* Research Report 27, London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

<sup>6</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011a) *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*, Cm 8122, London: Stationery Office.

<sup>7</sup> Note none of the students surveyed in this study will be affected by the changes in student funding to be introduced in 2012/13.

<sup>8</sup> OECD (2012) *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives. A Strategic Approach to Skills Policies*, OECD, Paris

<sup>9</sup> UKCES, 2010 p.109 Op Cit.

<sup>10</sup> Bennion, A, Scesa, A and Williams, R (2011) The benefits of part-time study and UK higher education policy. In *Higher Education Quarterly*, 65, 2, 145 – 163; p150

the employment benefits of HE study fail to consider the reality of part-time students' lives, and the fact that the vast majority (over 80%) are already in employment. Unlike full-time students, most part-time students are not new labour market entrants, they are economically active. Yet this is ignored in research and in the assumptions informing that research. Consequently, researchers rarely look at the employment impacts of part-time study for those still studying.

This study attempts to fill the gaps in the literature. It is one of only a few longitudinal studies of part-time undergraduate students in the UK, which has tracked student progression overtime. This report is based on the findings of a follow-up survey conducted in 2010 of 261 UK domiciled part-time undergraduates who were originally surveyed in 2008 when they were in their first year of study. Thus, the report gives an indication of how these individuals have progressed two years after they were first interviewed, their experiences of study, and what impact their course has had on their career development. The study was conducted for the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and undertaken by Prof Claire Callender, Birkbeck and the Institute of Education, University of London and David Wilkinson of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase of this research (Wave 1) was undertaken in 2007/08. It included a survey of 3,704 part-time UK domiciled undergraduate students. Of these, 1,876 were in their first year of study in 2007/08 and 1,828 were in their final year of study. The survey focused on their career intentions and ambitions and career development and decision-making. The findings were reported in *Career decision-making and career development of part-time higher education students*.<sup>11</sup>

The second phase of the research consisted of two follow-up surveys both conducted in 2010/11. One survey followed-up students who were in their first year of study in 2007/08 and this report is based on this survey, as well as in-depth telephone interviews with 10 of the student surveyed. The second survey followed-up those who were in their final year of study in 2007/08 and the findings on that survey are reported elsewhere.<sup>12</sup>

By way of context, it is useful to outline the key findings from phase one or the research on students surveyed in 2007/08. These briefly were as follows:

### **Part-time students' reasons for studying**

- The part-time student population is extremely heterogeneous and this is reflected in their wide range of reasons for studying. The initial factors triggering their decision to study, influencing their choice of course, and shaping their aspirations were primarily instrumental. They were employment and career driven. They were manifest in their desire for a higher education qualification to get ahead and to meet their career ambitions, and to develop new or existing skills and better opportunities in the future.
- However, the students also valued the intrinsic rewards of studying in terms of wanting to do something new and different, their interest in their subject of study, and for mothers especially, acting as a role model for their children.

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<sup>11</sup> Callender, C., Hopkin, R., and. Wilkinson, D. (2010) *Futuretrack: Part-time students Career decision-making and career development of part-time higher education students*, Manchester: HECSU [http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/careers\\_decision-making\\_and%20career\\_development\\_of\\_parttime\\_he\\_students.htm](http://www.hecsu.ac.uk/careers_decision-making_and%20career_development_of_parttime_he_students.htm)

<sup>12</sup> Callender, C and Wilkinson, D (forthcoming) *Futuretrack Part-time higher education students: the impact of part-time learning two years after graduation*, Manchester, HECSU.

- Students' reasons for studying part-time as against full-time were both financial and pragmatic. They could not afford to give up their job to study full-time (80%). In addition, part-time study offered them greater flexibility (83%) and they could fit their studies around their existing work (79%) and domestic commitments (54%).

### **Part-time students' career plans and ambitions**

- Well over a half of students had clear career ambitions and well-reasoned long-term career plans – they knew what they wanted to do, especially students who already had some experience of, or exposure to, higher education. For the vast majority of students, both their decision to study (89%) and choice of subject (92%) were firmly linked to these career aims.

### **The careers information, advice, and guidance sought by part-time students and their use of university/college careers services**

- Only a third of new entrants had sought any careers information, advice, or guidance before starting their course. This was because most (71%) of them knew what they wanted to do and/or had experience to call upon to weigh up their career options. In addition, the vast majority did not think they needed more help and advice in choosing their course of study.
- It was primarily for these reasons that only a third of students had used their university/college careers service once they got to university.
- Of those part-time students who had not used their university/college careers service during the academic year, nearly three in five (58%) knew what they wanted to do and/or had the knowledge and experience to make up their own minds about their career options. However, a further third of students who had not used their university/college's careers service were unaware of its existence, or thought the service did not cater for people already with jobs or for those studying part-time, especially female students and those under the age of 25.
- When students did seek careers information, advice, and guidance either before starting their course or during their course, those who were employed mostly relied on their employer (32%) or someone at work (30%) for such advice, which they also rated the most helpful sources of careers information, advice, and guidance. By contrast, those who were not employed depended primarily on help from family and friends (27%) which they also rated as the most helpful source
- Although most part-time students did not use their university/college's careers service while at university, the majority (57%) had sought some careers information, advice, and guidance from alternative sources. This demonstrates an appetite for such help and support, and potential missed opportunities for university/college careers services. So, while there is a demand for careers information, advice, and guidance among part-time students, university/college careers services are not fulfilling that demand.

### **The costs of part-time study and employer support**

- There were wide variations in part-time students' total costs of study including both tuition fees and other course costs such as books, computers, travel etc. The average costs amounted to £1,730. Of this, £1,166 was spent on tuition fees, which were paid up-front, and the remaining £564 on other course costs.

- A minority of students received any help with their fees from their employer – around 41%. Employers were very selective in terms of who they were prepared to sponsor, favouring the most advantaged in their workforce to the detriment of those students most in need of help to improve their labour market position and human capital. Those missing out included students from ethnic minorities, from working class households with low-incomes and poorly paid part-time jobs and low qualification levels on entry. Those most likely to benefit from employer support were students least in need of such help- white students in full-time jobs, from high-income households already with a university degree studying towards a vocational qualification especially in engineering and technology.
- On top of help with fees, nearly a half of students had been given paid time off work to study by their employer, and one in six had received financial help towards their course-related costs. However, just like employers' financial contributions towards employees' tuition fees, employers were very selective in terms of in which employees they were willing to invest and support both financially and in kind so that their employees could successfully complete their course of study.
- Just under a half (46%) of employed students thought their employer was very supportive in helping them do their course. Not surprisingly, the employees most appreciative of their employer, who rated them as very supportive in their studies, were those who had received financial and practical help in the form of: contributions towards their course-related expenses; paid time off work to study, and payment of their tuition fees paid in full.

### **Government-funded financial support for part-time students**

- Part-time students are potentially eligible for two means-tested government-funded grants: a fee grant towards the costs of their tuition and a course grant for help with the costs of books, travel computing etc. However, eligibility to both grants is restricted to students studying at least 50% of a full-time course, those without a level 4 qualification or a first/bachelor's degree, and with low household incomes. As a result, the vast majority of part-time students do not receive this financial support.
- Only 14% of all the students surveyed received a fee grant while 19% were awarded a course grant. This compares with 10% of all part-time undergraduates nationally. However, the amount they receive is inadequate and does not meet their costs. Over two in five (43%) students surveyed in receipt of a government fee grant, had tuition fees higher than the fee grant they received while 68% awarded a course grant incurred course costs higher than their grant.

In the second phase of the study (Wave 2), conducted in 2010/11, students in their first year of study in 2007/08 - called 'starters' - were surveyed separately from those who were in their final year of study in 2007/08 – called 'completers'. The survey results for the 'starters' and 'completers'<sup>13</sup> are reported separately and this report focuses exclusively on the 'starter' students.

## **1.2 Aims and objectives of the research**

The overall aims of the research were:

- to collect data on career intentions and ambitions for part-time students;

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<sup>13</sup> Callender, C and Wilkinson, D (forthcoming) *Futuretrack: Part-Time Higher Education Students: The impact of part time learning two years after graduation* Manchester: HECSU

- to investigate employment and training outcomes for part-time students;
- to assess the impact of the mode of study on employment and training outcomes;
- to collect data on students' career development/learning and decision-making; and
- to investigate the views of employers of part-time students.

### 1.3 Methodology

The study was designed to be longitudinal with follow-up interviews. The research reported here is based on analysis of data collected from online and telephone surveys of part-time learners. The students were first interviewed towards the end of their first year of study of an HE undergraduate course in 2008 (Wave 1), and then interviewed again two years later in 2010 towards the end of their third year of study (Wave 2). Thus, the report is based on students in their third year of study. The students were drawn from a total of 29 UK universities.

It is noteworthy that some students who were in their first year in 2007/08 (Wave 1) had completed their studies by 2010/11. These students were not included in the survey results reported here. Conversely, a few students who were in their final year of study in 2007/08 had still not completed their studies by the time of the second interview in 2010/11. These students are included in the 'starter' survey reported here.

For further details and issues about rates of attrition see the Technical Appendix.

The population of students that the survey was designed to cover included those: studying part-time, including those studying on block release or studying during the evenings only; and those studying full-time for less than 24 weeks in the academic year. It covered home students, domiciled in England, Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland and focused on those studying towards one of the following types of qualification:

- First undergraduate degree
- Foundation degree
- HNC
- HND

The students were studying towards a qualification in one of the following subject areas (JACS Subject Code in brackets):

- Engineering (H)
- Technologies (J)
- Social Studies(L)
- Law (M)
- Business and Administrative Studies (N)

- Education (X)

In 2007/08, together these subjects absorbed around 40% of all part-time undergraduates.

The survey data was weighted to correct for differential response rates by qualification aim, subject of study and age of the student. Our analysis is largely descriptive and given the sample size we were unable to undertake any multivariate analyses. The analysis compares students in the 2010/11 survey with the same students' responses to the 2007/08 survey. It does not compare all respondents in 2010/11 with all respondents in 2007/08.

In addition to the survey, qualitative interviews were conducted by telephone with ten students. Again given the numbers involved, these interviews cannot be representative, but provide some useful insights into students' thinking. In total, 137 respondents to the wave 1 and wave 2 surveys had agreed to take part in a follow-up telephone interview: most of these were aiming for a first degree as opposed to an HND or Foundation Degree (85 per cent were doing so), and most had provided an email contact address, and a mobile (or landline) telephone contact number.

Of those 117 aiming for a degree, 70 were employed full-time at wave 1 and employed full-time at wave 2. Of these, 13 had changed occupation level<sup>14</sup> between wave 1 and wave 2 (where level was given). Of these 13 who had changed occupation level: 2 had moved from routine to intermediate; 6 had moved from intermediate to managerial/professional; 5 had moved from managerial/professional to intermediate.

Initially all those who had been employed full-time at wave 1 and at wave 2, and whose occupation level changed between wave 1 and wave 2 were contacted by email at the beginning of November 2011 (n=13). The email reminded recipients that they had previously been involved in the study, asked if they would be prepared to take part in a follow-up phone interview (lasting around 25 minutes) and provided a short outline of the study by way of background (as an attachment). Given a rather slow response to this initial email, a further 20 respondents who had previously agreed to take part in a follow-up interview, and who had been employed full-time at wave 1 and at wave 2 were contacted by email.

In most of the 33 cases, a follow-up phone call was made some 10-15 days after the initial email to remind recipients about the email and to ask them to contact the researcher to arrange a suitable date/time for the 'phone interview. In most cases, a message had to be left on voicemail. Once an agreed date/time had been established, the individuals concerned were emailed some further details about the telephone interview, essentially outlining the main themes to be covered.

The achieved 'starter' sample totalled nine students, comprising: three students who had changed occupation level between wave 1 and wave 2, and a further six students whose occupation level (as determined in the surveys) had seemed to remain the same. In almost all cases, the telephone interview was undertaken in the early evening, once the respondent was home from work.

#### **1.4 The limitations of the study**

By design, the sample of students surveyed consisted of a particular sub-group of part-time undergraduates. The overall number of respondents is small, and along with the attrition rates, it is

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<sup>14</sup> Occupation level as determined by respondents' replies to specific questions about occupation contained in the wave 1 and wave 2 surveys.

unlikely that the sample is representative of the current part-time undergraduate population, or those in their third year of study. This is discussed further when describing the characteristics of the sample below. Thus, care should be taken when interpreting the findings and in making generalisations from them.

In light of the small sample size, we only report on findings where there is a minimum of 50 cases. As a result, the analysis we could undertake was limited. When undertaking cross-tabulations, we were unable to report on certain student characteristics such as their age, ethnicity, their current employment status including whether they worked part-time or not at all, and their subject of study. In addition, we only report on differences, which are statistically significant. Differences, which are statistically significant at the 5% level, are described as significant; differences at the 1% level as strongly significant and differences at the 10% level as weakly significant.

## **1.5 Outline of the report**

The rest of this chapter looks at the characteristics of the students surveyed and the courses they are studying. Chapter 2 focuses on changes in students' study patterns between 2007/08 and 2010/11. Chapter 3 examines students' employment situation and conditions in 2010/11 and how they might have changed since 2007/08, and charts the relationship between their studies and their employment. Chapter 4 explores the realities of studying part-time and the pressures of combining paid work with studying for a higher education qualification. Chapter 5 concentrates on the costs of study and who paid students' tuition fees. Chapter 6 looks at students' career plans and their use of careers information, advice and guidance. Finally Chapter 7 examines the impact of studying on students working and non-working lives, and at their future plans.

## **1.6 The characteristics of the students surveyed**

Tables 1.1 to 1.2 provide some basic information about the students included in the survey. Table 1.1 shows that most students surveyed were:

- aged 25 years or over on 31 August 2009;
- female;
- White;
- living with a partner;
- had children
- in paid full-time employment; and
- working in managerial and professional occupations.

In addition, the majority of students had a household income below £50,000 per annum with more than one in five in households with annual incomes below £25,000. Most were up-skilling and raising their skill levels, these are people who were aiming for a qualification higher than their entry qualification, who started their part-time course with a lower-level qualification, who had had no prior experience of higher education, and who were taking advantage of what could be termed 'second chance' educational opportunities. In addition, well over a third are re-skilling and updating

their skills, these are people with some prior experience of higher education, and who start their part-time course having already gained a Bachelor’s degree or higher. This illustrates how part-time students are polarised in terms of their entry qualifications, unlike full-time undergraduates who typically enter HE with a Level 3 qualification. This also suggests that policies issues regarding **both** re-skilling and up-skilling are central to this study.<sup>15</sup>

By way of comparison with HESA data on UK domiciled part-time undergraduate students studying in UK HEIs in 2009/10,<sup>16</sup> our sample has a slighter higher proportion of men (44% as against 37% nationally); are slightly younger (76% are aged 25 or over compared with 80% nationally); are similar in terms of ethnic origin (17% are from an ethnic minority compared with 18% nationally); and has more students with Level 3 entry qualifications (36% with Level 4 or above, 44% with Level 3, and 20% with Level 2 or below or no qualifications, compared with 40%, 25%, and 18% respectively nationally). Comparable national data are not available on the economic status of part-time undergraduates, their household income, or their prior exposure to HE. Thus, although there are some differences in the profile of the students surveyed compared to all UK part-time undergraduates, many of these are small which lends some confidence to the representativeness of the overall demographics of the students under scrutiny in this report. However, as discussed below, the characteristics of students do vary by their qualification aim.

**Table 1.1 Student characteristics**

Characteristic	All	
	Weighted %	Unweighted N
<b>Age at 31<sup>st</sup> August 2009<sup>1</sup></b>		
Under 25 years	23	34
25 years or over	76	225
Missing	1	2
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	56	148
Male	44	113
<b>Family type</b>		
Single with no children	31	63
Lone parent	14	40
Couple with no children	16	45
Couple with children	37	108
Missing	3	5
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White	82	223

<sup>15</sup> In our first report, Callender et al (2010) op cit we also examined students motivation for study and the most important were “realising I need a Higher Education qualification to get ahead” (59%) or “realising that my existing qualifications were inadequate to meet my career ambitions (56%). The proportion of students reporting these reason were broadly similar irrespective of their qualification aim and highest qualification on entry and thus irrespective of whether students were up-skilling or re-skilling.

<sup>16</sup> Pollard, E., Newton, B., and Hillage, J (2012) *Expanding and Improving Part-time Higher Education* BIS Research Paper No 68, London: Department of Business Innovation and Skills.

	Not White	17	37
	Missing	1	1
<b>Current economic status<sup>2</sup></b>			
	Full-time paid employment	70	182
	Part-time paid employment	14	37
	Other	16	42
<b>Gross annual household income<sup>3</sup></b>			
	< £25,000	22	63
	≥£25,000 & <£50,000	37	81
	≥£50,000	29	82
	Missing/refused	11	35
<b>Social class of highest earner</b>			
	Managerial and professional	53	133
	Intermediate	28	77
	Routine, manual and unemployed	12	35
	Missing	8	16
<b>Highest qualification on entry</b>			
	Level 4/5	36	101
	Level 3	44	98
	Level 1/2/entry or none	20	59
	Not answered	1	3
<b>Partner/children/parent HE qualification.</b>			
	No HE qualifications	53	136
	Hold HE qualifications	42	114
	Missing/don't know	5	11
<b>All</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>261</b>

Base: All respondents (N=261)

Notes: + indicates a percentage that is greater than zero, but less than 0.5

1 Age calculated using full date of birth.

2 Students were asked to describe what they are mainly doing now.

3 Individual income if single/widowed/divorced/missing marital status. Household income if married/cohabiting/civil partnership.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

## 1.7 The courses students were studying

Table 1.2 shows that the majority of students surveyed were:

- aiming for an undergraduate bachelor's degree not at the Open university;
- studying at a higher education institution (HEI) rather than at a Further Education College; and

- paying fees themselves.

By way of comparison, Callender et al's (2010)<sup>17</sup> analysis of HESA data for UK domiciled undergraduates in 2007/08, found that only 35% of all part-time undergraduates were studying for a bachelor's degree while the majority (57%) were studying other undergraduate qualifications<sup>18</sup> with the remaining studying foundation degrees and higher nationals. In the original design of the study and sampling of students, those taking other undergraduate qualifications were intentionally excluded from the remit of the study (See Technical Appendix). Thus, this report focuses on a particular sub-group of part-time undergraduates.

**Table 1.2 Course and institution characteristics**

Characteristic	All	
	%	N
<b>Qualification Aim</b>		
Undergraduate degree	93	218
Foundation degree	3	14
HND/HNC	3	27
Other	1	2
<b>Subject</b>		
Engineering/technology	17	47
Social Science or Law	48	112
Business	27	61
Education	8	39
Other	1	2
<b>Studying at the Open University?</b>		
OU student	33	75
Not OU student	67	186
<b>Intensity of study</b>		
Less than 50 per cent FTE	9	28
50-74 per cent	42	101
75-99 per cent	6	13
100 per cent or more	7	16
Unknown	37	103
<b>Type of institution</b>		
HEI	91	225
FE college	9	34
Don't know	1	2
<b>Whether continuing to study and if fees payable in 2010/11</b>		
Not continuing	26	75

<sup>17</sup> Callender, C, Mason, G., and Jamieson, A (2010) *The supply of part-time higher education in the UK*, London: Universities UK, 73 pp

<sup>18</sup> Other undergraduate qualifications consist mainly of diplomas and certificates in higher education, undergraduate diplomas or certificates, professional qualifications at undergraduate level and institutional undergraduate credits.

Switched to a course out of scope of the study	5	13
No fees payable	2	6
Fee amounts not reported	8	21
Fees payable and reported	59	146
<b>Sources used to pay tuition or course fee in 2010/11 (Base=146)<sup>1</sup></b>		
Employer	37	62
Myself	55	79
Fee waiver/ financial assistance scheme	31	44
Family/friends	4	7
Other source	7	10
<b>All</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>261</b>

Base: All respondents (N=261)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

Table 1.2 also shows the range of subjects covered in our sample with students most often studying Social Sciences and the Law (48%) and Business (27%). Also shown are figures for students' intensity of study based on their reporting of the number of credit points taken in their first year of study.

More than a third were unable to report the number of credit points they took and a further 7% reported they were studying more than 100% of a full-time equivalent course. For those able to report their credit points, roughly 10% were studying at less than half of a full-time equivalent and 42% between 50 and 74% of a full-time equivalent. By way of comparison, Callender et al's (2010)<sup>19</sup> analysis of HESA data for UK domiciled students in 2007/08, found that 48% of part-time First degree students were studying at less than half of a full-time equivalent while 41% were studying between 50-74% of a full-time equivalent.

National HESA data on UK domicile part-time undergraduate students suggests some differences in the characteristics of those aiming for a bachelor's degree compared with those taking other undergraduate qualifications. In 2007/08, those studying towards a first degree were less likely than those studying other undergraduate qualifications to be women (61% compare with 67%); and to be aged over 25 year (75% compared with 83%).<sup>20</sup> Their highest qualifications on entry were slightly lower than those of students studying for other undergraduate qualifications. In 2009/10, 46% of first degree part-time students started their degree with a Level 4 qualification or above compared with 59% of students aiming for other undergraduate qualifications.<sup>21</sup> And, bachelor's degree students' intensity of study is higher compared with students taking other undergraduate qualifications. Over a half (52%) of first degree students study 50% or more of a full-time course compared with 28% of those taking other undergraduate qualifications.<sup>22</sup>

So how does our sample of part-time students, the vast majority of whom were aiming for a bachelor's degree, compare with all UK domiciled part-time students aiming for a bachelor's degree? Our sample, compared with the national population, has a slightly smaller proportion of women (56% compared with 61%); a similar proportion of students aged over 25 (76% compared with 75%);

<sup>19</sup> Callender, C, Mason, G., and Jamieson, A (2010) *The supply of part-time higher education in the UK*, London: Universities UK, 73 pp

<sup>20</sup> Callender, C, Mason, G., and Jamieson, A (2010) Op cit p.19

<sup>21</sup>, Pollard et al, (2012) Op cit p.123

<sup>22</sup> Some 19% of first degree students study below 25% of a full time course compared with 50% of those taking other undergraduate qualifications Pollard et al, (2012) Op cit p.134

a lower proportion whose highest qualification on entry was a Level 4 qualification (36% compared with 46%); and a similar proportion whose intensity of study is 50% or over (55% compared with 52%) although there is a lot of missing data on intensity of study for our sample. These measurable differences are not large which lends some confidence to the representativeness of the demographics characteristics of the students sampled when compared the overall population of UK domiciles part-time students aiming for a bachelor's degree.

## 2 CHANGES IN STUDENTS' STUDY PATTERNS SINCE 2007/08

This chapter focuses on any changes in students' patterns of study between 2007/08 and 2010/11 and whether they continued or stopped studying. Of the 261 respondents surveyed in 2010/11, the vast majority (91%) reported that they were in their first year in 2007/08. Nevertheless, a small minority who reported in 2007/08 that they were in their final year of study, had not completed their qualification by 2010/11 and so were included in the survey results reported here.

### 2.1 Study patterns since 2007/08

Overall, just over half of the students surveyed were still on the course they had started in 2007/08 with a further one in ten who had taken a break in their studies but had returned to the same course (Table 2.1). A quarter had either dropped out of their course or said they had 'stopped out' - taken a break and not yet returned to study. In addition, a further 10% had switched courses either to full-time study or to another course but were still studying.

**Table 2.1 Continuation of studies**

	%	N
	Weighted	Unweighted
Continued on same course without a break	53	134
Took a break from course but returned to the same course	12	31
Finished but not completed or took a break and not yet returned to studies	25	74
Switched to study full-time	5	10
Changed course, qualification aim or subject	5	12
<b>All</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>261</b>

Base: All respondents (N=261)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

Of those students who had continued study either on their original course or on new courses, over a half anticipated completing their qualification within the next five years (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2 Time expected to complete qualification**

	%	N
	Weighted	Unweighted
Less than 3 years	11	18
3-4 years	17	31
4-5 years	27	52
5-6 years	18	30
6-7 years	19	26
Don't know or not stated	9	17
<b>All</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>174</b>

Base: All continuing students who remained within the original scope of the study (N=174)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

One of the students interviewed who was taking a degree in Early Years Childhood Studies had changed her mode of study. When she started her degree she was attending university for ½ day per week, but has since changed to distance learning mode. She explained why.

*“I didn’t find the half day very useful so I’ve changed to long distance ...as I feel I wasn’t getting anything out of it [attending] ..I just found that you went into the classes, did some group sessions and talking but it didn’t actually help me write the essays [laughs] ..at the end of the module...I found we did nothing in the class that actually helped ..that prepared me for writing the assignments...and they were talking about things...and maybe because I’m very experienced I wasn’t learning anything different ...’cause the class is very mixed ...and you’re getting people...I’m a nursery manager ...and you’re getting all sort of practitioners working in schools and nursery assistants and it just wasn’t beneficial to me ...”*

## 2.2 Dropping out and stopping out

The quarter of students who dropped out or had ‘stopped out’ in our study (Table 2.1) is lower than suggested in some national studies. For instance, one study suggests that 23% of first degree part-time students drop out at some stage during their first year of study – often in their first term,<sup>23</sup> while another<sup>24</sup> shows that 56% of part-time first degree students do not complete their degree within seven years. In addition, these studies suggest that most students stop studying in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study, while in our study most stopped studying in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year (Table 2.3). These differences may be a function of who responded to our survey, and the timing of both the wave 1 survey (towards the end of students 1<sup>st</sup> year) and the wave 2 survey (towards the end of students’ third year). It is unclear if students who say they have ‘stopped out’ will actually return to study, or eventually drop out, although two-thirds plan to re-start studying within the next 3 years (Table 2.4). Stopping out is potentially easier for part-time students on modular courses who can accumulate credits on a part-time basis, and is likely to be a useful option for students who have other substantial and fluctuating work and family responsibilities

**Table 2.3 When stopped studying if not completed**

	% Weighted	N Unweighted
During first year	34	29
During second year	52	34
During third year	10	8
Other / can’t remember	4	3
<b>All</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>74</b>

Base: All students who had finished their course and not completed or who took a break and not yet returned (N=74)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

<sup>23</sup> National Audit Office (2007) *Staying the course: The retention of students in higher education* Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, HC 616 Session 2006-2007

<sup>24</sup> HEFCE (2009) *Part-time first degree study: Entry and completion* Issues Paper May 2009/18, Bristol: HEFCE

**Table 2.4 Whether plan to re-start a higher education course**

	% Weighted	N Unweighted
Yes, within the next 3 years	64	43
Probably, but not within the next 3 years	18	11
Probably not	9	10
Definitely not	5	7
Don't know	4	3
<b>All</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>74</b>

Base: All students who had finished their course and not completed or who took a break and not yet returned (N=74)  
Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

The key reasons student stopped studying were for personal and financial reasons (Table 2.5), despite the increase in tuition fees over this period (see chapter 5). But a fair proportion also experienced problems with their course – findings that accord with those from other research.<sup>25</sup> However, the number of students giving these reasons is small, and so their responses should be treated with caution. It is not possible to say if drop out will increase in future years for new entrants due to the 2012/13 tuition fee increases or any future fee increases for current students.

**Table 2.5 Main reason stopped studying if not completed**

	% Weighted	N Unweighted
Personal/domestic problems/ill health	31	16
Financial reasons	20	15
Couldn't juggle study with other commitments	15	12
Problems with the course <sup>1</sup>	17	14
Other	17	16
<b>All</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>73<sup>2</sup></b>

Base: All students who had finished their course and completed or who took a break and not yet returned (N=73)

Note: 1. Problems with course includes respondents who reported: "didn't like the course"; "couldn't cope academically with the course"; "course no longer relevant to my job"; and "poor quality of course/teaching"  
2. One respondent did not answer the question.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

One of the people we interviewed demonstrates the difficulty of defining what is meant by non-completion. This individual had started studying with the OU in 1998 but had had a break from her studies at the OU over the last 2 years. At that time she was interviewed, she had not completed her OU degree, but she had been doing a post-qualifying social work course (PQSW) at another university, which was delivered face-to-face. The course is a top-up to a professional qualification, and does not require a first degree. She did not complete the post-qualifying social work course. However, she had registered to study another OU module ('exploring ageing', 60 credits, level 3) in February 2012, which should give her a total of 300+ credits with the OU. "...I've got 285 [credits]

<sup>25</sup> National Audit Office (2007) *op. cit.*

*now...and I think that'd be enough to get me a degree...but things drop off now, if they're not relevant..."*

Her experiences illustrate why people drop out and stop out.

*"...I found the style of learning very, very difficult...and it made me feel inadequate ...I failed the academic assignments on more than one occasion ...each assignment I failed, I felt personally criticised ...and I was personally criticised, and one of the comments made to me, which I did challenge, was 'the OU have a much lower standard than we have ' ...and I used some quite curt and quite accurate words and told them where to go ..with that attitude, I thought that was appalling ..so part of my return to study is to boost my confidence.[laughs] ..I write for a living ...I write reports and that ...but I don't write in the academic style that [name of university] wanted ...whereas with the OU I had passed my assignments ..they may have been 45- 50 % but they were a pass...and I have never been made to feel a lesser person ..by the OU...so [name of university] just destroyed my confidence, disappointing, but that's life ..".*

[and the course was top-up to a professional qualification?]

*"...I think one of the difficulties...social work students who have recently qualified are much better trained in that they can write academically ...I did my nurse training and I qualified in 1980 ..it wasn't an academic training ..I mean I know a lot of stuff [laughs] ...you didn't need to tell us to feed and clean people ...[laughs]...so I think my ability to write in that pure, academic sense...references. references ..it's just not me ...so I stepped away ..I could have stayed on the PQSW...the second submission was a pass, you know you get your 40% ...but I found it was affecting my mental health ..I was so stressed and self-critical ..so you have to decide ..to step away.."*

Another students' experiences similarly demonstrate the difficulty of defining what is meant by non-completion. He had started studying a degree in Politics, Economics and Philosophy part-time in 2007/08. He completed the first year only, because he realised he could not commit the necessary time to studying. He has just completed one degree-level module in Law (level 2) by distance learning but has not committed to studying for a full degree programme. Should such a student be defined as dropping out or stopping out?

Here he explains why he stopped studying for his degree in Politics, Economics and Philosophy and why he too switched from a face to face course to one delivered via distance learning because he could fit it around his demanding job as a policy advisor in the Department of Work and Pensions.

*"unfortunately, as I say, the [name of university] degree, it was just the time commitment that got out of balance ..."*

[what was actual time commitment?]

*...there were a couple of evenings per week, and then there were other opportunities for study . like tutorials ...but in the end, it was finding the time and getting over there from the office ..then attend the lectures for a couple of hours , and then get back home ...I live outside of London ...so the difficulty of all of that ..that's what drew me towards the OU...a lot of the study [materials] is on line so therefore you don't have to be physically at the university ...so I can be much more flexible about when I do it ..if I have some spare time during the day say during my lunch hour then I can ... to some extent I could have done that with [name of university] but it was just the fact that the lectures were an*

*integral part of the course...and it's just finding the time to attend ...and on a regular basis ...I think a couple of years ago I was much busier in terms of the job, than I am now ...we were working on quite a major piece of legislation so there was quite an expectation that we'd be available to work in the evenings ...longer hours and a greater volume of things to deal with ..so that was quite unfortunate timing when I'd just started the course ...and it was not really possible to balance so."*

He continued

*"only regret is not being able to devote enough time to the course at [name of university] ..it was a very interesting, well put together course ...very knowledgeable, interesting and passionate teachers ..."*

### **2.3 Conclusions**

Well over half of the students surveyed who had started their undergraduate course in 2007/08 were still studying the same course in 2010/11 with a further one in ten having taken a break but returning to the same course. An additional one in ten was also still studying in 2010/11 but had switched or changed course. This left a quarter who had 'dropped out' or 'stopped out' of their studies primarily for personal reasons. However, defining exactly which respondents had dropped out and which had stopped out is problematic as most of those not studying in 2010/11 intended to return to study in the next 3 years. This is easier to do when accumulating credits on a part-time basis for those on modular courses, and likely to be a useful option for students who have other substantial and fluctuating work and family responsibilities.

### 3 CHANGES IN STUDENTS' EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS SINCE 2007/08

This chapter explores respondents' employment status in 2010/11 and whether this had changed since they were interviewed in 2007/08. It then looks at the nature and characteristics of students' current job including their pay, job conditions, and job satisfaction. Next, the chapter examines the extent to which the students' current job was related to their long-term career plans and the relationship between the course they were taking and their current occupation or employment. Finally, the chapter looks at the relationship between the qualification they were taking and their current job.

#### 3.1 Employment status

In 2010/11, the vast majority (84%) of students surveyed were employed, mostly full-time (Table 3.1). Between 2007/08 - when the students were interviewed initially and were in their first year of study- and 2010/11 at the time of their follow-up interview, just a few (5%) had altered their employment status with most changers moving into non-employment. Looking over a longer time period, from before students started their course until their second interview in 2010/11 some 11% had switched employment status (Table 3.3).

**Table 3.1 Employment status before and during the course**

	Before (%)	Wave 1 2007/08 (%)	Wave 2 2010/11 (%)
Full-time employee	68	69	70
Part-time employee	16	18	14
Other	16	13	16
<b>All (Base N)</b>		<b>100 (261)</b>	

Base: All respondents (N=261)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

It is clear that the vast majority of the students surveyed had very stable employment patterns. Table 3.2 shows the proportion of students who changed employment status or remained in the same state (employed vs. not employed) at three points in time: before students started studying; in 2007/08 when first interviewed; and in 2010/11 when re-interviewed. Nearly four in five (78%) were employed at all three points in time, 10% were not employed over the period and, while 12% changed states. This last group includes people who started off employed, then moved out of employment, and then moved back into employment again.

Table 3.3 reports on those respondents who were employed at each of the three points in time (the 78% in row 1 of Table 3.2). Around 11% switched between full-time and part-time employment, with the most common employment pattern being in part-time employment before study and switching to full-time employment at some point during the course of studying. In addition, the vast majority of students surveyed had a very stable employment status. Nearly four in five of those employed before starting their course and at both waves of the survey worked full-time at each point in time. Similarly, one in ten was not employed part-time at each of the three points in time.

**Table 3.2 Stability of employment patterns**

	(%)
Employed before the course and at both waves of the survey	78
Not employed before the course and at both waves of the survey	10
Switched between states	12
<b>All (Base N)</b>	<b>100 (261)</b>
Base: All respondents (N=261)	
Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010	

**Table 3.3 Stability of employment status**

	(%)
Employed full-time before the course and at both waves of the survey	79
Employed part-time before the course and at both waves of the survey	10
Switched between states	11
<b>All (Base N)</b>	<b>100 (207)</b>
Base: All employee respondents (N=207)	
Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010	

For those who were employees at both in 2007/08 and 2010/11, they were asked if they were employed by the same employer. Some 77% of employees were working for the same employer. Overall there is a high level of employment continuity for part-time students. Using data from the British Household Panel Study we calculate that 72% of people who were employees in 2006 and were also employees in 2008 were with the same employer at both points in time. Hence our figures indicate slightly higher levels of employment continuity than for the wider population.

### 3.2 Characteristics of job held at 2010/11 interview

The survey provides some detail of the characteristics of the jobs held at the time of the 2010/11 interview. These are shown in Tables 3.4 to Table 3.6. Most students surveyed had permanent jobs which they had worked in for 2-10 years. They tended to be employed in medium to large sized employers but were equally divided among employers in the private and public sector (Table 3.4).

However, there were some significant gender differences in the job characteristics of the students. Specifically, men were more likely than women to work in the private sector, and to work for an employer employing 250 people or more. In contrast, women were more likely than men to have been in their jobs for between two- to five years but overall, there were no gender differences in relation duration of employment above or below a particular threshold.

The majority of all part-time students worked in the service sector, most often in the Business sector but women, unlike men, were concentrated in health and social work and in education (Table 3.5).

**Table 3.4 Job characteristics by gender in 2010/11**

	Male	Female	All
	%	%	%
<b>Sector<sup>1</sup></b>			
Public	46	52	49
Private (including self-employed)	53	35	43
Voluntary	1	14	8
<b>Permanent or temporary</b>			
Permanent	82	81	81
Self employed / freelance	5	3	4
Temporary	13	16	14
<b>Job Tenure</b>			
Less than two years	27	23	25
Two to five years	21	35	29
Five to ten years	31	26	28
Ten years or more	22	15	18
<b>Employer Size<sup>2</sup></b>			
Less than 10 people	5	9	7
10 to 24 people	13	19	16
25 to 99 people	25	26	25
100 to 249 people	8	18	13
250 to 999 people	18	11	14
1000 or more people	20	8	13
Don't know	12	10	11
<b>All (Base)</b>	<b>100 (97)</b>	<b>100 (128)</b>	<b>100 (225)</b>

Base: All employed respondents (N=225)

Notes: 1. Differences in sector of employment are all significant at the 5% level

2. Men were more likely than women to work for employers where 250 or more people worked. This difference is significant at the 5% level.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

**Table 3.5 Industry of employment by gender in 2010/11**

Industries	Male	Female	All
	%	%	%
Manufacturing	9	1	4
Other Production	14	6	10
Business Services <sup>1</sup>	32	34	33
Public Administration	24	12	17
Education <sup>2</sup>	12	18	15
Human health and social work <sup>2</sup>	8	26	18
Other Services	2	3	2
<b>All (Base)</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100 (224)<sup>3</sup></b>

Base: All employed respondents (N=224)

Notes 1. Includes Transport and storage and Information and communication industries

2. Women were more likely than men to work in Education and Human health and social work industries. This difference is significant at the 5% level.

3. One respondent did not answer the question on industry of employment

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

In 2010/11, the majority (57%) of part-time students were in managerial and professional jobs (Table 3.6). However, there were some gender differences. Women were significantly less likely than men to be in managerial and professional jobs and much more likely than men to have intermediate jobs.

There was no statistically significant evidence to suggest that since 2007/08 part-time students had moved up the occupational hierarchy (Table 3.6) nor of any differences by gender.

**Table 3.6 Occupation in 2010/11 and 2007/08**

	2010/11			2007/08		
	All %	Men %	Women %	All %	Men %	Women %
Managers and professional	57	64	52	55	61	51
Intermediate	30	19	39	26	25	27
Routine manual and unemployed <sup>1</sup>	6	8	4	8	5	10
Don't know	6	9	5	10	9	11
<b>All (Base)</b>	<b>100 (225)</b>	<b>100 (97)</b>	<b>100 (128)</b>	<b>100 (225)</b>	<b>100 (97)</b>	<b>100 (128)</b>

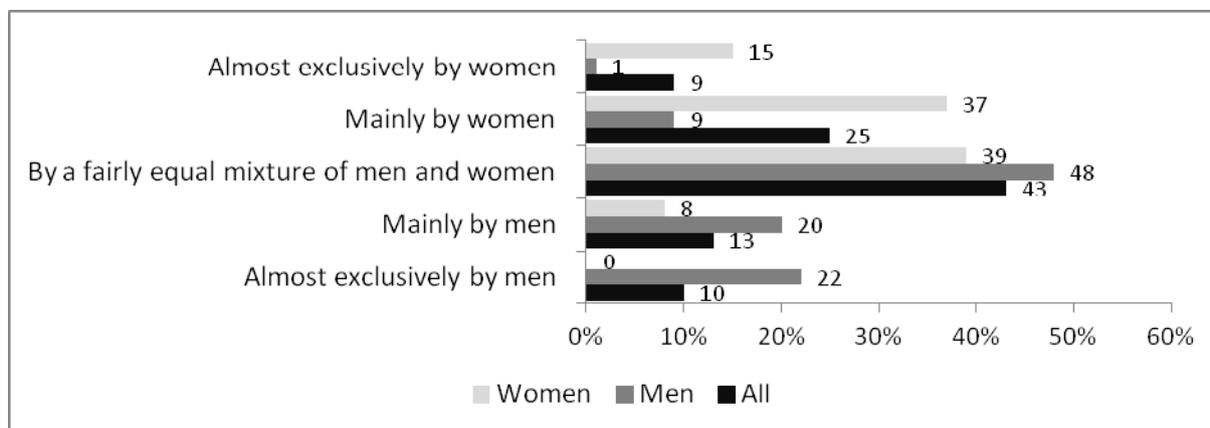
Base: All employed respondents (N=225)

1 includes students who were unemployed in 2007/08

2. Women were less likely than men to work to be in managerial and professional jobs. This difference is significant at the 5% level while the difference at intermediate level is significant at 1% level.

Women were more likely than men to work mainly or nearly exclusively with other women (Figure 3.1). This type of gender occupational segregation can be attributed to both vertical and horizontal segregation. Vertical gender segregation occurs when women are located in jobs lower down the occupational hierarchy while horizontal segregation is associated with the concentration of women in occupations dominated by women such as nursing or teaching. As we have seen, female part-time students were more heavily concentrated than male part-time students in jobs lower down the occupational hierarchy (Table 3.6). In addition, our findings also suggest evidence of horizontal segregation. Female students' in managerial and professional jobs were concentrated in female dominated occupations such as health, social work and education (Table 3.5), which in turn is associated with their concentration in the public sector (Table 3.4).

**Figure 3.1 Gender mix of employment situation in 2010/11**



Base: All employed respondents (N=225)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

### 3.3 Pay

Figure 3.2 examines part-time students' median annual pay. Here we restrict our analysis to respondents who were employed full-time and reported pay as either an annual, monthly or weekly amount. We therefore exclude around 8% of respondents who reported hourly pay, because we do not have information on their weekly hours of work in order to calculate an annualised figure.

In 2010/11 part-time students who were employed full-time had median earnings of £25,000. There were large differences in earnings particularly by gender, and whether they were a traditional or non-traditional student namely whether someone in their immediate family had experience of higher education (Figure 3.2).<sup>26</sup> Traditional students had median annual pay that was £3,528 higher than non-traditional students. Men's median full-time earnings were £29,000 while women's were £22,000 a gender pay gap of 32%; a difference that was strongly significant. By way of comparison, in April 2010 the median annual earnings of full-time employees nationally were £25,882. For men, the median was £28,080 and for women £22,492.<sup>27</sup> So median earnings for part-time students who

<sup>26</sup> Differences by students' entry qualifications, subject of study, and who paid for students' tuition fees are not reported because of the small number of cases in some categories.

<sup>27</sup> ONS (2011) *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2010* All Employees Table 1.7a

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcmm%3A77-238620> Accessed 12/5/2011

worked full-time was broadly in line with national median earnings for full-time employees in the UK.

**Figure 3.2 Median pay by respondent characteristics in 2010/11 (£)**



Base: Respondents employed full-time who reported pay (excluding those who reported an hourly amount) (N=144)  
 Note: Differences by gender were significant at the 1% confidence level, whilst difference by whether a family member had studied in HE were significant at the 5% level.  
 Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

Table 3.7 compared students' average annual earnings for full-time employees in 2010/11 and 2007/08. The large amount of missing data makes it difficult to interpret the extent of any changes. However, other evidence, discussed in Chapter 7 (Figure 7.1), suggest that 29% of students surveyed had received a pay rise in part because of their course.

**Table 3.7 Annual Earnings of full-time employees by pay band in 2010/11 and 2007/08**

	2010/11 <sup>1</sup>	2007/08
Percentage earning in each pay band	%	%
Less than £25,000	48	55
£25,000 or more, but less than £50,000	35	34
£50,000 or more	4	7
Not answered / Refused	13	5
<b>All (Base)</b>	<b>100 (166)</b>	<b>100 (168)</b>

Base: All full-time employees. (N=166 in 2010/11 and N=168 in 2007/08)  
 2010/11 earnings data has been deflated to 2008 prices using the Seasonally Adjusted Whole Economy Average Weekly Earnings Series

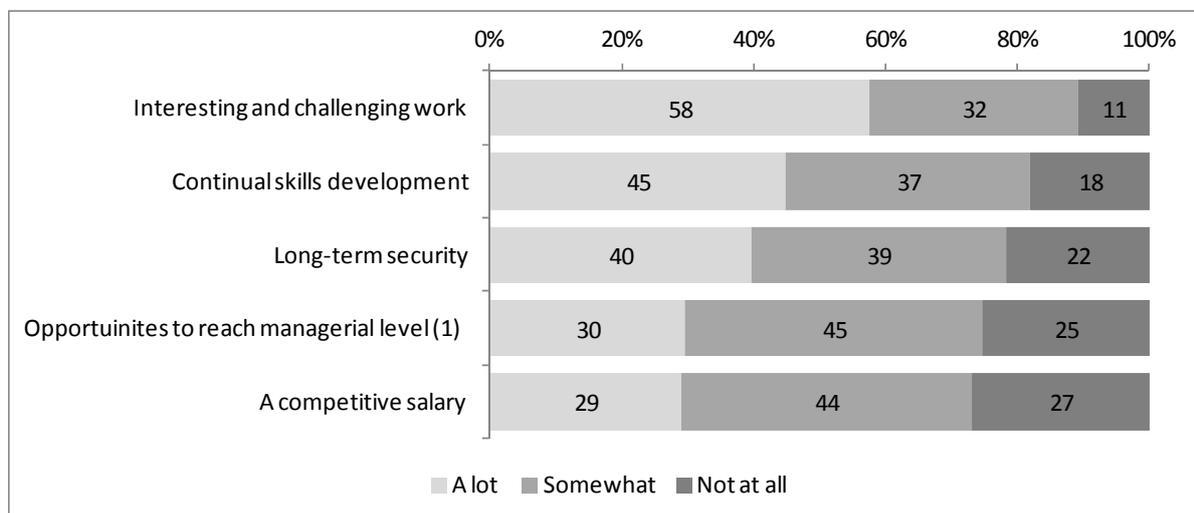
Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010 and 2008

### 3.4 Job conditions and job satisfaction in 2010/11

We now turn to consider other aspects of employment. First we consider the extent to which respondents' jobs offered features such as a competitive salary, continual skills development, interesting and challenging work, long-term security and opportunities to reach managerial level.

Most part-time students surveyed were in jobs that provided interesting and challenging work 'a lot' (58%) but they were least likely to have jobs offering a competitive salary 'a lot' (Figure 3.3) – reflecting their lower than average salaries (Figure 3.2). However there were some interesting and strongly significant differences by whether the part-time students worked in the public and voluntary sectors or in the private sector (Table 3.8). Overall, those working in the private sector were more likely than those working in public and voluntary sectors to rate their jobs as providing long-term security 'a lot' (51% compared with 31%) and a competitive salary 'a lot' (37% compared with 22%), which is perhaps not surprising given the current cuts in public expenditure. However, respondents working in the public and voluntary sectors were more likely than their peers in the private sector to think that they had opportunities for continual skills development 'a lot' or 'somewhat' (88% compared with 74%).

**Figure 3.3 Further job characteristics in 2010/11**



Base: All employed respondents (N=225)  
 Notes: 1. Only asked of employees (N=213)  
 Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

**Table 3.8 Further job characteristics by whether students work in the Private or Public/Voluntary sector in 2010/11**

	Private sector %	Public/Voluntary sector %	All %
<b>Percentage reporting job offered characteristic 'a lot'</b>			
Long-term security	51	31	40
A competitive salary	37	22	29
<b>Percentage reporting job offered characteristic 'somewhat' or 'a lot'</b>			
Continual skills development	74	88	82
<b>All (Base)</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>100 (225)</b>

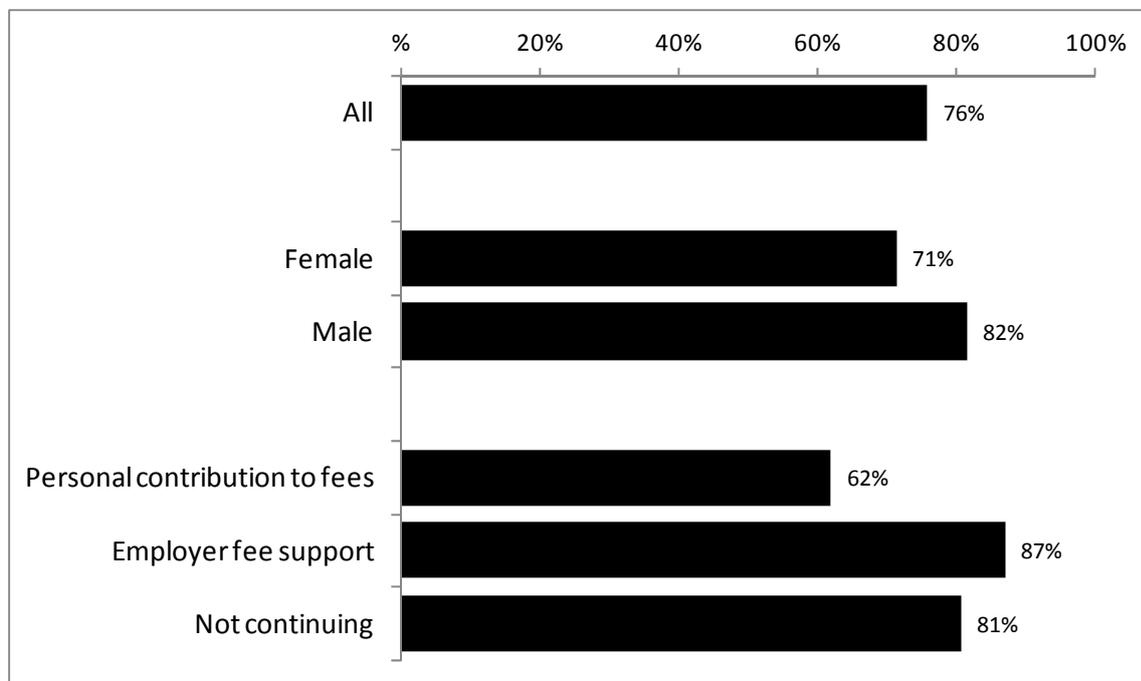
Base: All employed respondents (N=225)

Note: Differences by sector were significant at the 1% confidence level.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

In this context we consider an overall measure of job satisfaction. Employed respondents were asked 'all things considered, how satisfied would you say you are with your current job?' The majority (76%) were very or fairly satisfied with their job particularly those whose tuition fees were paid in full or part by their employer (87%), and men (82%). In contrast, those least satisfied were those who had had to pay something towards the costs of their tuition fees (Figure 3.4).

**Figure 3.4 Job Satisfaction by respondent characteristics**



Base: All employed respondents (N=225)

Note: Differences by gender were significant at the 5% confidence level. Difference by whether students made a personal contribution to fees and whether they got employer fee support and by whether students made a personal contribution to fees and those who did not continue studying were significant at the 5% level. Differences between students who got employer fee support and those who did not continue studying were not significant at the 5% level.

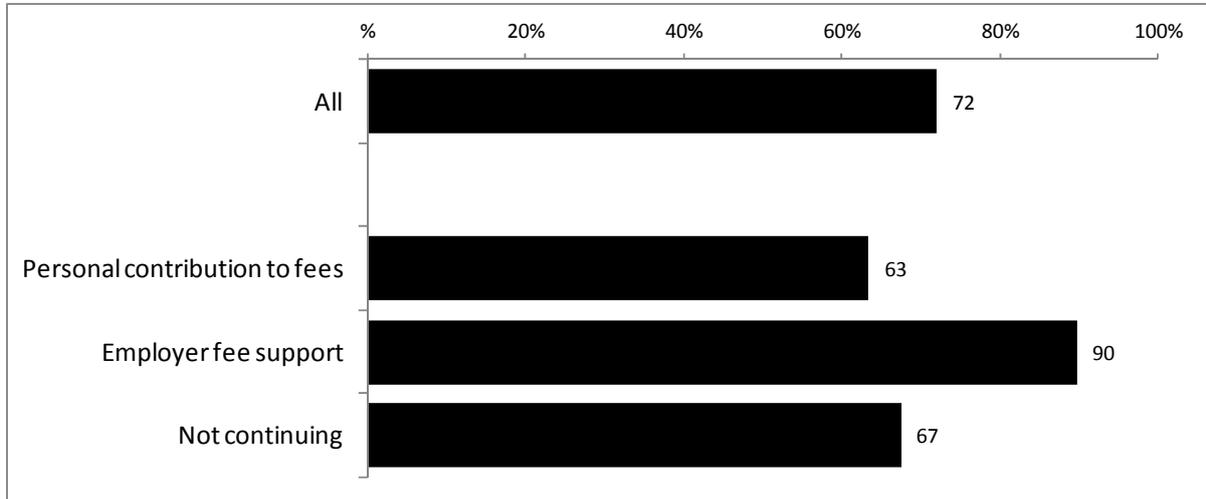
Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

### **3.5 Whether current job related to long-term career plans**

Figure 3.5 shows that most respondents (72%) were in a job that was related to their long term career plans, which are discussed in further detail in chapter 6. This was particularly the case for students whose employer was contributing towards their tuition fees (90%). As we will see in Chapter 5, employers were quite selective in terms of which employees they are prepared to sponsor – so it is perhaps not surprising that that there is a strong correlation between employer support and the extent to which employees current job is related to their long-term career plans.

The proportion of students stating that their current job is related to their long term career plans in 2010/11 is almost identical to the proportion in 2007/08 - 71%. This is probably because most were still in the same job.

**Figure 3.5 Whether current job is related to long term career plans: percentage of respondents in 2010/11**



Base: All employed respondents (N=225)

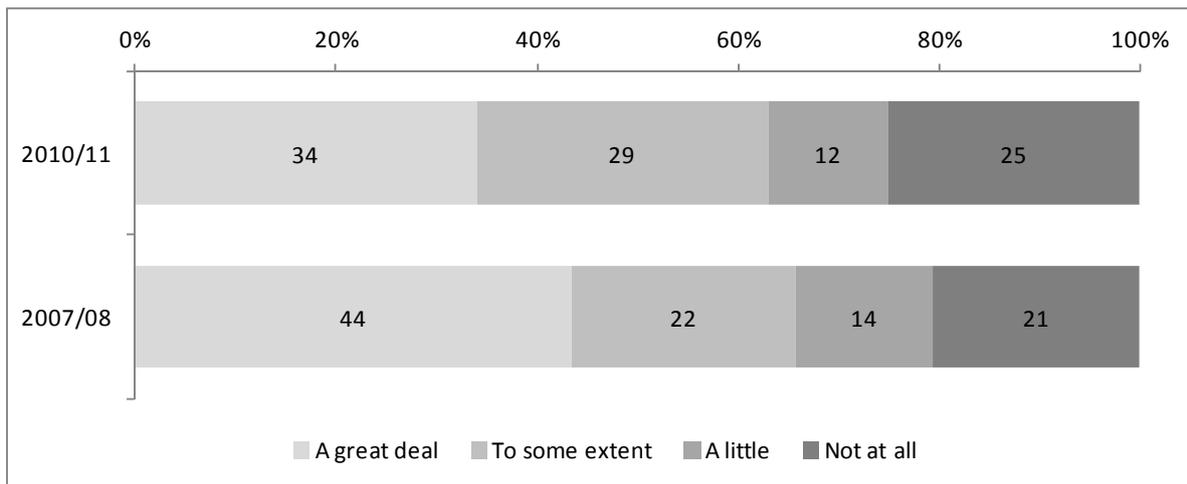
Note: Difference by whether students made a personal contribution to fees and whether they got employer fee support were significant at the 1% level. Differences by whether students made a personal contribution to fees and those who did not continue studying were significant at the 5% level. Differences between students who got employer fee support and those who did not continue studying were significant at the 1% level.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

### **3.6 Relationship between course and current occupation or employment in 2007/08 and 2010/11**

The majority (63%) of part-time students surveyed also believed that that the course they were taking was related to their current occupation or employment a great deal or to some extent (Figure 3.6). This was a similar proportion (66%) in 2007/8, again probably because so few students had moved jobs since 2007/08.

**Figure 3.6 Extent to which course related to current occupation or employment in 2010/11 and 2007/08**



Base: All employed respondents (N=225 in 2010/11 and N=217 in 2007/08)  
 Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

One interviewee taking a BSc in Business Studies talked about the relevance of her course for her job as a supervisor in the Social Security Agency as follows:

*"...yes...and well..obviously there were some [modules] that didn't [relate to her job]...but there were some like statistics, and we did some accountancy ones ..but not all of it [related] ..like the profit and loss accounts ...and then the more managerial, line manager ones [modules] like employee behaviour and human resource ones...some of those were related to my job ...with me having staff [ 8 staff report to her] ..."*

A non-completing student who had taken a wide variety of courses commented how her courses helped her to develop her work skills and how she selected courses to fulfil her work needs.

*"...all my studies have enabled me to develop vocationally...so they have had a link directly or indirectly to social welfare...and I did finance, and managing organisations and things like that ...so they do link ..as a nurse, and I have to keep my registration as a nurse, I have to do 52 hours of ...prep, post-registration education and practice, a year ...so all my studies have helped me meet that prep criteria ..."*

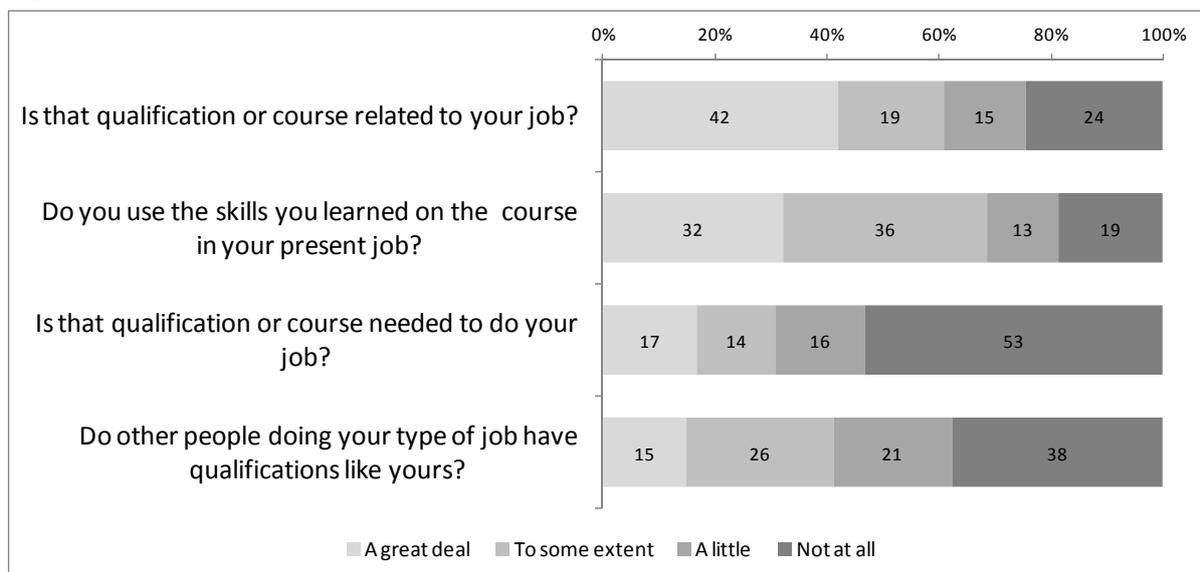
*"... I did a computer course which skilled me up..maths, my original course was a level 1 and that was because I didn't feel confident about my maths ..so that gave me a big boost ...and I did management of organisations and some others ..care of dying , and the patient's family ..I was working with colleagues who were losing people ...I ticked them [the modules] off because of where I am personally in my own life , and where I feel I need to fill a gap professionally ..so it's enhanced me holistically ...I'm not an academic learner...the learning has got to have a real life purpose for me ..."*

### 3.7 Relationship between qualification and job in 2010/11

Employed respondents were asked how relevant their qualification was to their job; this covered the extent to which their qualification was: related to their job; needed to do their job, and the extent to

which other people doing their type of job had qualifications like theirs and whether they used the skills they learned on their course in their present job. The results are shown in Figure 3.7. The majority believed that their qualification or course was related to their job (61%) a great extent or to some extent, and a higher proportion stated that they used the skills learned on their course in their present job a great deal or to some extent (68%). However, less than half of respondents were working among people doing their type of job who had similar qualification a great deal or to some extents (41%) and only a minority - just under a third (31%) - thought that the qualification they were aiming for and their courses were needed in order to do their job.

**Figure 3.7 Relevance of qualification to job**



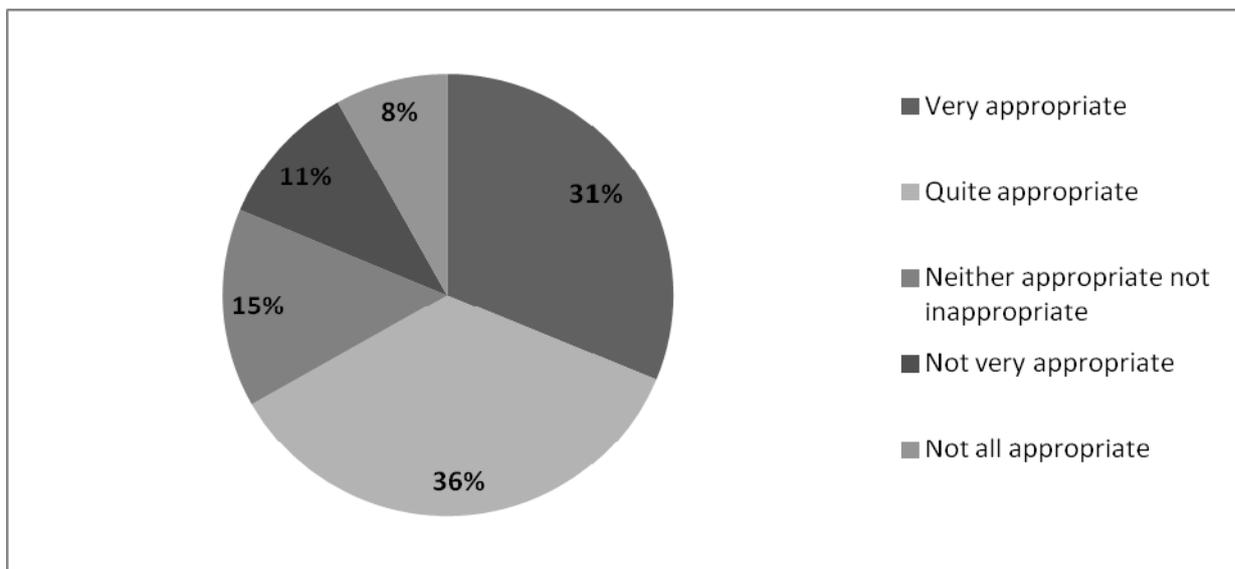
Base: All employed respondents (N=177)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

This might indicate that these students were not necessarily working in 'graduate' jobs<sup>28</sup>, which is not surprising given so many they were working in these jobs before starting their current undergraduate qualification. However, despite the fact that only a minority of students thought they needed the qualification they were studying in order to do their job, the majority (67%) thought that their job was appropriate for someone with the level of their qualification and only 19% thought their job was inappropriate (Figure 3.8) – suggesting a level of synergy and 'fit' between their job and qualification.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 3 for a full discussion about graduate jobs in Purcell, K., Elias, P, Davies, R., and Wilton, N. (2005) *The Class of '99: A study of the early labour market experience of recent graduates* DfES Research Report No. 691, Nottingham, DfES

**Figure 3.8 How appropriate is respondents' job for someone with their level of qualification in 2010/11**



Base: All employed respondents (N=177)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

### 3.8 Conclusions

The vast majority (84%) of students surveyed in 2010/11 were employed, mostly full-time. And most of them also had very stable patterns of employment. Only around one in ten students had either switched from full to part-time employment or from employment to unemployment over a two year period from before they started their course until their second interview in 2010/11. Furthermore, for those students who were employees both in 2007/08 and 2010/11, the vast majority (77%) were still working for the same employer. So there is a high level of employment continuity and an absence of mobility among students studying part-time.

Respondents were equally likely to be employed in the public and private sectors but most worked in the service sector, especially in Business services. Most had permanent jobs they had worked in for 2-10 years with employers employing 100 or more people. The majority had managerial and

professional jobs, especially men, and the median annual pay of £25,000 for full-time employees was in line with the national median of £25,882. There was a large and significant gender pay gap of 32% among full-time workers: men's median full-time earnings are £29,000 while women's are £22,000. However, the vast majority (76%) were satisfied with their job. Most (58%) had jobs providing 'a lot' of interesting and challenging work but those employed in the private sector tended to rate their long-term job security and competitive salary more highly than those working in the public sector.

Students' continuity of employment meant that, in 2010/11, the proportion reporting that their job was related to their long-term career plans (72%) and that their course was related to their current occupation or employment (63%) had not changed since 2007/08. In 2010/11, most (61%) students surveyed said their qualification was related to their job and they had been able to use the skills learnt on their course in their current job (68%). However, most did not think they needed the qualification they were taking in order to do their job (53%), probably because they had been in the same job before starting their current qualification. Yet, the majority (67%) thought that their job was appropriate for someone with the level of their qualification – suggesting a level of synergy and 'fit' between their job and qualification. Moreover, as we will see in Chapter 7 students' employment and careers benefited from their studies.

## 4 EXPERIENCES OF STUDYING

This chapter looks at how respondents' courses were delivered and at their experiences of studying part-time including the pressures of combining their studies with their other work and domestic commitments.

### 4.1 Course delivery and hours of study

Most full-time courses are delivered face to face at a student's HEI.<sup>29</sup> However, as the experiences of the part-time students surveyed shows, their courses were delivered in more flexible ways. For 90% of students surveyed some or all of their course was delivered face-to-face at their university or college, while for over a half (53%) some or all of their course was provided through distance learning, and for 12% some of their course was undertaken at their place of work (Table 4.1).

Overall, 42% of students surveyed were on courses where the teaching was delivered exclusively face to face at their university/college, 8% were taught solely via distance learning, but none of the courses were delivered only at students' place of work. Hence, half the students were on courses delivered by mixed teaching methods.

**Table 4.1 Location of course delivery**

Percentage of time	At place of work	Face-to-face at university/college	Distance learning
	% of respondents	% of respondents	% of respondents
None	82	10	47
Less than half	6	40	14
More than half	6	50	39
Not working/ not applicable	6		
<b>All (Base)</b>		<b>100 (261)</b>	

Base: All respondents

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

For those respondents taught face to face at their HEI, an equal proportion were taught alongside other full-time students as were taught in classes exclusively with other part-time students (Table 4.2). In other words, for nearly half of the students, their courses were not necessarily tailored to their needs. This tends to be a cheaper way of delivering part-time study as students are usually taught during 'normal university hours' rather than in evenings or at week-ends, and by staff employed on regular contracts. Consequently there are no additional costs of keeping open facilities outside normal hours or of employing staff to work 'unsociable' hours.<sup>30</sup> Given this pattern of

<sup>29</sup> Up till now courses delivered exclusively through distance learning, even if 100% of a full-time equivalent course, are classified as part-time courses. For student funding purposes this will change in 2012/13.

<sup>30</sup> For a full discussion of the additional costs and 'risks' associated with 'tailor made' part-time provision see Callender, Mason and Jamieson (2010) *op cit*

provision, it is perhaps not surprising that most often students' classes took place during the day rather than in the evening or at week-ends (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2 Other aspects of course delivery**

	Taught alongside full-time students <sup>1</sup>		When most classes are / were held
	% of respondents		% of respondents
Yes	47	Daytime	46
No	45	Evenings	41
Don't know	8	Weekend	13
<b>All (Base)</b>	<b>100 (226)</b>		<b>100 (226)</b>

Base: All who had part of course delivered at university/college face-to-face by a lecturer or other academic (N=226)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

As our interviews with students suggested, such in-fill arrangements where part-timers are taught alongside full-time students can be isolating. As one student commented:

*“when I first started it [the degree] I was completely on my own ..but not really social groups [changed] to be honest ..first couple of years I did meet a few people that I'd talk to ...I don't sit on my own very often ...but a lot of them are younger..and the older ones that are there tend to be mixed, because they're doing it full-time so they know each other.”*

For those students surveyed who had some face to face teaching either at university/college and/or at their place of work, they had an average of six contact hours of teaching a week. In addition, all students spent twice as much time - a further 13 hours on average per week studying independently (Table 4.3).

Unsurprisingly, part-time students have less contact hours than those studying full-time but the amount of time spent on independent study is similar. For example, the Futuretrack study<sup>31</sup> of full-time undergraduates reported that students in their first year of study (in 2007/08) normally spent an average of 15 hours each week in timetabled lessons, tutorials, practical work, or other activities supervised by a lecturer or other academic. In addition, full-time students spent a further average of 13 hours each week on other non-timetabled coursework or study related to their course. These results are similar to those of other research on full-time students' hours of study.<sup>32</sup> The fact that both part-time and full-time students spend a similar amount of time on independent study gives some insight into the time pressures involved in part-time study and the commitment required to

<sup>31</sup> Purcell, K., Elias, P., Atfield, G., Behle, H., Ellison, R., Hughes, C., Livanos, I., and Tzanakou, C (2009) *Plans, aspirations and realities: taking stock of higher education and career choices one year on* HECSU/University of Warwick, p23.

<sup>32</sup> On average, in 2012 students reported 14.4 hours of private study per week – a significant increase over the 13.1 hours in 2006 and 12.7 in 2007. Bekhradnia, B. (2012) *The Academic Experience of Students in English Universities - 2012 report*, Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) p 5, <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/466-2060/The-Academic-Experience-of-Students-in-English-Universities.html> (accessed 24.6.12)

complete such a course. This is especially the case given that most part-time students surveyed were working full-time and had family commitments (Table 1.1).

**Table 4.3 Hours spent studying during term-time**

	Face-to-face contact with teaching staff at university/college or work (excluding students who only took distance learning courses) %	Independent study %
Percentage of respondents reporting zero hours	14	2
1-5 hours	43	16
6-10 hours	35	40
11-20 hours	6	33
More than 20 hours	2	9
Average hours if greater than zero	6	13
<b>All (Base)</b>	<b>100 (235)</b>	<b>100 (261)</b>

Base: All respondents (N=261)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

#### 4.2 Students' views on their teaching and learning experiences at university/college

Overall, the students surveyed had had positive teaching and learning experiences in terms of learning support in general; their assessment of the HEI environment; and individual daily experiences of being a student (Figure 4.1). Regarding their overall university experience, two-thirds or more students agreed with statements that: their 'university experience had been positive' (81%); 'overall they were satisfied with the quality of the course' (80%); and 'the learning support received on their course was excellent' (66%). Their evaluation of the HE environment was not quite as enthusiastic. Even so, the majority agreed that 'library resources are adequate' (67%), and that they had sufficient 'access to web-based facilities' (60%). Their individual experiences as students were more mixed. While about two-thirds agreed with the statement that they were 'given good feedback on their progress' (66%), about a half disagreed with the statements 'the amount of personal/pastoral support I received was inadequate' (54%), and 'hardly anyone on the academic staff knows my name' (51%).

The only question in this survey which mirrored exactly any of those asked in the National Student Survey (NSS) is 'overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course'. According to the results of the 2011 NSS for part-time students taught at HEIs in England- 88% were satisfied,<sup>33</sup> slight more than the 80% recorded in our survey. In addition, our survey results are lower than the NSS's in relation to

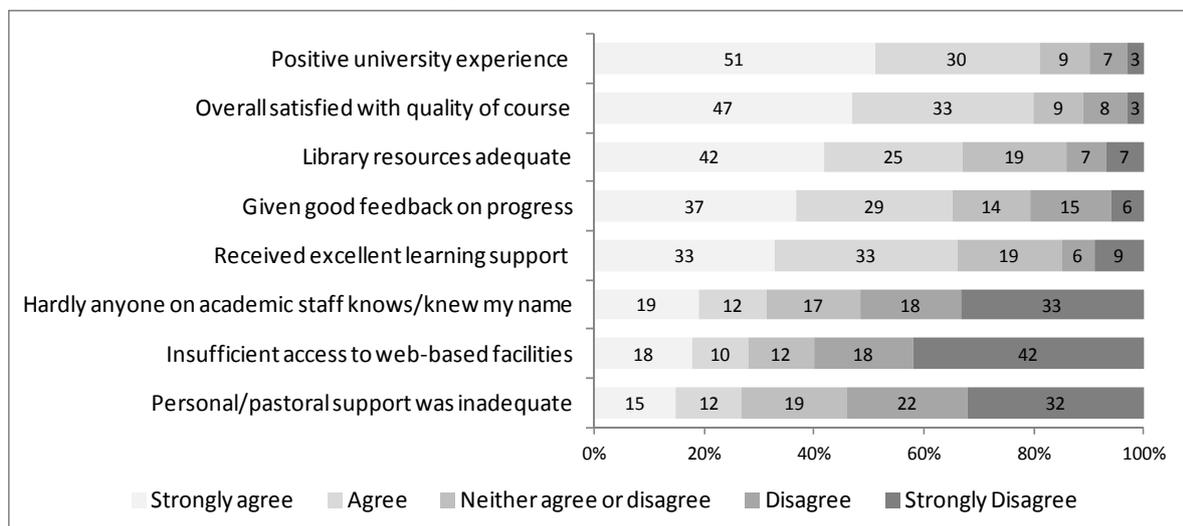
<sup>33</sup> HEFCE (nd) 2011 National Student Survey summary data

<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/it/publicinfo/nationalstudentsurvey/nationalstudentsurveydata/2011/> Accessed 18/07/2012

library resources. While 82% of NSS participants think that ‘The library resources and services are good enough for my needs’, some 67% of the students we surveyed believe that ‘Library resources are/were adequate’.

Similar questions were asked of full-time undergraduates in the Futuretrack study,<sup>34</sup> so the experiences of the part and full time students can be compared. Interestingly, there were few differences in students’ experiences by their mode of study. For instance, 80% of full-time respondents agreed with the statement ‘On the whole, the tuition and learning support I received on my course was excellent’. Most full-timers reported that they were content with their library resources: only 19% agreed with the statement that these had been inadequate compared with 14% of part-time students. More full-time than part-time respondents reported sufficient access to web-based facilities (86% compared with 60%). A slightly higher proportion of full-time than part-time students received good feedback on their progress but both full and part-time students were divided about whether they thought academic staff knew their names. Among full-time students nearly half (46%) did not agree with the statement, but 41% did. Among part-timers the proportions were 51% and 31% respectively.

**Figure 4.1 Views on university/college experiences**



Base: All respondents (N=261)  
 Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

Issues about the importance of adequate personal support was raised by one of the students interviewed who had moved from face-to-face teaching to a distance learning course.

*“When I changed to distance learning, the tutor who was assigned to me, she was very good....she’d been a nursery manager herself so she very much understood the challenges for me ..she was very understanding and understood what was possible, so I found her very supportive , and I actually thought I got more out of it ..when you do it by distance learning, you get to talk to the tutor more, and in different ways ..you don’t have to talk just about my work [studies]..but I could talk about the fact that I had my mum , and the job ..and other things ..when in the uni you can’t ..it’s too formalised ..and you feel like they haven’t got the time for you ...you don’t really to get to have a proper*

<sup>34</sup> Purcell, K., Elias, P., Atfield, G., Behle, H., Ellison, R., Hughes, C., Livanos, I., and Tzanakou, C (2009) *Plans, aspirations and realities: taking stock of higher education and career choices one year on* HECSU/University of Warwick, p23.

*conversation it's a very artificial kind of thing ..so in that respect I found the distance learning better .."*

Another student undertaking a distance learning degree in Early Years Childhood Studies was concerned about how long it took to receive feedback on her assignments.

*"you know when you do your assignments and it goes away for marking ..the time that you get it back, ...you're not getting it back until about 4 weeks before you have to send in your next one ...which I think is not very good...you might get the feedback but you don't get the assignment back ..because by that time you're trying to get the other assignment in and you haven't got time to look back on your work done and reflect on where you can make improvements ..I think the turn-around should be much quicker ..."*

### **4.3 The pressures of part-time study**

As we have seen, the part-time students surveyed spent as much time per week studying independently as their full-time colleagues. However, most also had full-time jobs and family commitments. Unsurprisingly, one of the biggest challenges over three-quarters of respondents faced, which made part-time study difficult – a lot or to some extent - was juggling study with their other commitments. Particular pressures were being busy at work (67%) and at home (61%) (Figure 4.2).

One student we interviewed neatly summed up the realities of trying to meet all these demands.

*"...my work/life balance has changed dramatically...it's like having a baby..I feel I have to have my whole life organised...I suppose it's down to how dedicated you feel, but I feel I have to arrange my whole life around the course dates ..I don't want to miss any weeks...if we want to go on holiday, I feel we have to go when the course is not on ..I do find that I have to arrange everything I do, I have to plan it around the course, which not everybody does, but I feel I have to ..... and I really do feel I have to even organise my home, because there's books everywhere , boxes everywhere..so it really does get into your personal life..."*

Another student interviewed commented on the importance of family support to succeed.

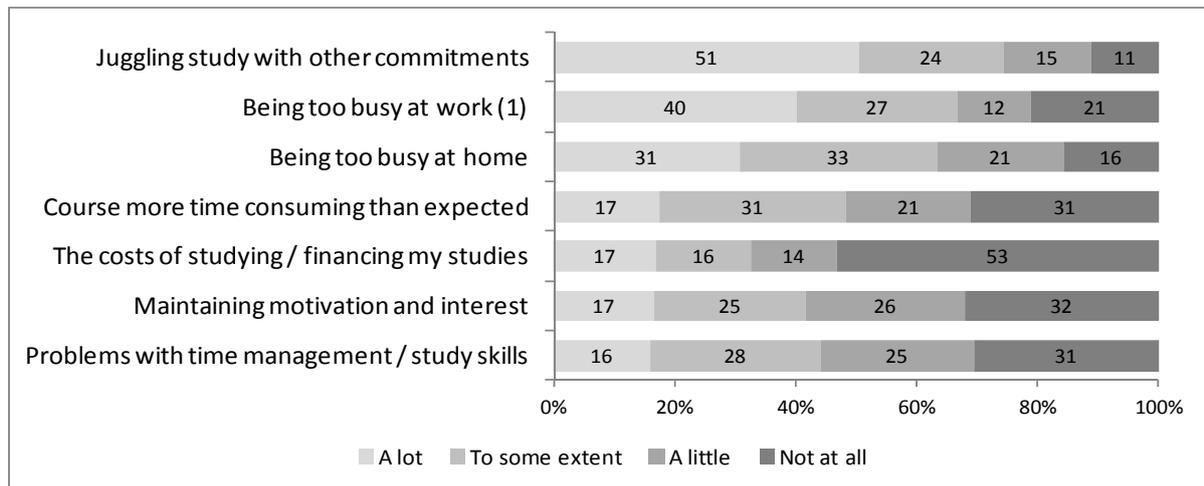
*"...well, without my partner I don't know how I would've got through these final couple of years ..I don't like disorganisation, I don't like things not being done right ...I like the house to be tidy ...he's been really good, he's changed his day hours so he comes home for a couple of hours during the day..he'll do the hoovering ..so when I come home from work all I have to do is cook the dinner , and if I don't want to do that, I don't have to do ...that's a huge difference ..."*

Other things that made part-time study difficult for a significant minority of students surveyed was that the course was more time consuming than expected (48%) and they experienced problems with time management/study skills (44%). These are areas where a students' institution could potentially help. The unexpected workload suggests that students were not necessarily given enough information about their course and the workload in advance and before starting their course. Similarly, HEIs could help students by providing them with time management and study skills, indeed many courses designed for part-time students incorporate such skills for mature learners either as

an integral part of the course or as add-ons.

Currently, HEIs can also play a role in financial support, through for example Access to Learning Funds although it is unclear if students are aware of such support.

**Figure 4.2 The extent to which studies have been made difficult**



Base: All respondents (N=261)

Note: 1. only applies to working respondents (N=225)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

Several students interviewed commented on how stressful it was combining full-time employment and part-time study. For instance, a women studying to be a social worker who studied one day a week at her university commented:

*“...it’s very stressful and .. I’ve let everything go when I’ve been at uni ...not really had time...for anything outside work. I was working ..4 days/week and studying ...and then obviously you’re expected to put in your own time ..it’s not just being there at uni one day a week...you still have to do all that extra on top, so I just really didn’t have the time ..it’s just work home, work home ...and I’m still learning a lot at work as well...”*

Another who had 6 hours face to face teaching at her university split over three days said:

*“...at the moment I feel..because it’s level H ..I feel as if I’ve got no time to myself at the moment ...because all I’m doing is working and studying ...from October to May when the year finishes, that’s what I feel then ..and after that it’s just sort of my time really...for social time .. I don’t go out that much ...because of the type of work I do ...I work 24 hour shifts, 31 hour shifts, 56 hour shifts so I’m there, at work most of the time ...”*

Other stressful times focussed on particular events at university. An interviewee studying two evenings a week and 2 modules per semester commented:

*“...well. coming up to assignments time it was hard...well ,you know it was very hard to do any work in the evenings..by the time you’d get home from work..it would have been mostly weekends, you would have been sitting in trying to get assignments done , or*

*revising for exams...”*

Assignments proved stressful for other students too. However previous exposure to learning was helpful.

*“what I find difficult is having to do the assignments ..[laughs] and I think partly that’s because of my age ....I have older children and like they’re not as fearful [of doing assignments] ...well , I suppose my younger daughter , she’s at university full-time and it’s all fun for her ..[laughs] ..and I’ve got a daughter who’s 10 years older and she’s already done her degree and she’s working full-time but is thinking of going back to study ...and I think because they’re younger, it doesn’t seem so hard for them ...whereas I think because I’m older, I think that’s a challenge as well...I did a few NVQs level 4 which were helpful..I did 2 ...one I did a year before going to university, and the other one I probably did 2 or 3 years prior to that ...if I hadn’t have done those, I don’t think I would have been able to cope at all.”*

This particular student continued.

*“I just wish we didn’t have to do the assignments..[laughs] ..I think they should design a degree for people who’ve been working as managers for a long time , but with far less assignments...have the learning, but have less assignments ...it would be far more enjoyable ..[laughs] ...because it just feels like one hard slog , which is a shame, because when you do the learning it is actually so good ..but having to do the assignments is just such hard work..it really is a challenge ..”*

Several students mentioned issues about the costs of study, and the planned rise in tuition fees as a potential barrier to participation.

*“I can’t see the average 65 year old putting up £9,000 for 3 years of study ...whereas £400 or £500 here and there, a year, ..is a little bit more inviting”.*

Another student who was in her fourth year, of a six year, part-time degree in Early Childhood Studies and worked as a nursery manager, highlighted how the lack of preparation for her studies and help with time-management made studying difficult. She particularly discussed the role her university could have played in helping her.

*“At the beginning I didn’t actually give myself any time [to study] ..and found it really difficult..and I realised I do actually need time, as I work full-time ..I do need the time to do it .. but the uni wasn’t really very helpful there, because nobody talks to you about things like that ..you have to kind of work it out for yourself...because nobody came and chatted to us, and said ‘oh, if you work full-time how are you going to organise your time [for study]?’...no-one really did that so it was a real struggle ..”*

She continued that she would have expected the university to give her some guidance.

*“I would have expected them to make suggestions ..because you are working full-time, I would have expected them to say ‘how are you going to arrange your time?’ or ‘is it possible for you to get time-off?’ ..because I’m the manager, I could have given myself the opportunity in the beginning...but nobody said it, so I didn’t do it ...but after you’ve done a couple of modules ..and at the time I had a lot on my plate, my mum was living with me , and she was starting to forget..and I was working full-time..and also I’m diabetic so I get tired ..and my age is against me...and so it would have been really*

*helpful if someone had said 'you know, you've got to give yourself time off to actually do the studying, and nobody did...but because I was doing it with another manager, she was saying 'well why aren't we giving ourselves the time?' ...because the scheme we came through was a government scheme where they gave the nursery money and they give enough money for support ...it was quite lot, like £7,000 a year ...and so I was thinking well really that money is to support us ..so apart from buying books and travel and things like that, what we should have done in the beginning was to buy our time out so that we could do the study ...but nobody actually said anything to you ..[laughs] ..so it took a chat between us to decide that was what we needed to do ...but if we'd done that in the beginning we'd be further ahead...it was a shame no-one helped us in that way ..."*

In an open-ended question, the survey respondents were asked what single thing their university/college could do to make studying easier. Their responses were very diverse and the most popular were:

- more contact with / support from staff
- better availability of resources and online provision
- changes to the structure of course, especially more evening classes
- more tutorials

In the interviews, one student commented on the timing of her study skills module which formed part of her degree. She felt she would have benefited from taking this module earlier in her course.

*"...that's another thing..they have a study skills module, but that was not the first module I done..so that wasn't really helpful either.. [laughs] .[It was] ..probably the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> module I did...which really you should be directed to that module at first ...because I think if you did that module first, then that is where all those questions come up about time, and how you manage it ..I did it as my 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> and by then I'd already given up on the university [in the sense of attending it] ..because it just wasn't helpful..."*

Another student in her penultimate final year of study discussed the lack of people with which to bounce off ideas and the ensuing loneliness.

*"...that was only thing about the degree, I've found it quite lonely ...when I was doing criminology and police studies last year it was great, I could discuss things with my partner [an ex-policeman], but there's been times when I've done something like developmental psychology, and I don't know anyone who knows anything about that...and it's quite lonely ...like when I did A levels and a BTEC, I had friends that I knew doing it with me ...which was quite nice, even on the car journey on the way home you could say 'oh, I didn't get that bit about so-and-so.' ....and help each other with it ...and with the degree, although you've got tutors and stuff, you can't be on them every five minutes."*

#### **4.4 Conclusions**

Part-time courses tend to be delivered more flexibly than full-time courses. Among the students surveyed, 'blended learning' involving a mixture of face-to-face provision and distance learning was common. Some 90% of respondents had some or their entire course delivered face-to face at their

university or college, 53% through distance learning, and 12% at their place of work. However, their courses were not necessarily tailor made for part-time students. An equal proportion of respondents were taught alongside full-time students (47%) as were taught exclusively with other part-timers (43%). The former delivery model tends to be a cheaper way for HEIs to provide part-time courses because it rarely demands additional resources unlike most 'out of hours' provision. And, this helps explain why most frequently the part-time students surveyed attended their course during the daytime rather than in evenings or over week-ends – somewhat undermining the idea that part-time study is more flexible and convenient for those in full-time jobs.

The part-time students surveyed, who were taught face-to-face, had an average of 6 contact hours a week. In addition, all respondents, irrespective of how they were taught, spent a further average of 13 hours a week on independent study. The amount of time devoted to independent study by the part-time students surveyed is a similar amount recorded in other studies of full-time students. Yet, most respondents also had full-time jobs and family commitments, unlike most full-time undergraduates.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the biggest challenges faced by the part-timers surveyed was juggling study with their other commitments (75%) and the pressures of being busy at work (67%) and at home (61%).

Despite these very real pressures, the part-time students surveyed, like their full-time peers in other studies, were very positive about their teaching and learning experiences. Two-thirds or more of respondents agreed with statements that: their 'university experience had been positive' (81%); 'overall they were satisfied with the quality of the course' (80%); and 'the learning support received on their course was excellent' (66%). The majority also agreed that 'library resources are adequate' (67%), and that they had sufficient 'access to web-based facilities' (60%). Their individual daily experiences of being a student were more mixed. While about two-thirds of respondents agreed with the statement that they were 'given good feedback on their progress' (66%), about a half disagreed with the statements 'the amount of personal/pastoral support I received was inadequate' (54%), and 'hardly anyone on the academic staff knows my name' (51%).

## 5 TUITION FEES AND THE COSTS OF STUDY

This chapter examines the cost of studying focusing on respondents' cost of tuition and course fees and who paid for these fees. It also looks at whether both the level of fees as well as sources of financial help toward tuition costs have changed over time.

By way of context, it is useful to discuss the forthcoming reforms to tuition fees and financial support for tuition fees, as set out 2011 White Paper *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*<sup>35</sup>. From 2012/13, the government monies HEIs currently receive for most of their undergraduate teaching will be withdrawn and be replaced by tuition fees paid by students. For the first time, from 2012/13, part-time undergraduate fees will be regulated and capped. The maximum tuition fee a university can charge for a part-time undergraduate course will be £6,750<sup>36</sup> a year, which pro rata equates to a tuition fee of £9,000 a year for a full time equivalent course. As a result of these changes, part-time tuition fees will rise considerably come 2012/13.

Part-time fees from 2012/13 will vary. Table 5.1 examines the maximum tuition fees to be charged in 2012/13 for part-time bachelor degree courses for a full-time equivalent (FTE) course (120 credits) at those universities in England with the largest number of part-time undergraduates.<sup>37</sup> Each HEI had a minimum of 7,000 part-time undergraduates in 2009/10. Among these seven universities listed, their fees range from £3,000 a year for a full-time equivalent course (120 credits) for a Bachelor's degree at the University of Central Lancashire to £9,000 at Birkbeck, University of Plymouth, and Hull. The average was £7,133 FTE (before any fee waivers) or a maximum tuition fee of £5,350 a year for a part-time course studied at 75% intensity.<sup>38</sup>

**Table 5.1 Maximum tuition fees to be charged in 2012/13 per year for a part-time bachelor degree for a full-time equivalent course at English universities with the largest number of part-time undergraduates.**

	Full-time equivalent tuition fee
Open University	£5,000
Teesside University	£6,480
Birkbeck College	£9,000
University of Central Lancashire	£3,000
London South Bank University	£8,450
University of Plymouth	£9,000

<sup>35</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011a) *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*, Cm 8122, London: Stationery Office.

<sup>36</sup> This is equivalent to 75% of the maximum full-time fee of £9,000. However the cap of £6,750 a year is irrespective of students' intensity of study. In other words, a university, in theory could charge £6,750 a year for a course that was only 50% of a full time equivalent course.

<sup>37</sup> Students study at different intensities of study, so to make the tuition fee comparable, we have provided the fee for a full-time equivalent course.

<sup>38</sup> Note this figure will vary depending on a students' intensity of study.

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Source: OFFA agreements <http://www.offa.org.uk/access-agreements/> and each university website

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From 2012/13, for the first time part-time undergraduates, like their full-time peers, will be eligible for student loans to pay for all their fees<sup>39</sup>, and so will no longer have to pay their fees up-front. Those who study more than 25% of a full time equivalent and do not hold a Level 4 qualification (Bachelor's degree of equivalent) will qualify for these student loans. The terms and conditions attached to these loans are broadly similar to those available to full-time undergraduates. While studying, students' loans will attract an interest rate of inflation plus 3%. Part-time students will begin to repay their loans four and a half years after starting their course (irrespective of whether or not they have completed their course and graduated) or sooner if their course ends earlier or they stop studying for some reason.<sup>40</sup> At that stage, the loan repayments will be 'income contingent' and linked to part-time students' earnings. Both graduates from part-time and full-time study will not start repaying their loans until earning £21,000 a year, when the interest on their loan will be limited to inflation. Graduates earning between £21,000 and £41,000 will be charged interest on a sliding scale up to a maximum of inflation plus 3% when annual earnings exceed £41,000 whereby repayment will be more progressive. Any outstanding debt will be forgiven after 30 years. Not data, at the time of writing, were available on the take-up of these loans

According to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills the proposed changes will mean more part-time students will benefit from financial support. Government figures suggest that currently, 15% of all part-time students receive a government funded grant, and around 35% of students studying for their first degree.<sup>41</sup> Under the new financial arrangements, 30% of all part-time undergraduates will be entitled to a student loan for their fees come 2012/13, and around 67% of part-timers studying for a bachelor's degree will qualify.<sup>42</sup> Other estimates of the proportion of students benefiting from the new student loans are not quite as optimistic. For instance, government funded research<sup>43</sup> undertaken by the Institute of Employment Studies suggests that overall a similar proportion (31%) of all UK domicile part-time undergraduates at UK HEIs would be eligible for students loans – these are students studying at least 25% of a full-time equivalent and/or do not hold a higher level qualification. This report concludes that: 'A greater proportion of those studying at first degree level would meet the eligibility criteria compared with those studying at other undergraduate degree level (44 per cent compared with 23 per cent...)'<sup>44</sup> A recalculation of these figure for UK domicile students studying at English HEIs, are very similar. They suggest that 32% of all part-time undergraduates would qualify for the new loans, 45% of those taking a First degree, and 23% of those taking other part-time undergraduate qualifications would qualify.<sup>45</sup>

According to the government's figures, therefore, the majority of students taking a first degree will qualify for the new student loans but only a minority of all undergraduates will. However, the

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<sup>39</sup> Full-time undergraduate also qualify for loans towards their maintenance but these will not be available to part-time undergraduates.

<sup>40</sup> Full-time students start to repay their fees once they graduate irrespective of the length of their course, but earlier if they stop studying for some reason.

<sup>41</sup> The overall figure broadly accords with those found in the Wave 1 report (Callender et al 2010) but we found that only 14% of the students surveyed taking a First degree received a government tuition fee grant.

<sup>42</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2010) Interim equality impact assessment: urgent reforms to higher education funding and student finance p. 18 <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/i/10-1310-interim-equality-impact-assessment-he-funding-and-student-finance.pdf> [Accessed 1 December 2010]

<sup>43</sup> Pollard et al, 2012 Op Cit

<sup>44</sup> Pollard et al, 2012 Op Cit p 135

<sup>45</sup> We are grateful to the Institute of Employment Studies for undertaking this recalculation.

Institute of Employment's figures suggest the only a minority of students taking first degree or another type of undergraduate qualification will qualify. Prospective students who do not qualify, and who do not receive any employer support, primarily those doing less intensive courses and those who are reskilling rather than up-skilling, will be faced with far higher tuition fees which they will have to pay up-front and out of their own pocket (or with employer support).

Existing research suggests that the downward pressure on HE participation arising from increases in tuition fees is in part but, not wholly, off-set by increases in grants and loans. For example, Dearden et al (2010)<sup>46</sup> estimate the separate impacts of upfront fees, grants and maintenance loans on UK higher education participation. They suggest that £1,000 per annum increase in fees – holding all other factors constant – would be expected to lead to a 4.4 percentage point decline in participation. A £1,000 per annum increase in grants increases participation by 2.1 percentage points while a £1,000 per annum increase in loans would increase participation by 3.2 percentage points. They conclude: 'the impact of upfront tuition fees in 1998 had a small negative impact on participation among high income groups, while the package of reforms introduced in 2006 had no impact on participation, largely because tuition fees were accompanied by large increases in loans and grants.' (p 2). They continue

'These results are highly relevant for policy makers, who ought to be aware of the negative impact of upfront fees – i.e. those not covered by a fee loan – and the positive impact of aid on participation. Maintenance grants can potentially be used to offset the negative influence of fee increases, given their opposing influences on participation. Policy makers should also be aware of particularly vulnerable groups when setting levels of fees and grants, and may need to target specific groups with more generous aid to counteract any increases in tuition fees.'(p 31)

What is unclear is the relevance of these findings for part-time students because this research, like the vast majority of other studies examining the impact of changes in student funding on HE participation,<sup>47</sup> is based on the university participation decisions of 18 year olds and the financial assistance available to full time students. As we have seen the vast majority of part-time undergraduates are over the age of 25 and they, unlike their full-time peers are not eligible for grants or loans for living costs, and only for loans to cover their tuition fees. Moreover, the decision to participate in higher education may be seen as an investment decision based on the expected rate of return. Yet there is very little research examining these returns for part-time students who are already in employment.<sup>48</sup>

At the time of writing, it was not possible to say, with any certainty, what impact the increase in tuition fees or the availability of student loans for some students and not others, will have on the demand for part-time study. We do not have a national early warning system on part-time university applications. Part-time students, unlike full-time students, do not apply to university via the

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<sup>46</sup> Dearden, L., Fitzsimons, E., and Wyness, G. (2010) *The Impact of Higher Education Finance on University Participation in the UK* BIS Research Paper No 11, London: Departments for Business, Innovation and Skills

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/i/10-1188-impact-finance-on-university-participation.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> For a recent review of this literature see London Economics (2010) Review of Student Support Arrangements in Other Countries BIS Research Paper No 10, London: Departments for Business, Innovation and Skills

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/r/10-670-review-student-support-in-other-countries.pdf>; Long, B. (2008) "What Is Known About the Impact of Financial Aid? Implications for Policy." New York: National Center for Postsecondary Research (NCPR) Working Paper. Accessed 20/08/2010

[http://www.postsecondaryresearch.org/i/a/document/6963\\_LongFinAid.pdf](http://www.postsecondaryresearch.org/i/a/document/6963_LongFinAid.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> Dorsett, R., S. Lui, and M. Weale (2010) *Economic benefits of lifelong learning*. NIESR discussion paper 352, London: National Institute for Economic and Social Research; Callender, C., and D. Wilkinson. 2011. *The impact of higher education for part-time students: evidence report 36*. London and Wath-upon-Deane: UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

centralised University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Instead, they apply directly to the universities of their choice. We will not know for sure what has happened to demand nationally until January of next year when HESA data on national part-time enrolments becomes publicly available.

## 5.1 Tuition fees among the students surveyed

The average tuition fee paid by the students surveyed in 2010/11 who had continued with their studies was £1,467 with a half paying more than £1,200 (Table 5.2) - the vast majority of whom were studying towards a Bachelor's degree.<sup>49</sup>

**Table 5.2 Tuition or course fees payable by year of study**

	Mean £	Median £	N
2010/11	1,467	1,200	146
2007/08	1,155	1,000	140

Base: All respondents continuing with their studies in 2010/11 who reported fees were payable and reported the amount (N=146 in 2010/11 and 140 in 2007/08)

Notes: 1 respondent who reported fees in 2010 reported that no fees were payable in 2008  
5 respondents who reported fees in 2010 reported that they could not remember or don't know value of fees in 2008

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2008 and 2010

## 5.2 Who paid for students' tuition or course fees in 2010?

The majority (54%) of part-time students surveyed paid all or some of their tuition fees themselves with most of them paying all of their fees themselves. A third received some help toward their fees from their employer and of these, most often their employer paid for their fees in full. Lastly, 27% of part-timers surveyed received a fee waiver or some other form of financial assistance including a government-funded fee grant (Figure 5.1).

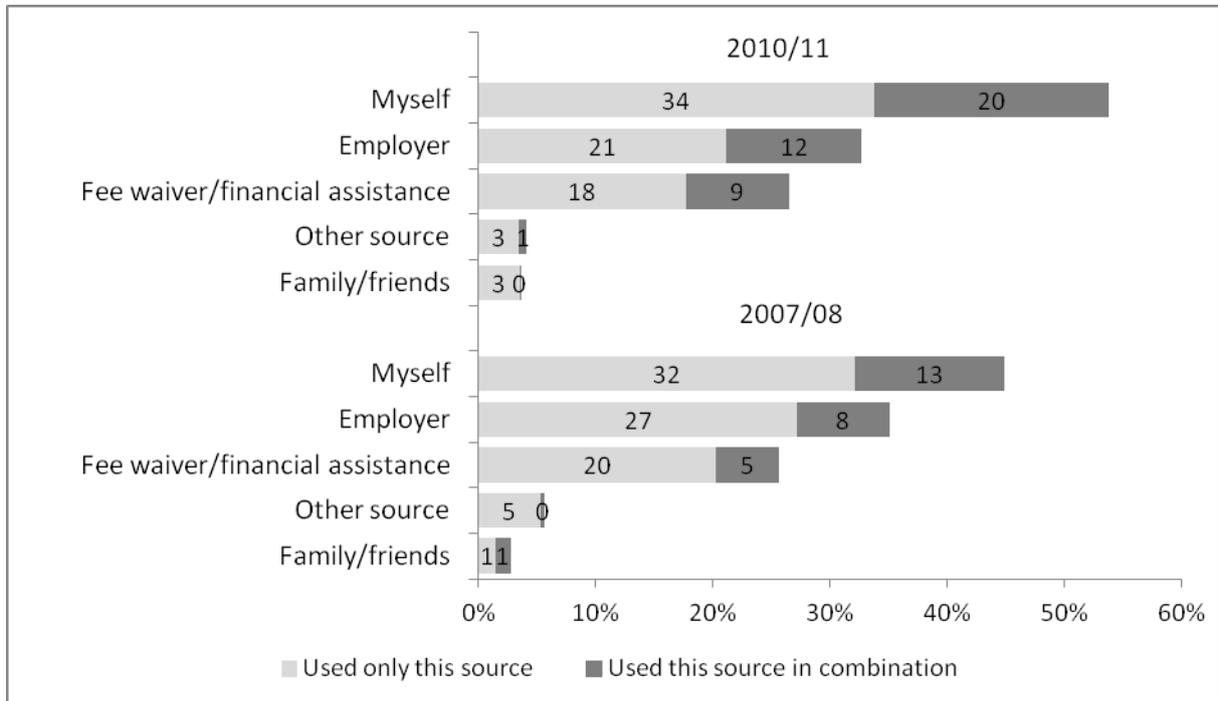
There were no significant differences by student characteristics in the proportion of students who paid some of their tuition themselves or who received employer support towards their fees. However, there were some differences in terms of those part-time students who received a fee waiver or some other form of financial assistance including a government-funded means-tested fee grant.<sup>50</sup> This form of financial support is aimed at those most in financial need and without prior experience of higher education. The most marked differences amongst those receiving this support, was related to students' highest qualification before starting their current course. Students with a

<sup>49</sup> There are not enough cases to explore how tuition fees may have varied by the subject studied or other course characteristics. Nor was the data on students' intensity of study reliable enough to calculate variation in fees by intensity of study.

<sup>50</sup> The government currently provides part-time students with fee grants of up to £1,230 a year, and course grants of up to £265 a year for books, and material etc. These grants are means-tested and so are only available to low income part-time students – the current income threshold for the receipt of a full fee grant (for a single childless person) is under £16,845 per annum. The grants are restricted to students who do not already have a Level 4 qualification and/or to those studying over 50% of a full time course. Roughly 15% of all part-time undergraduates receive a government fee and course grant and around 35% of part-timers studying for a bachelor's degree. These grants will be abolished for new students in 2012/13 and replaced by student loans.

level 3 qualification or less were three and a half times more likely to rely on this funding source than those already with a higher education qualification (Figure 5.2).

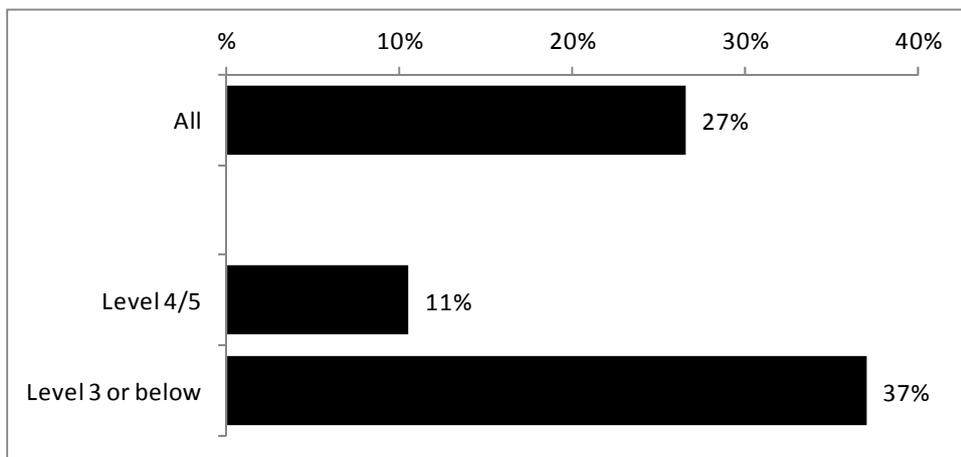
**Figure 5.1 Sources used to pay tuition or course fees**



Base: All respondents continuing with their studies in 2010/11 who reported fees were payable (N=146 in 2010/11 and 144 in 2007/08).

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2008 and 2010

**Figure 5.2 Characteristics of students who got help with tuition fees from fee waiver/financial assistance scheme**



Base: All respondents continuing with their studies in 2010/11 who reported fees were payable (N=146).

Note: Difference by whether students got help with their tuition fees from a fee waiver / financial assistance scheme

were significant at the 5% level.  
Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

Elsewhere<sup>51</sup> we have discussed at length the inadequacies of the current government funded support for part-time students. However some of the part-time students we interviewed highlighted the problems with the lack of financial support.

*“...it’s just about student finances as well...because I’m a part-time student, I haven’t had that much privilege as a full-time student ..full-time students can get loans and things like that ...but when you’re a part-time student, you don’t get that advice and you’re not entitled to anything like that ..now, I’m supposed to get a grant at the beginning of my academic year ..and I don’t get it until Christmas when all the books and that are supposed to have been bought by then..so I have got in contact with ‘student finance England’ to find out why this has happened to me every year ..but they just haven’t been in contact back ...I get me fees paid because of me financial situation ...my wages are not that high ..and I also get of about £380 to last me the whole year a grant ...and the issue this year was I thought I’d fed up with waiting for this money ...everyone else has their money at the beginning of term for books and things..and I’ve got to pay for them out of my wages and I’ve got bills to pay ...but apart from that, I don’t have any other issues..”*

Turning to employer support for tuition fees, a woman interviewed who was training to be a social worker who was sponsored by her local authority where she worked as a social care worker in London, had had all her tuition fees paid for by her employer and was given paid time off to study. She commented the rigours involved in getting such sponsorship.

*“...it was quite a rigorous process to go through to get sponsored ..it was a scheme that was advertised ...in the council ..and externally as well...I think ..and then ...like you’d go for a job..you go for an interview ...you’d go through the application ...you had to be interviewed by a panel., and if you passed that stage, you had to be interviewed by the uni ..so it was quite a hard, vigorous process ....most local authorities do this kind of scheme regularly..like every year ...my council has been doing it for a while ..it’s quite competitive ..there’s a lot of people as social care workers..or family support workers..so you do get a lot of applicants ..”*

Another woman working as a civil servant studying for a BSc in Business studies who got 80% of her fees paid for her by her employer said:

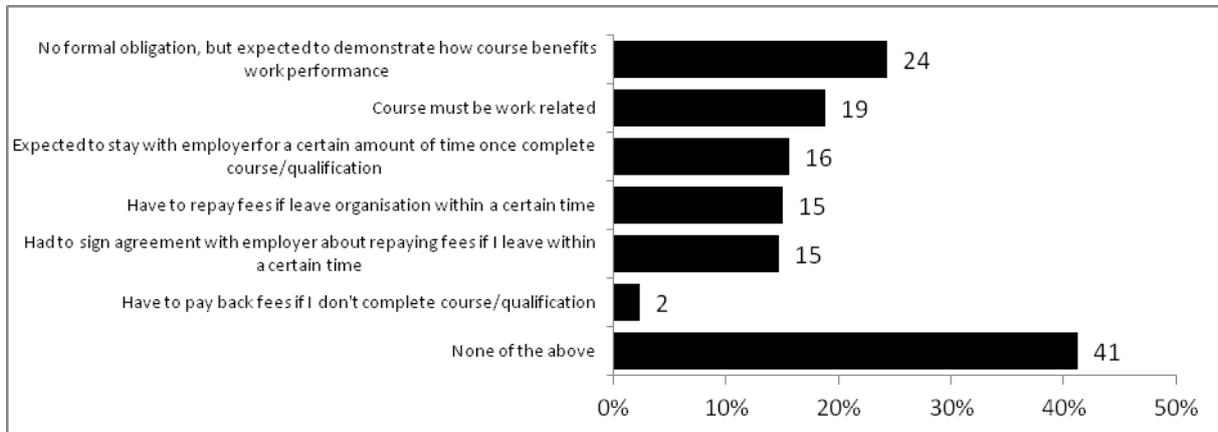
*‘because I could relate the degree to my job...every year I had to apply for funding, and as long as I related the modules to my job, they funded me ...’*

Most often, there were no formal conditions attached to the receipt of financial help with the costs of their tuition from their employer (Figure 5.3) but a sizable minority of students – around a quarter – felt they were expected to demonstrate how their course had a positive impact on their work performance.

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<sup>51</sup> Callender, C (2011) *Widening participation, social justice and injustice: part-time students in higher education in England*, International Journal of Lifelong Education Vol. 30: 4, 507–525

**Figure 5.3 Conditions to employer contribution to fees (%)**



Base: All respondents continuing with their studies in 2010/11 who reported that their employer made a contribution to their tuition/course fees (N=51)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

One student interviewed who worked full-time as an unqualified teacher talked about the conditions attached to her school funding her BSc in Social Sciences. She was in her final year of her course (5<sup>th</sup> year) and next year was going on to a graduate teacher programme (GTP) so that she would be a fully qualified teacher. When asked about if she had received any advice on the type of degree she took she said the following:

*"...no-one really...I was given the choice as to what I would do ...the school would fund it with the proviso that I would stay at the time ...that I wouldn't leave...really is was my choice as long as it was something that would fit in with a GTP at the end ...if there's not enough places for the citizenship route [if insufficient demand?] then I could do an assessment-based GTP ...the trouble with that is it costs about £5,000 but they [the school] have said they'll fund that if I can't get on the GTP.."*

This student also discussed how her approach to her job had changed which was associated with the implicit obligations associated with employer support.

*"...I'm not sure if my approach to work has changed ...in a way it has, because I've been determined to succeed all around really...so perhaps if I put a bit more effort in at work ....you feel you've got to prove yourself all the time to justify why they've done it [supporting me] ...they give me time out to do it ...and I do a lot of stuff [for the school] in my own time...they give me one day a week this year, and the same last year so I could go to university ..from October to April...but in the first couple of years it was literally in my own time and evenings.. and after I'd been in work all day that was really quite hard ..."*

Another interviewee spoke about having to continue to work for her employer as a result of the financial support she received

*"you have to give them back 2 years , that's part of the deal [of being sponsored] ..."*

probably would have stayed with them anyway...so that's not a problem ..I've been working with the council for 10 years anyway."

Another talked of the pressures associated with being given paid time off work to study.

*"they quite kindly agreed to do it [give me time off] ...but I have to do additional duties to make sure I make up the time that I'm out ..and you know...with my couple of free periods, I have to really use it carefully ...but I think most of the staff have been really supportive, the colleagues in the department where I work ..they're kind of supporting me...even if it's just moral support..."*

### 5.3 Changes over time in the costs of tuition and sources of financial help

As Table 5.2 shows average tuition fees paid in 2010/11 were considerably higher than fees paid in 2007/08. Over this period of time, the Retail Price Index (RPI) increased by 4.4% whereas the average fees payable increased by 27% and the median by 20%. These above inflation rises in tuition fees are probably related to increasing financial pressures on HEIs to charge part-time fees pro-rata to the maximum full-time fee. Evidence suggests that when full-time fees were first increased to £3,000 in 2006, only a minority of HEIs nationally increased their part-time fees pro rata to the new maximum full-time undergraduate fee because of concerns about widening participation and the impact of higher fees on recruitment.<sup>52</sup>

Table 5.2 shows how the contributions from each of the three key sources of tuition fee support have changed over time. The percentage of students relying on a personal contribution to their fees increased from 45% in 2007/08 to 54% in 2010/11, whilst the percentage of students receiving some financial help from their employers with their fees had changed little between 2010/11 (33%) and 2007/08 (35%). Employers were less likely to pay employees tuition fees in full in 2010/11 (21%) compared with 2007/8 (27%), and were more likely just to make some contribution to their employees' fees. Thus the percentage of students making a partial contribution to their fees increased from 13% in 2007/08 to 20% in 2010/11 (Figure 5.1).

These findings echo those from other research on part-time students<sup>53</sup> which suggests that increasingly employers are willing to pay for certain modules of a course but not willing or able to pay for a full qualification. They also are largely consistent with results from the two employer surveys in 2009<sup>54</sup> and 2011<sup>55</sup> - surveys of employers of some of the respondents in this study and conducted as part of the overall programme of research on part-time HE study. Focussing solely on the 145 employers who participated in both employer surveys, the proportion of employers paying full fees for the majority of employees engaged in part-time HE study dropped from 54% in 2009 to 46% in 2011. Mason (forthcoming) continues

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<sup>52</sup> UUK (2009) Variable Tuition Fees in England: Assessing their impact on students and higher education institutions. A fourth report London: UUK.

<sup>53</sup> Callender, C, Mason, G., and Jamieson, A (2010) *The Supply of Part-Time Provision in Higher Education in the UK*, Universities UK, London, 72 pp

<sup>54</sup> Mason, G and Hopkin, R (2011) Employer perspectives on Part-time Students in UK Higher Education Research Report 27, London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

<sup>55</sup> Mason, G (forthcoming) Employer Support for Part-time Higher Education Students, Manchester; HECSU p 21

*Further evidence on trends in employer support comes from survey findings on the impact of the 2008-09 recession. About one in four respondents to the 2011 survey said that the recession had led them to reduce support for First degree course fees.... while 17% said that they had also reduced the amount of paid time off work for study purposes that they were willing to allow..... Furthermore, as many as 95% of those employers who had reduced fee support for First degree study said that, following the recession, they had not resumed providing support to the same level as before the recession..... The overall message of this analysis is positive, namely, that the majority of employers maintained their pre-recession levels of support for part-time HE study during and following the recession. However, the survey findings are consistent with other research<sup>56</sup>, which has shown a tendency for some employers to cut back on off-the-job education and training of different kinds during the recession while making greater use of internal training resources.<sup>57</sup>*

Table 5.2 shows the change in contributions of two of the key sources of tuition fee payment alongside the overall change in amount of fees payable. The increase in average tuition fees payable between 2007/08 and 2010/11 of 27% is strongly significant and considerably higher than the 4.4% increase in the RPI over this period. However, neither the change in the proportion of employers making a contribution to fees (down two percentage points) or the proportion of students having to make a personal contribution fees (up nine percentage points) is statistically significant. Furthermore, where employers were making a contribution to fees, the increase in the employer contribution was not statistically significant while the increase in the personal contribution to fees by students was only weakly significant. These figures are, however, based on very small samples and need to be considered in the context of a significant overall increase in fees, which has to come from one of the sources discussed in Figure 5.2.

The figures in Table 5.2 are suggestive of increased employer contributions to tuition fees, in excess of inflation, but lower than the increase in average total fees. An increase in employer contributions is noteworthy in a period of prolonged economic difficulties, but it is also noteworthy that during a recessionary period students themselves also have to pay a higher personal contribution to their fees.

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<sup>56</sup> Mason, G. and Bishop, K. (2010), *Adult training, skills updating and recession in the UK: the implications for competitiveness and social inclusion*, Research Paper 10, Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES); and Felstead, A., Green, F. and Jewson, N. (2011), *The impact of the 2008-09 recession on the extent, form and patterns of training at work*, Research Paper 22, Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES).

<sup>57</sup> Mason, G (forthcoming) *Employer Support for Part-time Higher Education Students*, Manchester; HECSU p22-23

**Table 5.2 Percentage of students with different sources of fee contributions and the amount of each contribution in 2007/08 and 2010/11**

	Percentage with fee contribution		Percentage point change	Amount of contribution if contribution from source £		Percentage increase
	2007/08	2010/11	2007/08 - 2010/11	2007/08	2010/11	2007/08 - 2010/11
<b>Personal contribution</b>	45	54	9	966	1113	15
<b>Base (unweighted N)</b>	140	146		67	75	
<b>Employer contribution</b>	35	33	-2	1061	1234	16
<b>Base (unweighted N)</b>	140	146		50	51	
<b>Total fees</b>				1,155	1,467	27
<b>Base (unweighted N)</b>				140	146	

Base: All respondents continuing with their studies in 2010/11 who reported fees were payable and reported who made a contribution to their fees. (N=146 in 2010/11 and 140 in 2007/08)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2008 and 2010

Tables 5.3 and 5.4 explore the continuity of support over time in more detail.<sup>58</sup> The vast majority (83%) of students who made a personal contribution to their fees in 2007/08 also did so in 2010/11, with just 17% of students no longer needing to contribute to their own fees. In contrast, nearly a third (30%) of students who had not made a contribution to their fees in 2007/08 did so in 2010/11 (Table 5.3). This asymmetry in percentages again highlights the increasing reliance on personal contribution to tuition fees and the increase in private contributions.

**Table 5.3 Percentage of students who paid some fees themselves in 2010/11 by whether they paid some fees themselves in 2007/08**

Made personal contribution to fees in 2010/11	Made personal contribution to fees in 2007/08		
	No %	Yes %	All %
<b>No</b>	70	17	54
<b>Yes</b>	30	83	46

<sup>58</sup> There are an insufficient number of cases to report on changes over time in the percentage of students receiving fee waivers or government funded financial support.

<b>Base (unweighted N)</b>	76	68	144
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Base: All respondents continuing with their studies in 2010/11 who reported fees were payable and reported whether made a personal contribution to their fees. (N=144)

Note: Differences in the percentage of students who made a personal contribution to fees in 2010/11 by whether they made a personal contribution to fees in 2007/08 are significant at the 1% level.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2008 and 2010

The highest level of consistent support was from employers. Table 5.4 shows that 86% of students who received an employer contribution to their fees in 2007/08 also received a contribution in 2010/11. Here, just 14% of students stopped receiving employer fee support between 2007/08 and 2010/11, and 5% of students were new recipients of employer fee support in 2010/11.

**Table 5.4 Percentage of students receiving employer fee support in 2010/11 by whether they received employer fee support in 2007/08**

<b>Employer fee support in 2010/11</b>	<b>Employer fee support in 2007/08</b>		<b>All %</b>
	<b>No %</b>	<b>Yes %</b>	
<b>No</b>	95	14	67
<b>Yes</b>	5	86	33
<b>Base (unweighted N)</b>	90	54	144

Base: All respondents continuing with their studies in 2010/11 who reported fees were payable and reported whether employers contributed to their fees. (N=144)

Note: Differences in the percentage of students who received employer fee support in 2010/11 by whether they received employer fee support in 2007/08 are significant at the 1% level.

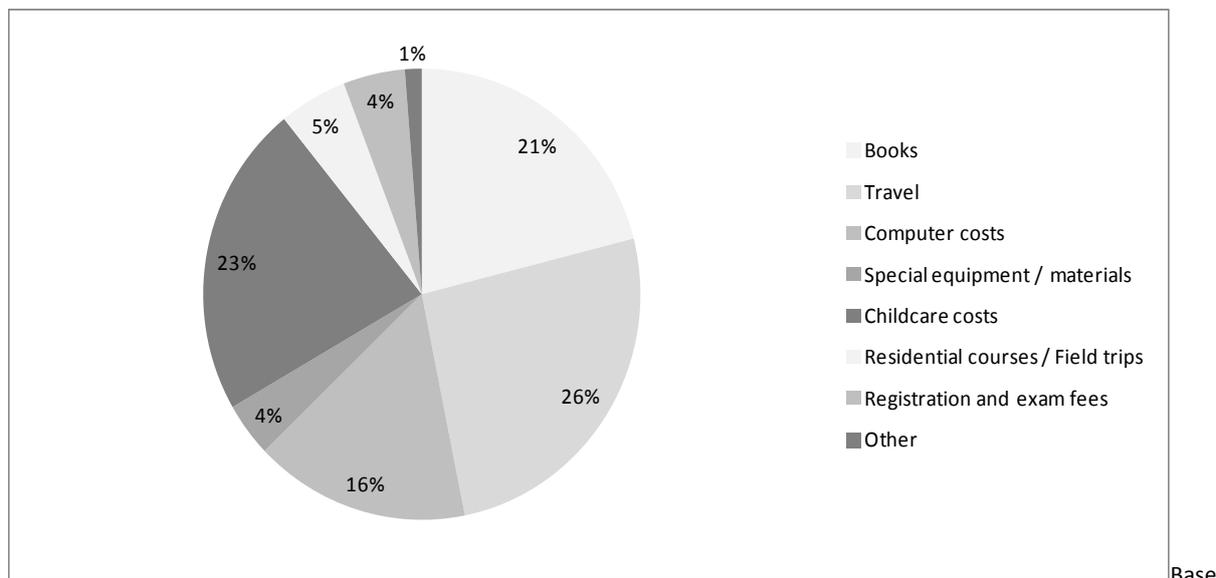
Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2008 and 2010

## 5.4 Expenditure

In addition to tuition fees, students incur other expenses while studying such as books, computing travel to and from your place of study, childcare while studying, and exam fees as a direct result of taking their course. Over the academic year, the part-time students surveyed spent an average of £483 on all these items. A quarter of the students surveyed spent an average of £50, a half £200, and three-quarters £590. However, 17% of respondents recorded no expenditure on course costs. For those incurring some course costs, a quarter spent an average of £100, half £300, and three quarters £640. There were no statistically significant differences by student characteristics.

Travel expenses and books absorbed the largest shares of students' course related expenditure (Figure 5.4) and it was these two items of expenditure that students most frequently incurred. Some 61% of all students spent money on travel and books, spending an average over the academic year of £206 on travel and £167 on books (Table 5.5). However, the most costly item of expenditure was computing costs at £226 but only a third of students incurred such costs.

**Figure 5.4 Composition of expected total course-related expenditure in 2010/11**



: All respondents continuing with their studies in 2010/11 who reported expenditure by type (N=168)  
 Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

**Table 5.5 Percentage of students who incurred different types of expenditure and the average amount spent**

	Percentage of students reporting they incurred expenditure %	Average expenditure if type of expenditure incurred £	Unweighted N of those who incurred each type of expenditure
Books	61	167	108
Travel	61	206	107
Computer costs	34	226	65
Special equipment / materials	24	*	40
Childcare	8	*	14
Residential course / Field trips	5	*	10
Registration / Exam fees	7	*	10
Other	8	*	12

**Base (unweighted N)**

168

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Base: All respondents continuing with their studies in 2010/11 who reported expenditure by type (N=168)

\*Indicates sample size too small to report reliable expenditure estimates.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

## 5.5 Conclusions

In 2010/11, the average cost of part-time study over the academic year was just under £2,000, which consisted of £1,467 spent on tuition/course fees and £483 on books, computing travel etc. Half the students were charged less than £1,200 in tuition fees. In 2012/13 new part-time undergraduates, will be faced with much higher fees of anything up to £6,750 a year, which they can repay via student loans. However, a sizable proportion of part-time students will not qualify for these loans, and will have to pay for these higher fees up-front and out of their pocket. This matters even more given employers' unwillingness or inability to meet all the increase in fees that have occurred between 2007/08 and 2010/11, before the introduction of the new funding regime and the much higher tuition fees to be introduced in 2012/13.

In 2010/11, the majority of students (54%) paid for some of their tuition fees themselves, a third received help from their employer, and 27% were awarded a fee waiver or some form of financial assistance including a government-funded fee grant. As revealed in the 2007/8 survey, employers favour supporting employees who are most likely to succeed in their studies with proven records of academic achievement.

Overtime, there have been some marked changes in the level of tuition fees charged to the respondents. Between 2007/08 and 2010/11, their average tuition fees rose significantly by 27%, well above the rate of inflation (4.4% RPI). So who paid for these increase in fees? Our evidence suggests that, despite the recession, employers and students shared the increase, but employers were less likely to pay all of the respondents' fees and that more students were making a contribution towards their fees.

## 6 STUDENTS' CAREER PLANS AND USE OF CAREERS INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

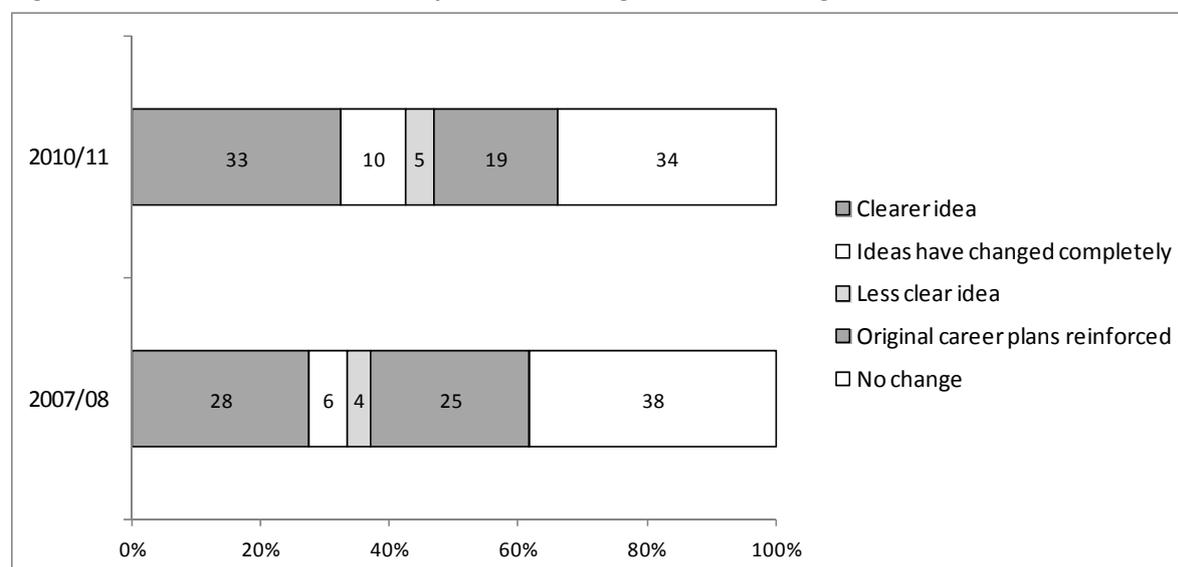
This chapter examines respondents' ideas about their career plans and whether these had changed over time, and explores their career satisfaction. Next, it looks at students' use of their university/college careers service and other career information, advice, and guidance opportunities, and whether their patterns of use had changed over time.

### 6.1 Career plans

The students surveyed were asked how their ideas about their career have changed since they started their course (Figure 6.1). They were asked the identical question when surveyed in 2007/08 in Wave 1 too, which means we can track any changes in their ideas over time. In 2010/11 in Wave 2, a third of students reported they had a clearer idea about their career plans since starting their course (33%), another third reported no change and that their ideas were neither clearer nor less clear than before starting their course (34%) while one in five said their original plans were reinforced (19%). Some 10% stated that since starting their course their ideas about their career plans had changed completely while 5% had a less clear idea. Thus, most students had fairly fixed ideas about their career plans.

When these responses are compared to students' responses in 2007/08 – Wave 1 - we see that their higher education experiences, amongst other things,<sup>59</sup> had changed some of their views. Specifically, the only significant difference was that more respondents in 2010/11 than in 2007/8 reported that their career plans had changed completely (10% in Wave 2 compared with 6% in Wave 1).

**Figure 6.1 How ideas about career plans had changed since starting their course**



Base: All respondents (N=248 in Wave 2 in 2010/11 and 227 in Wave 1 in 2007/08)

Notes: 13 respondents reported that the question was not applicable to them

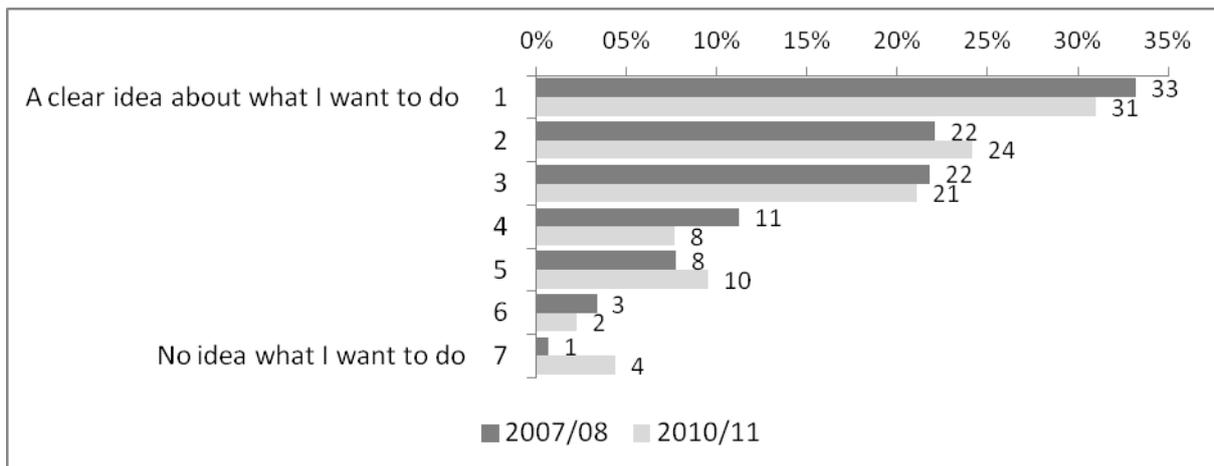
<sup>59</sup> It is acknowledged that a range of factors might have had an impact on students' career plans since starting their courses, however, data on these were not collected in this survey. So any causal link between changes in career plans and students' studies must be treated with caution. This applies to all changes between Wave 1 and Wave 2 discussed in this report.

Differences in the percentage of students who said that their ideas have changed completely between 2010/11 and 2007/08 are significant at the 5% level. Differences in all other categories were not statistically significant.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

In addition, the students surveyed were asked both in 2007/8 (Wave 1) and in 2010/11 (Wave 2) to rate the clarity of their long-term career plans on a scale of 1-7 s where 1 means 'I have a clear idea about what I want to do' and 7 means 'I have no idea what I want to do.' In 2010/11 over half (55%) the students had clear ideas about their long-term career plans (Figure 6.2).

**Figure 6.2 How graduates rated the clarity of their long-term career planning**



Base: All respondents (N=257)

Notes: 4 respondents reported that the question was not applicable to them

Differences in the percentage of students who said they had 'no idea what I want to do' between 2010/11 and 2007/08 are significant at the 5% level. Differences in all other categories and thresholds were not statistically significant.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

Both these two questions were asked of full-time undergraduate students participating in the full-time Futuretrack<sup>60</sup> study. We might expect that because part-time students are older than full-time students, are already in the labour market, and have embarked on their careers that their career plans would be more fixed and well formulated compared with younger full-time students after their first year of higher education. The evidence for this is mixed. On the one hand, slightly more part-time students than full-time students had a much clearer idea of what they wanted to do since starting their course (28% in 2007/08 in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study, and 33% in 2010/11 in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year of study compared with 24% of full-timers in 2007/08 in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study), and half as many part-time as full-time students declared that their ideas were less clear than before (4%/5% of part-timers in their 2007/08 and 2010/11 respectively, compared with 10% of full-timers in 2007/08 in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study).<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, less part-time than full-time students stated that their experiences of higher education had reinforced their original career plans (25% in 2007/08 in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study and 19% in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year compared with 26% of full-timers in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study in 2007/08) and twice as many part-time as full-time students stated that their ideas had changed completely (10% compared with 5%). Similar proportions - a third - of both part and full-timers stated that their ideas were neither clearer nor less clear than before starting their course.

<sup>60</sup> Purcell et al 2009 *op cit*

<sup>61</sup> We are unable to test if these differences are significant

Turning to the clarity of students' career plans and comparing part-time students with full-timers<sup>62</sup> after their first year of study, some 33% of part-time students in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study in 2007/08 and 31% in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year of study in 2010/11 had a clear ('1') idea about what they wanted to do compared with just 18% of full-time students after the 1<sup>st</sup> year in higher education.<sup>63</sup> This supports the idea that part-time students have a clearer sense about their career plans than their younger colleagues.

However, the Futuretrack<sup>64</sup> study also examined full-time students' career plan by their age. They too found that the older the student, the clearer their career plans. For instance, more than a third of students aged 26 and over stated that their experience of higher education had reinforced their original career plans (compared with 24% of students aged 20 and under). Another quarter of the older full-time students said that they had a much clearer idea of what they wanted to do since they started their course whilst 28% said that their ideas were neither clearer nor less clear than before, which is a much smaller proportion compared to younger students (36 per cent). Thus, a large part of the difference between full and part-time students can be attributed to their age.

## 6.2 Career satisfaction

Most students surveyed were very (29%) or fairly (53%) satisfied with their career to date (Table 6.1). However levels of satisfaction varied by students' characteristics (Figure 6.3) with those whose employer was contributing towards their tuition fees being the most satisfied.

**Table 6.1 Career satisfaction**

Degree of satisfaction	%	N
Very satisfied	29	75
Fairly satisfied	53	129
Not very satisfied	12	31
Not at all satisfied	6	13
<b>All</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>248</b>

Base: All respondents (N=248)

Notes: 13 respondents reported that the question was not applicable to them

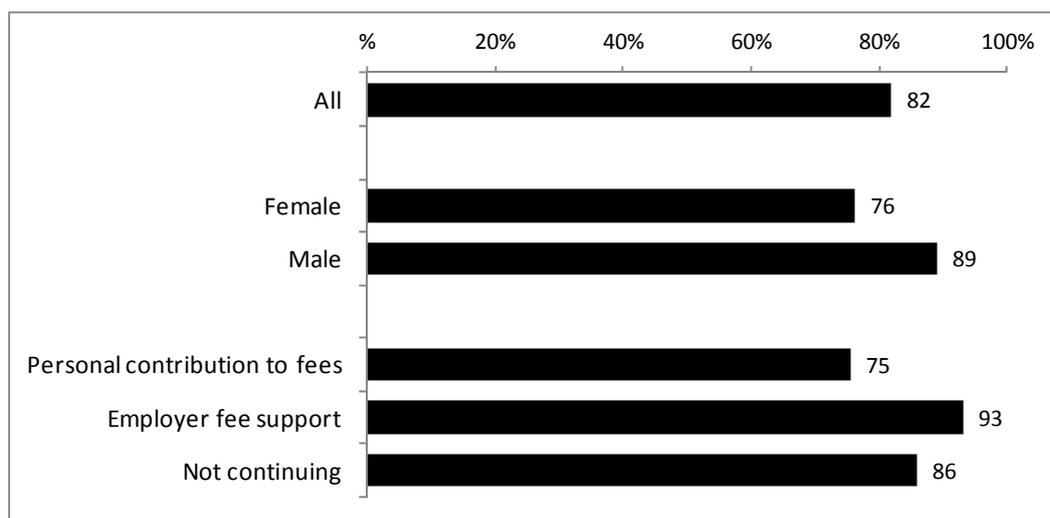
Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

<sup>62</sup> The wording of the question was slightly different for full-time students. They were asked about the clarity of their of their ideas about occupation and qualifications required' (Purcell et al, 2009 op cit)

<sup>63</sup> Purcell et al 2009 *op cit*

<sup>64</sup> Purcell et al 2009 *op cit* p 117

**Figure 6.3 Career satisfaction by graduate characteristics: Percentage very or fairly satisfied**



Base: All respondents (N=248)

Notes: 13 respondents reported that the question was not applicable to them

Difference by whether students made a personal contribution to fees and whether they got employer fee support were significant at the 1% level. Differences by whether students got employer fee support and those who did not continue studying were also significant at the 1% level. Differences between students who made a personal contribution to fees and those who did not continue studying were not statistically significant at the 5% level.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

### 6.3 Use of university/college careers service

We have seen that the students surveyed had fairly clear career plans and for a sizable minority their ideas had been re-enforced as a result of their higher education experiences. What role, if any, did their university/college careers service or other agencies and organisations designed to help students formulate their career ambitions play in helping students formulate their career plans?

A key finding from the 2007/08 survey was that only a third of students had used their university/college's careers service once they got to university. Instead, they tended to rely on their employer or someone at their workplace to provide career advice, guidance and information. In 2010/11, the same proportion as in 2007/8 – a third - had used their university/college careers service via the web, by phone, email, or in person at some point over the academic year (Table 6.2). Just over two-fifths of students who had used the service, had used it once or twice over the year, and roughly one-third had used it five times or more.

Of those using the service in 2010/11, 45% had also used the service back in 2007/08 too, which is significantly larger than the 29% who used the career service in 2010/11 but not in 2007/08. Thus having used the career service in the past, students were more likely to use of the service again.

**Table 6.2 Percentage in contact with university/college careers service in 2010/11 by whether had contact in 2007/08**

Contact in 2010/11	All %	No contact in 2007/08 %	Contact in 2007/08 %
None	66	71	55
1-2 times	14	14	15
3-4 times	8	7	9
5 or more times	12	8	21
<b>All (Base)</b>	<b>100(261)</b>	<b>100 (171)</b>	<b>100 (90)</b>

Base: All respondents (N=261)  
 Difference by whether students had contact with university/college career service in 2010/11 by whether they had contact in 2007/08 was significant at the 5% level.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

Again, the results from our study of part-time students can be compared with the Futuretrack<sup>65</sup> study of full-time students. Just under a third (31%) of full-time students aged 26 and over had used their university careers service compared to 37 per cent of students aged 20 and under. Many full-time mature students, like their older part-time peers, considered that they were already aware of their career options, which confirms previous research in which mature graduates were more likely to have 'taken their courses with a clear intention of enhancing their employment opportunities'<sup>66</sup>. As Purcell et al (2009 p 115)<sup>67</sup> observed, full-time 'respondents explained that their previous work experience had already enabled them to find their own way into employment or to have a good idea of what they wanted to do and how to do it.'

***Characteristics of users of the careers service and their levels of satisfaction with the service provided***

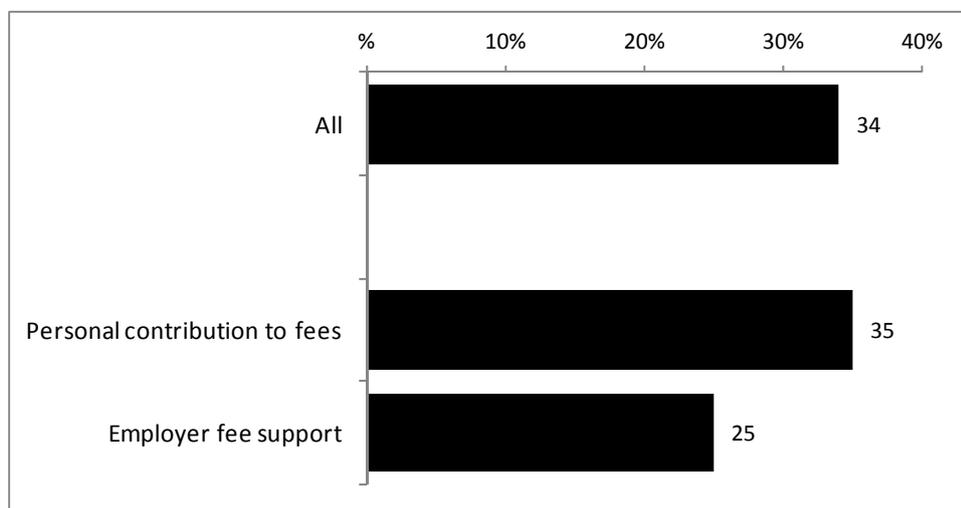
Focusing on the third of students who had used their university careers service in 2010/11, those who had made a personal contribution to their fees were more likely to use the service than those who had received employer support (Figure 6.4). The greater use of university/college careers service amongst part-time students who had paid some of their fees themselves may be associated with the fact that they have less access to careers advice from their employer. Most (71%) who had used their university/college careers service were very or fairly satisfied with the help provided.

<sup>65</sup> Purcell et al 2009 *op cit* p 115

<sup>66</sup> Purcell K, Elias P, Ellison R, Atfield G, Adam D and Livanos I (2008) *Applying for Higher Education – the diversity of career choices, plans and expectations: Findings from the First Futuretrack Survey of the 'Class of 2006' applicants for Higher Education*. Manchester: HECSU p.61

<sup>67</sup> Purcell et al 2009 *op cit* p 115

**Figure 6.4 Percentage of students who used their university/college careers service in the academic year by student characteristics**



Base: All respondents (N=261)

Notes: Difference by whether students made a personal contribution to fees and whether they got employer fee support were significant at the 5% level.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

### ***Characteristics of non-users of the careers service and reason for not using the service***

As we have seen, two-thirds of students had not used their university/college careers service in 2010/11 (Table 6.2), especially those receiving help from their employer with their tuition fees, who attended a further education college (Figure 6.4)

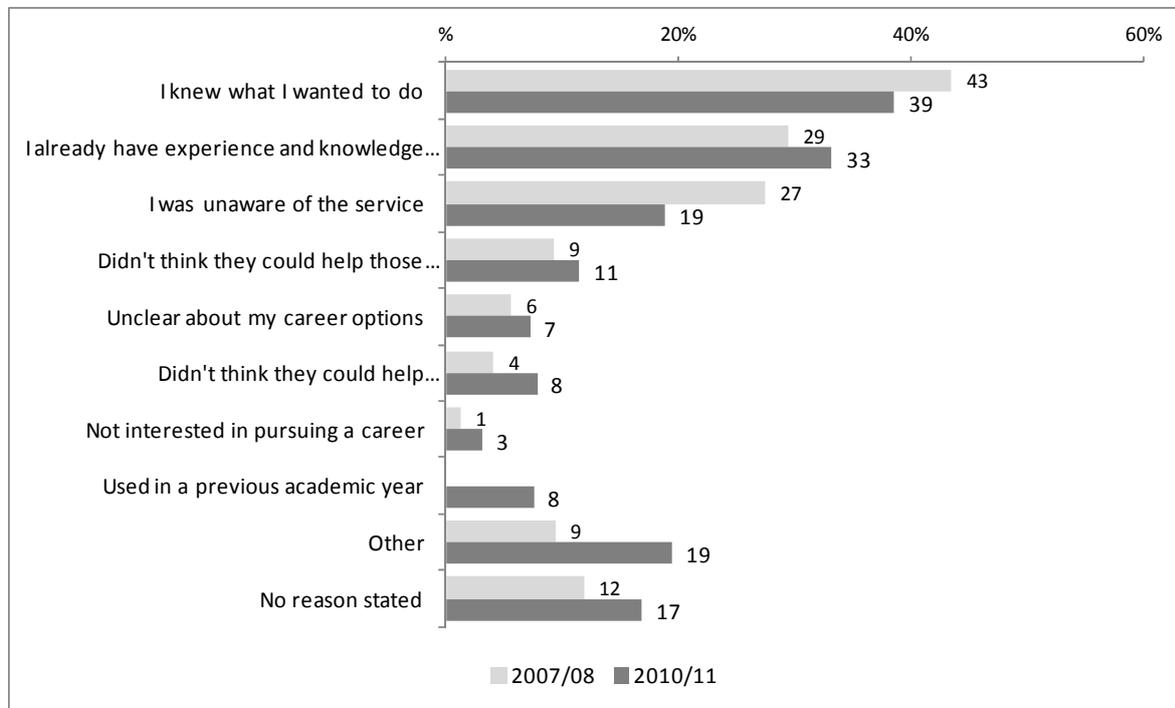
Most of those who had not used their university/college careers service in 2010/11 had not used the service back in 2007/08 either (Table 6.2). And their reasons for not doing so in 2010/11 were similar to the reasons they gave in 2007/08 (Figure 6.5). The main explanations both in 2010/11 and in 2007/08 were that students knew what they wanted to do (39% in 2010/11 compared with 43% in 2007/08) and had the experience and knowledge to decide about their career options (33% in 2010/11 compared with 29% in 2007/08). This helps explain why those gaining financial support from their employer and those studying education were two of the groups least likely to use their university careers service.

There were no significant differences in the proportion of respondents who were aware of the service in 2010/11 than in the first year of their studies in 2007/08 (Figure 6.5). Even so, in 2010/11 nearly one in five students<sup>68</sup> was unaware of their university/college careers service, despite the fact that they had been studying at their institution for around three years. In addition, one in ten did not think their university/college career could help those who already had a job or students who studied

<sup>68</sup> According to the Futuretrack study of full-time students (Purcell et al, 2009, op cit) 18% of full-time students in their first year of study were unaware of their university careers service – a lower proportion than part-time students in their first year of study.

part-time. So there remains a significant information gap about university/college careers services among the part-time student population. Clearly, there is scope for these services to help more part-time students and to consider how they could market their services to a broader group of students.

**Figure 6.5 Reasons students did not use the careers service at university/college in 2007/08 and 2010/11**



Base: Respondents who had no contact with careers service at university/college (N=173 in 2010/11 and 171 in 2007/08)

Notes: Difference between 2007/08 and 2010/11 in the percentage of students reporting 'other' reasons they did not use the careers service at university/college were significant at the 5% level. All other differences were not statistically significant.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

#### 6.4 Career guidance opportunities used

All students were asked if they had taken advantage of various careers information, advice or guidance opportunities during the academic year, and if so, which the most helpful source was. In 2010/11, just under half had used some form of careers information, advice and guidance, a similar proportion to students in 2007/08 (Table 6.3). In 2010/11, the sources most frequently used by part-timers were advice from their employer or someone at their workplace (48%) or advice from family and friends (45%), which also were considered the most helpful sources (35% and 25% respectively) (Table 6.3). The other most popular sources were guidance or information by email or telephone from their university/college careers service (23%) and visiting their university/college careers service website (23%) both of which were rated as the most useful source by eight per cent of those using these facilities. Consequently, most part-time students do not rely on professionals for their careers information, advice and guidance. Instead, they turn to those close at hand - their informal social networks at work and at home. This means that many students may not be receiving impartial or broadly informed career advice, when compared with the advice likely to be provided by a professional career advisor.

Overall, there are few differences in terms of the sources of careers information, advice or guidance

students used in their first year in 2007/08, and those they used at the start of their third year of study in 2010/11. The most frequently used sources of help were the same – advice from employers or someone at their workplace, and advice from friends and family.

The career guidance opportunities exploited by part-time students in 2010/11 were different from their full-time peers. It is clear from the full-time Futuretrack study,<sup>69</sup> that full-time students in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study took far more advantage of their university/college's careers service than was the case among part-time students. For example, full-time students in their first year were far more likely than part-time students in their first year or subsequently to have attended a careers event organised by their university/college careers service (49% compared with 14% in their 1<sup>st</sup> year /9% in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year); visited the careers service website (38% compared with 17% /23%); and taken part in a careers event for students specifically for their type of course (28% compared with 14%/6%). Perhaps surprisingly, a similar proportion of full and part-time students obtained careers advice from family and friends (42% compared with 48%/45%). However, predictably full-timers were far less reliant than part-timers on their employer or someone at their workplace (18% compared with 49%/48%). These findings suggest that university/college careers services are far more geared up to the needs on younger graduates and new entrants into the labour market.

Together, these findings suggest that despite the fact that only a minority of students used their university's careers service, they still wanted and sought out careers information, advice and guidance. They demonstrate an appetite for such help and support, and potential missed opportunities for university/college careers services. So, while there is a demand for careers information, advice, and guidance among part-time students, university/college careers services are not fulfilling that demand. As proposed by Little et al (2005),<sup>70</sup> university career-services need to re-orientate their services and do more to help part-time students prepare for career advancement or career change.

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<sup>69</sup> Purcell et al, 2009 *op cit* p 96

<sup>70</sup> Little, B. and ESECT colleagues, (2005) *Part-time students and employability*, Learning and Employability Series 2, York, ESECT and Higher Education Academy

**Table 6.3 Use of any career information, advice, and guidance in 2007/08 and 2010/11**

	2007/08		2010/11	
	%		%	
Used at least one source	49		45	
<b>All (Base)</b>	<b>100 (261)</b>			
	2007/08		2010/11	
	%		%	
<b>If used a source, which source used:</b>	<b>Used Source</b>	<b>Most helpful</b>	<b>Used Source</b>	<b>Most helpful</b>
Careers event organised by careers service at university/college	14	1	9	4
Careers event organised by department/faculty	8	6	6	0
One to one advice with careers service at university/college	9	3	10	2
Guidance or information by email or telephone from university/college careers service	16	6	23	8
Visited university/college careers service website	17	5	23	8
Completed a module to develop employment related skills	18	8	15	2
Advice from family and friends	48	24	45	25
Advice from employer or someone at workplace	49	22	48	35
Advice from a public or private careers agency	9	3	12	6
Help with CV writing or with interview technique	na	na	19	4
Career advice from a lecturer at university/college	na	na	14	7
Not answered	23			
<b>Accessed information advice and guidance (Base)</b>	<b>100 (130)</b>		<b>100 (118)</b>	

Base: All respondents (N=261)

Note: na – means this item was not asked about in the 2007/08 survey

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010 and 2008

In the qualitative interviews, students were asked if they had been given any advice about what degree or modules to take. In the vast majority of cases they received little or no help in their decision-making. Even where they were being funded by their employer, their choices were left to them with the proviso that it was relevant to their job.

## **6.5 Conclusions**

The majority of students surveyed in 2010/11, were very satisfied with their careers to date (29% very, 53% fairly) and in 2010/11 most respondents, just as in 2007/08, had fairly fixed ideas about their career plans. However, for a minority their higher educational experiences had been transformational - both their career plans and the clarity of their ideas about their careers had changed since starting their course. This overall clarity of career direction helps explain why only a third of part-time students surveyed had used their university's career service both in 2010/11 and 2007/08. They did not need the service because they knew what they wanted to do and had the experience and knowledge to steer their career plans. When respondents did seek careers information, advice, and guidance, they most frequently relied on their employer or someone at their place of work, which also was the most helpful source of assistance, or they called on family and friends. Of the minority of students surveyed using their university careers service, most (71%) were very satisfied with help they received. So little seems to have changed since 2007/08, although more students were more aware of their university's careers service in 2010/11. There remains scope for university careers services to provide impartial or broadly informed careers information, advice, and guidance for older students with labour market experience who want information, advice, and guidance on career progression and career change.

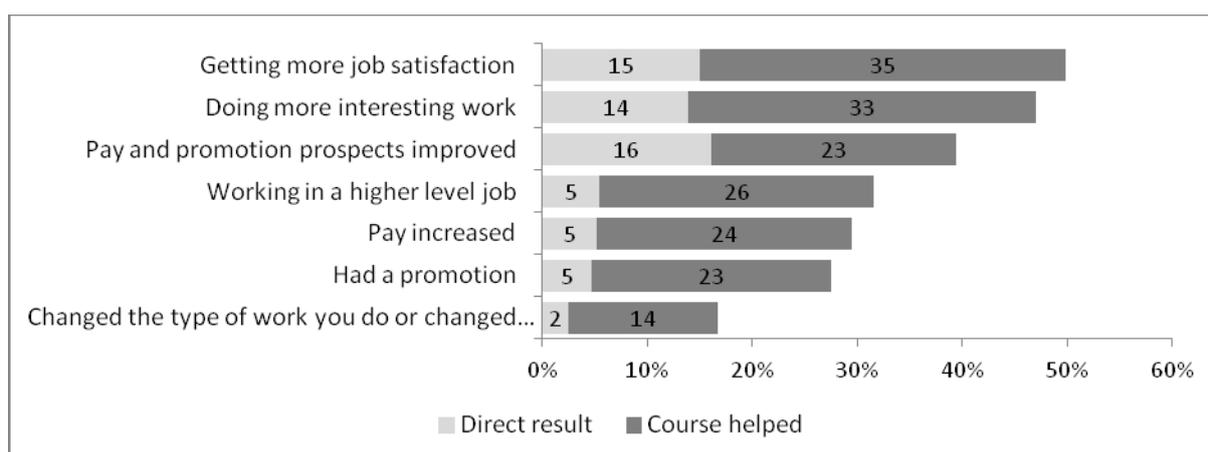
## 7 THE IMPACT OF PART-TIME STUDY

This chapter focuses on the impact of respondents' studies and their course on their working and non-working lives, and on their future plans. Exploring these effects while students are still studying is important because most of the research on the impact of higher education concentrates on what happens to students on graduation, once they complete their studies, and have gained their higher education qualification. Arguably this focus in the existing research is related to the assumption that undergraduate students are primarily school leavers who study full-time and have limited employment experience. These assumptions mean those studying part-time, who are already employed and pursuing a career and combining study with full-time paid work, tended to be ignored. Consequently, little research has explored whether the benefits of study are reaped while students are still studying as well as once they complete their studies. In other words, the returns of higher education - broadly interpreted - may well start long before part-time students graduate, as well as after they graduate.<sup>71</sup>

### 7.1 Impact on working life

Figure 7.1 neatly illustrates how just engaging in part-time higher education study benefits employees, well before they complete their course and gain a higher education qualification. Nearly a half of all respondents were getting more job satisfaction (50%) and doing more interesting work (47%) because of the course they were taking. Two in five also reported that their pay and promotion prospects had improved because of their course. For a substantial minority students surveyed, the benefits of study were recognised in tangible ways by their employer. As a result of having taken their course, some 31% of part-time students were now working in a higher-level job, 29% had received a pay increase since 2007/08 while 28% had been promoted since 2007/08.

**Figure 7.1 Percentage of continuing students reporting work changes between 2007/08 and 2010/11 as a result of their course**



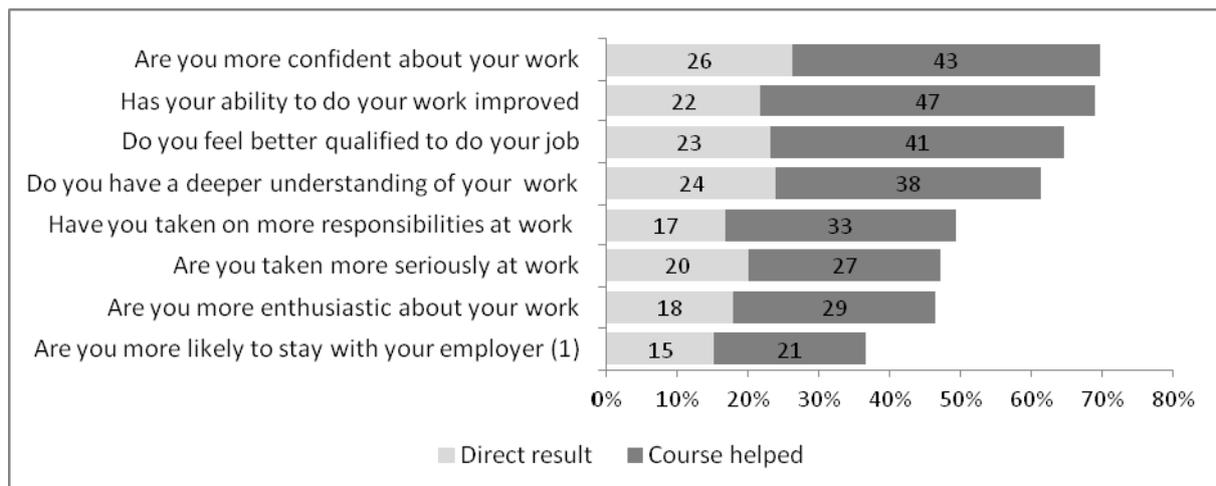
<sup>71</sup> Callender and Wilkinson (2012) op cit examine the labour market experiences of part-time students once they graduate. For a comparative study on the labour market experiences of graduated of full-time and part-time students see Callender, C and Wilkinson, D (2011) The Impact of Higher Education for Part-time Students UK Commission for Employment and Skills, London

Base: All respondents continuing with their studies in 2010/11 who were employees working for the same employer in 2007/08 and 2010/11 or who were self employed in 2007/08 and 2010/11 (N=121).

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

Figure 7.2 provides further evidence on how engaging in part-time study had resulted in changes in respondents' working lives and in their attitudes and approach to their work. For instance, between two-thirds and a half of them were more confident about their work (69%); believed that their ability to do their work had improved (69%); and felt better qualified to do their job (64%); had a deeper understanding of their work (62%) and had taken on more responsibilities at work (50%) because of their course.

**Figure 7.2 Percentage of employed respondents reporting work changes as a result of their course**



Base: All employed respondents (N=225)  
Only asked of employees (N=213)

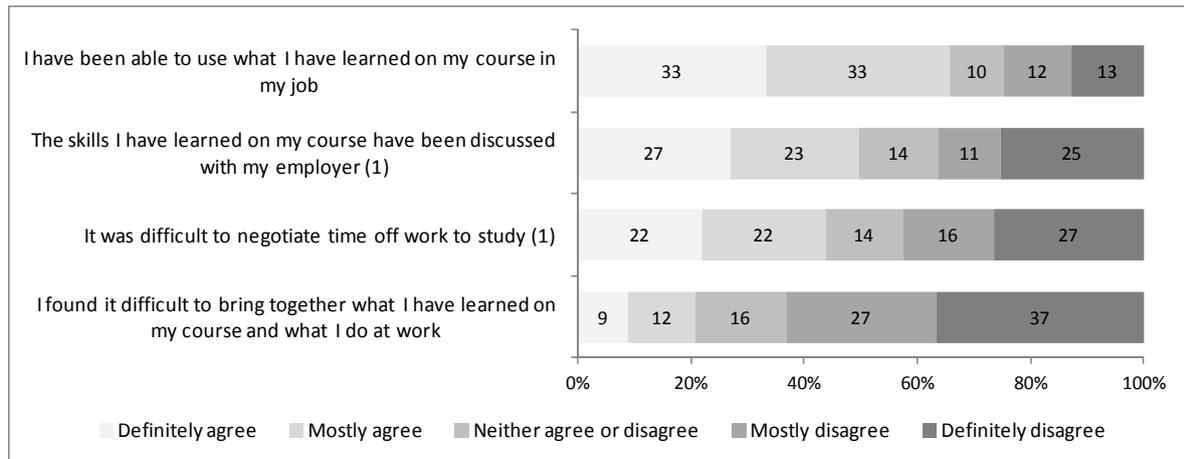
Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

One interviewee described that as a result of her course she was more positive, which was particularly important as she suffered from depression and severe anxiety disorder.

*"...I've become a more positive person ..my skills have changed a lot...as a student with disabilities,, and with my learning mentor....as a mature student, I didn't think I'd be able to go in [to uni] as a mature student, and do as well as I'm doing ...but I would recommend if anyone does want to go to university as a mature student..then I'd say, yes, 'go for it' ..."*

Furthermore, most students (66%) surveyed had been able to use what they had learned on their course in their job, and had been able to integrate, without difficulty, what they learned on their course with what they do in their job 64%) (Figure 7.3). Moreover, most students (50%) had had an opportunity to discuss the skills learnt on their course with their employer.

**Figure 7.3 Percentage of employed students reporting agreement/disagreement with statements about the relationship between work and study**



Base: All employed respondents (N=225)  
Only asked of employees (N=213)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

A student studying to be a social worker talked about how she used what she learnt on her course in her job.

*“...yes, you do use it in the job ...yes, the knowledge that you’re gaining, it’s all about integrating theory into practice ...learning about different [legal] frameworks ..and different assessments and kinds of things...yes, lots of different things actually ...things like social work models of thought ...”*

Another studying for a BA in Disability Studies who worked with adults with disabilities observed that her course and her work “connect well”. She gave the following example:

*“we did lots on the equality act last year ...and one of our service users did not have..she was not entitled to a bus pass even though she had this learning disability, and I went to Hatton Gardens in Liverpool with her and I explained to the people who were there ...that she needed a bus pass and I knew ..I knew how the equality act worked ...and the discrimination act..and I explained to these people ..if they weren’t giving her this bus pass they had to have a valid reason ..so I knew all about that ..and I’m learning a lot more about the social..and about the medical model of disabilities ..which if I ever have to do presentations and things like that ...or I have meetings at work ..then I can discuss and give my skills and experiences to colleagues who are not doing any type of course like that ..usually they’ve done health and social care [...NVQ] .. but my degree is a little higher than health and social care apparently...it’s like a level 4 ....”*

A student working as nursery manager taking a BA in Early Years Childhood Studies highlighted that her course helped not only her but has spin off effects on her colleagues.

*“...I think actually the degree is quite useful ..I think you’re always learning new things ...it helps you reflect and think differently about things , and you’re able to share a lot of your learning with the practitioners ..and you’re able to bring things in to the nursery to*

*make change, so I think in that way, it's excellent."*

For some students, their course affected their attitudes to work rather than enhancing a particular skill; although in turn such changes were likely to make them more effective in their jobs. For instance, a nursery manager taking a degree in Early Childhood Studies commented:

*"...yes, I think when you're dealing with families and the challenges that families have, you look upon it in a different light ..because you've learned more about the challenges that people face and how it affects their personal life, so your attitude to certain things does change ..and for the better.."*

Another student, who worked as a care manager in a local authority, talked about how what she learnt on her course had fed both into her professional and personal life and had changed her attitudes to work.

*"...yes, I do...I think some of my understanding of values ... I don't believe since the time I was 18 and I left training that my values, my morals, my ethics have changed but my understanding of why I feel that way have greatly improved, and now as a better informed practitioner, I feel I'm better able to work, advise, and support the people and the families that I work with ...to give you an example ...I did a course...'death and dying' ..and you would have got an English Nursing Board award 'care of the dying patient's family' ..and at the same time ... I cried through that course, it was so moving... one of my staff members had lost her husband, had a son in prison, and had just been diagnosed with breast cancer ...and I was very supportive, and I knew I was very supportive ...but I couldn't understand why I was avoiding making that call to ask her 'how are you?' ..and yet I actively encouraged her peers to make that call. ..I used to say to them 'go home an hour early...and go and see how she is' ...you know, that whole nurturing ...but I couldn't do it, and as I went through that course, I learnt why, I learnt about my own relationship to dying ..my own relationship to grief and how that transposed itself on me ...and ironically...I spoke to her and, once I'd learnt about ..my learning had enabled me to learn more about me, I apologised ...she'd had the most horrific experiences [in terms of family] ..and she was the most gracious person, and I told her why I'd behaved in that way...and she was very kind and forgiving ...and the whole thing of my learning, and those life experiences were incredibly empowering ...I still use those experiences that I learnt on that course ...because my client group are learning disability, and we work with adults ...but the disappointment of having a disabled child, the loss of what they might expect, is a huge disappointment ..that whole process of bereavement and loss and disappointment ..actually comes into my work on a day-to-day basis .... not about death, but about loss of expectation...I'd recommend that course to my friends, though I did sob ...for 9 months....if you read something academically it can be quite cold, but I read things more holistically, emotionally ...I'm the human side of life [laughs] .."*

Even where students were not taking a degree directly related to their current employment, their work still benefited from their studies. A woman studying a degree in Psychology in her 4<sup>th</sup> year of a 6-year course, who worked as a customer services manager in a private sector company observed:

*"...it's more the general studying connection as opposed to the actual course material ...things like better time management and more confident writing abilities ...writing formal letters and things like that, but the course has no bearing or relationship to my current job..I'm actually doing the degree to eventually start a new career ..it wasn't something I was ever doing as part of my current employment ...it was always sort of for*

*the future ...”*

In contrast, a student we interviewed studying for a BSc in Business Studies who worked for the a quasi government agency, commented on her employer’s lack of interest in her degree and how taking her degree was a private endeavour.

*“...no... they didn’t really...to be honest, discuss it [the degree] with us....and some point our agency was going through changed working practices and that was the only time my supervisor spoke to me about it ...because we’d learnt about change and all the theories behind that...but otherwise it wasn’t mentioned ...it seems funny that they were paying for it, then they don’t really speak to you about it ..[laughs] ..I think it’s because it’s not a private company...maybe in a private company would be smaller and your boss would be looking to see, y’know, is this really your job ..[to be studying] ...but in the civil service there’s so many different levels and managers ...probably the person making the decision about whether or not I got the funding probably wasn’t working directly above me ...y’know I kind of filled out a form..so in that kind of way....”*

*“...but it’s kind of something you were doing on your own ..it wasn’t something that was brought up at work ...because you done it in the evening...you’d done your work [during the day] ...and it wasn’t something that you were getting out of work to do ...so you were doing it on your own...you got time off for study and exams ...but it wasn’t really talked about to be honest ..that did seem a bit strange...but I think it’s because it’s not a private company, and employers wouldn’t be as close to their staff ..like value for money wise ..because at the end of the day my line manager is just the same as me..it’s not their money ...whereas if you’ve got a boss in a company he might be looking to see more ‘is this benefiting me, and my business?’....value for money or whatever... There’s some 300 people in my building so there could be lots and lots of people doing degrees but I don’t know...like there was a girl ..she was doing psychology and she was working in admin...[laughs]...I don’t know how she managed to get funding for it ...but it’s generally more business related ones..especially now with the economic climate, they will be looking ...like making sure the degree is related [to job] ..”*

## **7.2 Skills used in job and impact of course on skills development**

So what skills did the students surveyed use in their jobs and did their course help them to develop the skills they used? First, we look at a range of skills and identify the extent to which they were used by students in their current jobs (Figure 7.4). Then we consider the extent to which the course enabled students to develop these skills (Figure 7.5).

Figure 7.4 lists the main skills that employed respondents used in their current jobs ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’. Focusing on those skills used ‘a lot’ by students, the majority used all the skills listed except for numeracy skills. All of these skills can therefore be considered as important and in widespread use by those in work. The skills the students most frequently used, by at least two-thirds of students, included: the ability to work in a team (73%); inter-personal skills (70%); spoken communication (69%); logical thinking and problem solving (69%) and written communication (66%). All these skills are primarily generic and transferable skills. Interestingly, subject knowledge was one of the areas least likely to be used by students in their jobs.

The extent to which these highly utilised skills were developed through respondents’ courses is, however, somewhat mixed. We limit our analysis to anyone who reported that they used a given skill either ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’ in their current job. As noted above, this includes the majority of

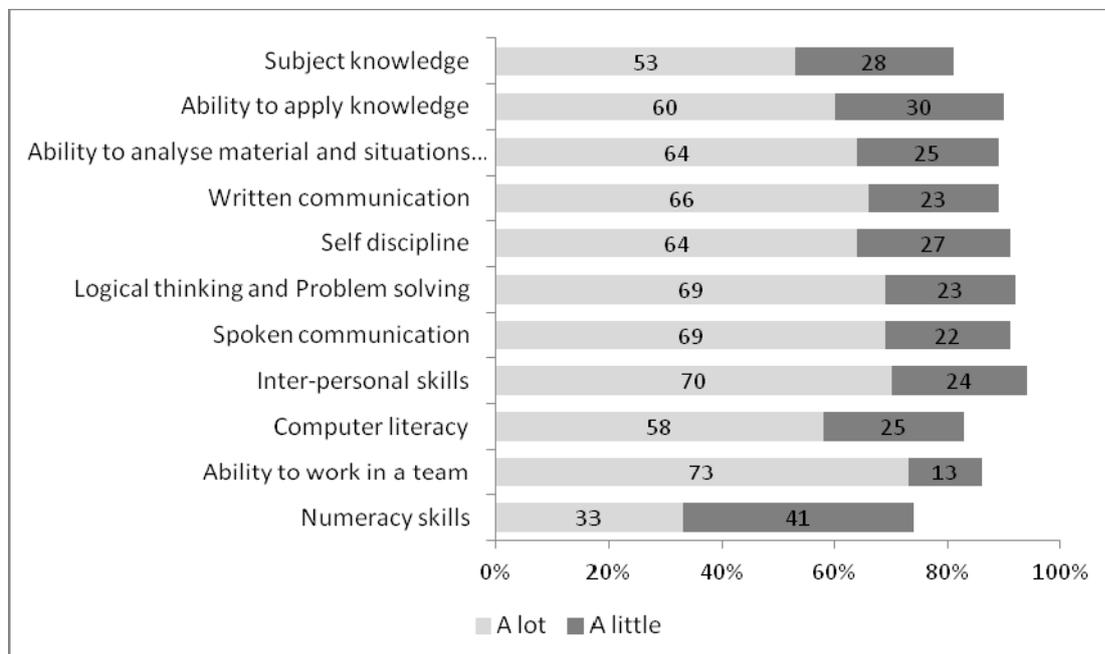
students in each case.

Figure 7.5 shows that subject knowledge (79%), ability to apply knowledge (70%) and ability to analyse material and situations critically (66%) were developed ‘a lot’ by courses for the vast majority of students. Adding to these figures the numbers where courses developed these skills ‘a little’ we get percentages that are very close to 100% (98%, 98% and 95%). These skills therefore seem to be developed very well across the courses studied.

Other skills were developed less well by respondents’ courses. Focusing only on where students reported that the course had enabled them to develop their skills ‘a lot’, we find that this was the case for at least one-half of students for written communication (62%), self discipline (59%), and logical thinking and problem solving (51%). Again for these skills, a large percentage of students reported that their course enabled them to develop these skills ‘a little’. Taking these responses into consideration meant that courses had helped to develop all of these skills for around nine out of ten of students.

However, when these skills which were developed ‘a lot’ by respondents’ courses are compared with those they used ‘a lot’ by respondents in their work, we see that there is scope for courses to develop further the following skills: ability to work in a team – used by 73% of student ‘a lot’ in their work but reported as being developed ‘a lot’ in their courses by 33% of them; interpersonal skills - used by 70% of students in their job but reported as being developed a lot by 43%; and spoken communication skills used by 69% ‘a lot’ in their jobs but reported as being developed in their course by 48%. The evidence above suggests that there is some scope for better development of these skill areas in respondents’ courses.

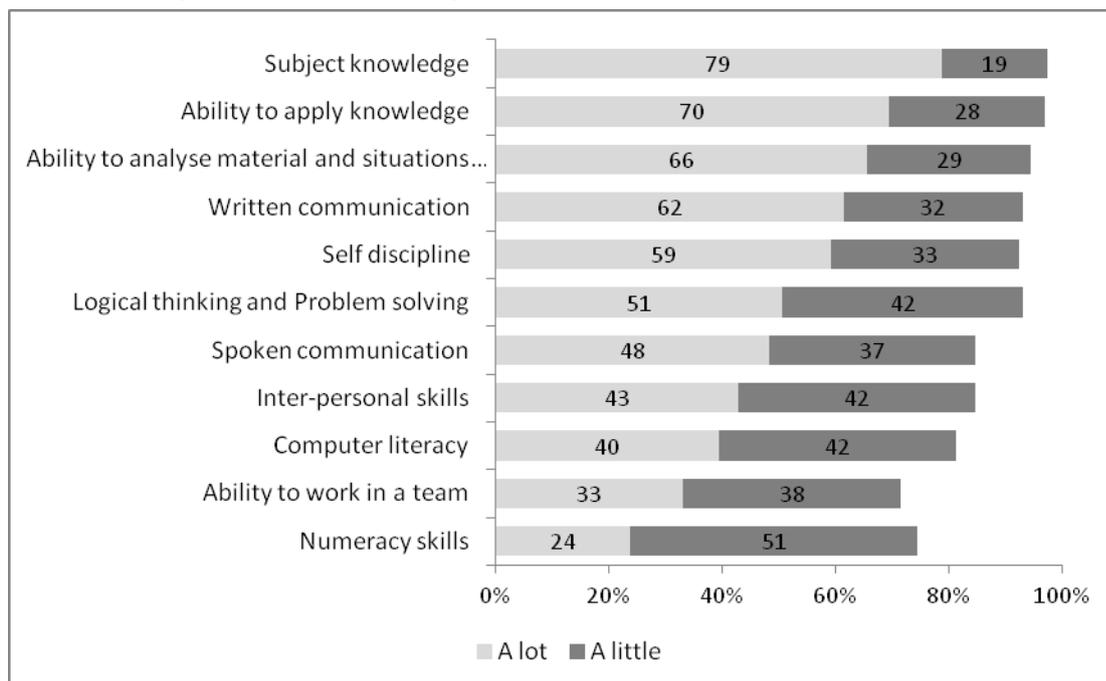
**Figure 7.4 Percentage of employed students reporting that they use skills ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’ in their current job**



Base: All employed respondents (N=225).

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

**Figure 7.5 Percentage of employed students reporting that they developed the skills ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’ that they used in their current job**



Base: All employed respondents who used skills a lot or a little (N varies from 162 to 209).

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

One of the students interviewed described how his degree course in Politics, Economics and Philosophy, which he dropped out of, had provided very useful transferable skills .

*“...I think it was more the relevance of the study skills at higher level...the skill set needed in order to successfully negotiate the course and develop and progress ...I wouldn’t say the subject matter was hugely relevant..it was interesting to me personally, but I don’t think it was something that would have directly benefited how I did my job...”*

[what sort of study skills?]

*“...well, writing skills...setting out an argument clearly and logically ...evidence gathering skills and being able to assess the relative relevance of the evidence ..how to analyse evidence and use that to draw conclusions ...those are certainly useful skills in and of themselves ..that would benefit me in my role ..”*

Although among the students surveyed just over a half used their subject knowledge ‘a lot’ in their job, opportunities to do so inevitably varied by the type of job they did. One student interviewed who worked as an unqualified teacher and was studying for a BSc in Social Sciences talked about using her subject knowledge as follows:

*“some of the topic areas I’d like to use more...I’ve been doing criminology as one of the units ..and I’ve got bits that I can put in [to my school work]..and I’m sure there’ll be other bits that I will put in to the schemes of work in the future that are really interesting, and I’m sure the kids will find really interesting ...the history of prisons and*

*things like that [laughs] .....we.. actually did something on prisons and they [pupils] were absolutely enthralled ....it was not something they'd ever looked at ..we actually had a group called 'prison me, no way [...?] a little while ago, and that was worthwhile because ...they got to meet a real-life prisoner ..and they had a day when they were literally treated like prisoners all day ..no breaks, supervised lunch, marched everywhere from one department to another . ...it was really brilliant .. part of it was my own interest in things like that...like borstal...and I'm anticipating doing something on that for my dissertation.."*

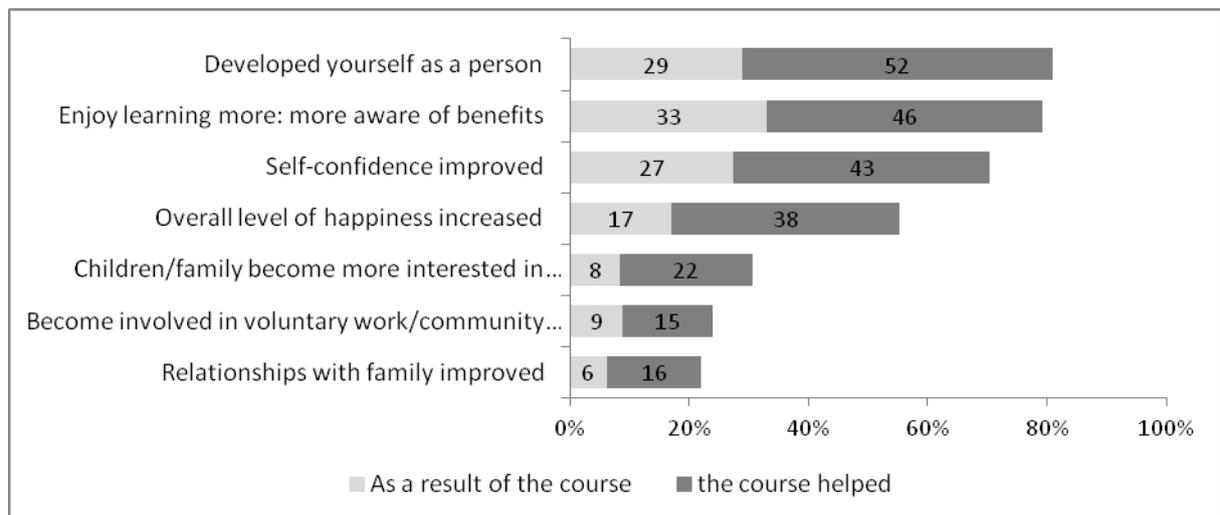
### 7.3 The wider benefits of learning

Most of the literature examining the returns to higher education, with a few exceptions,<sup>72</sup> focuses on the financial benefits of learning and the effects of higher education on graduates' working lives. However, the experience of higher education and learning is likely to have broader effects, beyond those associated with employment. Figure 7.6 examines some of these. Students were asked if a number of things had happened as a result of their course. Only one per cent of students reported that none of the listed changes had happened, so for almost all respondents their course had some impact on their development. Some of the impacts were widespread, but others much less so. Even so these effects of learning are important as they highlight the social impact of learning and how learning has social returns rather than just economic returns for both individuals and society as a whole.

The vast majority of students surveyed reported that as a result of the course, or that the course had helped, their personal development (81%); to increase their enjoyment of learning more and their awareness of its benefits (79%); and to improve their self-confidence (70%), and for more than one-half their overall level of happiness has increased (55%).

The impact of the course on families and community engagement was less widespread, but still evident for non-trivial percentages of respondents. Overall, the course had some impact on the family becoming more interested in learning for nearly one-third of respondents, and for over a quarter some effect on students' involvement in voluntary work, community activities or campaigning work and in improving their family relationships.

**Figure 7.6 Percentage of students reporting changes as a result of their course**



<sup>72</sup> McMahan, W (2009) *Higher Learning, Greater Good: The Private and social benefits of Higher Education* Baltimore: John Hopkins Press

Base: All respondents (N=261)  
 Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

The unqualified teacher studying for a BSc in Social Sciences we interviewed, also discussed how, as a result of her degree course, she became involved in other learning opportunities:

*“I did a restorative justice course a little while ago ..it was something I was going to do [in my degree] but they changed the dates of it ...so work let me go on a course ..it was really good and the kids will benefit from it...and there again, I probably wouldn't have even bothered with that, wouldn't have gone on something like that ..I would have turned my nose at it ...but now you're thinking ..oh that could be really good, or something along those lines.”*

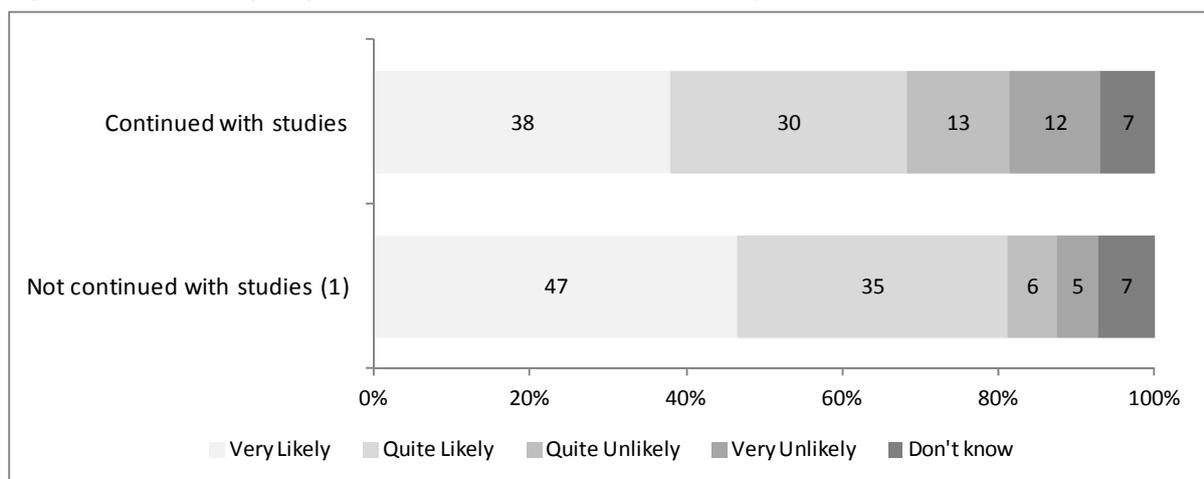
Another interviewee who started but did not complete a degree in Politics, Economics and Philosophy and worked as a policy advisor in a central government department commented:

*“I enjoy study for its own sake...I've never taken a course that I'm not interested in ..should time allow, it's definitely what I will carry on doing ... the subjects I studied are subjects I always had an interest in ...I think the main thing is the interest in philosophy, I'd never had an interest in philosophy ..I thought it was a quite boring subject ...but I found it really really interesting , really broadening and interesting stuff ...I read a lot more material around that now ...which I didn't do before..I'd had no exposure to it ..but I've always been interested in politics and current affairs , I've always kept pretty abreast with all of that ..which is why I do what I do [in terms of work].”*

#### 7.4 Future study plans

All those surveyed were asked about their future study plans including those who were still studying, and those had either dropped out of their course or who had 'stopped out' and planned to return to study (Figure 7.7). The latter group were significantly more likely than those still studying to report that it was likely they would undertake another qualification/continue studying sometime in the future (82% compared with 68%). The main reasons students gave for wanting to continue studying were career and work related, especially to help change or improve their job opportunities and career options (44%) and to develop a broader range of skills or knowledge (41%) (Figure 7.8).

**Figure 7.7 How likely respondents are to do another course/qualification**



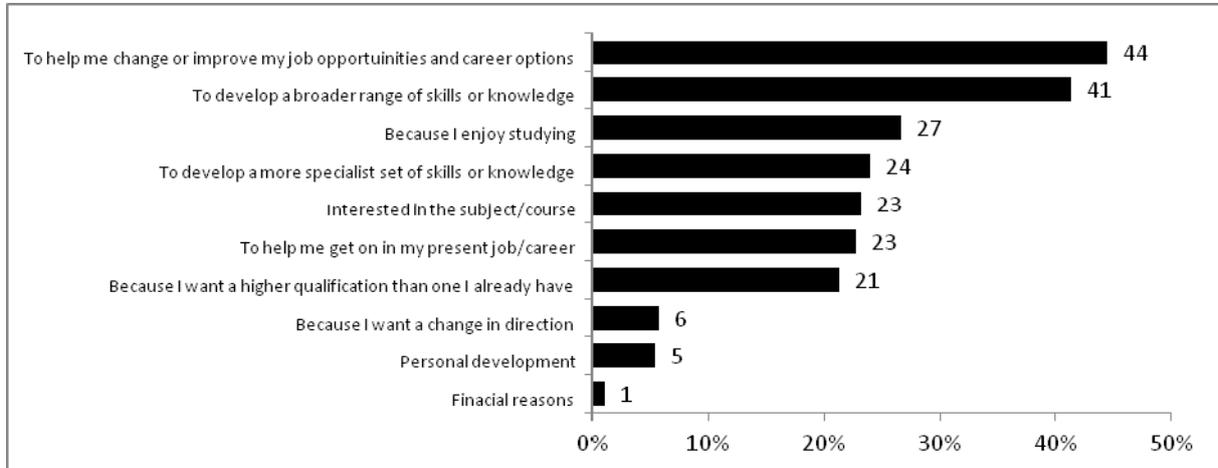
Base: All respondents (N=261)

Notes: Includes the 13 students who changed course to one that was out of scope for this report Difference between

those who continued studies and those who had not was significant at the 5% level.

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

**Figure 7.8 Why want to continue studying**



Base: All respondents who reported that they were very or quite likely to do another qualification/continue studying (N=184)

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

One person interviewed, in her penultimate year of her BSc in Social Studies was already considering a postgraduate degree because she had enjoyed her undergraduate studies so much.

*“ though it has been hard, I have enjoyed it...actually, the other day I got some paperwork about a Masters degree and I sort of looked and thought ‘do I, don’t I?’ you know [laughs] .....there’s a good chance I will ...although I keep saying no, I want my life [back] ...maybe I’ll do my teacher training, and then go back and do the Masters...”*

[and that came from University of XXX– where you’re doing your degree?]

*“...yes, they’re offering like a package ...like a thousand pounds cheaper...and their fees are small anyway ...for part-time study for a year it’s something like £700 a year ...which is good, I think....for some places, you do [pay] that just for one course ...*

[what would the Masters be in?]

*“...in Criminology...although I’m doing social sciences, psychology and things..it’s the criminology that I am really interested in ... crime and justice, it’s a really interesting topic, and does help as well that my partner’s been a policeman for 30 years ....I’ll be reading something and say ‘oh, listen to this’ ..and he knows the same sort of things ....my husband never wanted me to do it [further study] ..in fact, I’d say he was a barrier to my getting educated, he didn’t want me from the beginning to go out and get more qualifications .. even though it was at a time when they didn’t need babysitting anymore, he really made it awkward.. “*

An interviewee coming to the end of her Business Studies undergraduate degree commented:

*“ I’m in two minds now thinking whether I’ll do something else [study] ...with my*

*friends...one of them graduated a few years before me..and she left it a year and then she did professional exams in accountancy ..and she wished she hadn't had the break... and I'm now like, oh I could not just be bothered to go back ..[laughs] ...I doubt very much that I'll go on and do...certainly not in accountancy ...I might do a course or something..but I doubt it very much ..., unless I know it's specifically for another job..I don't have specific plans., no..."*

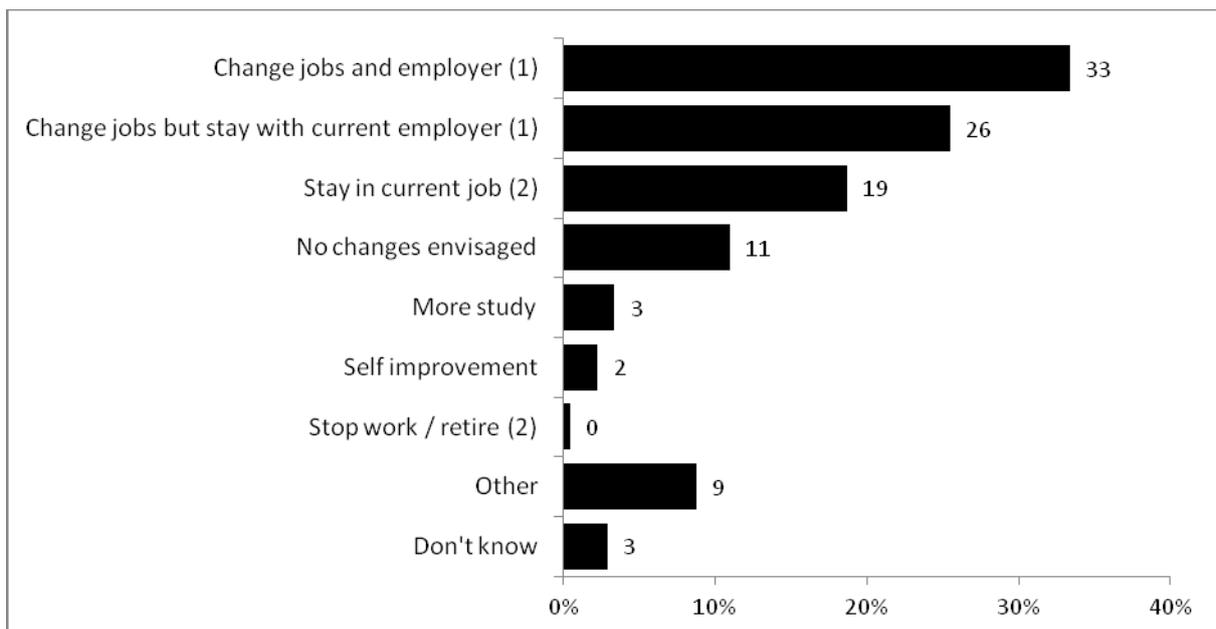
Another interviewee raised other constraints of future study options, and in particular limits on part-time study opportunities.

*"my next course choice is about the elderly ...obviously it's work-related, but I'm also very mindful that my own parents are getting elderly ...so again, it's about me being better prepared ...that sounds very cynical, doesn't it... [laughs] ... my mum's 79 and not in good health, and I work with families and older people ..so again that's a motivational factor ... but also I have found there are limited courses available ..of a broad church, unless you are enrolled on the social work or nursing degree [with the OU] ...there used to be far more choice ...I think they're restricting what you can do ..whereas I could pick off courses before ...so it's getting quite restrictive what I can do ...I'm talking specifically about the [XX university]...I don't think I'd go to another college of university ...I know I wouldn't ...I think [that in practice] it's becoming exclusive because it removes the vocational ..and I wonder if [XX university] is trying to fill a bit of the gap that higher education are having to fund differently ...because the subsidies have gone, haven't they ...so it might be part of a bigger plan."*

### 7.5 Future employment plans

Those students who were still studying were asked about their future employment plans and what they hoped to do when they finished their current course of study (Figure 7.9). By far the most common response was to change jobs and employer (33%).

**Figure 7.9 What students hope to do when finish course of study**



Base: All respondents who continued studying (N=173)

Note: 1. Asked only if an employee (N=143)  
2. Asked only if employed (N=149)  
Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

Several students interviewed felt that they had to wait to move to another job. First, they had to complete their qualification and gain more experience before opting for a job move.

*"...well, there is a career progression...you have to have a certain amount of experience .before you can move on to a senior social worker ..you don't have to become a senior ...you can just stay as a social worker ...it's all about getting different experience now...because there's so many different areas of work that you can go in to ...so it's all about gaining the experience, because you learn all these different things at uni ...so it's now about getting the experience...so I haven't got that aspiration [to be a senior social worker] right now ...but maybe in a few year's time ,we'll see what happens ..."*

One interviewee's main motivation for a job change was to get a more satisfying job and this had spurred her to take her degree in Psychology. She is currently working as a customer services manager in the private sector. When asked about her expectations about a new job, moving into a new area and better conditions of service, she commented.

*"...not really, as long as I'm on similar salary level...it's more to have more job satisfaction .....to go to work and feel that you've made a difference ...rather than going to work and coming home thinking it's been a bit pointless ..."*

Many were aware of the constraints in jobs opportunities and were concerned about changing jobs because of the economic recession.

*".. the only difficulty at the moment for a lot of graduates in social work now...there's less jobs at the moment ...and some of them are asking for experience ..I know some of the full-time colleagues of mine [other students] have been successful in finding work , but I've obviously had the advantage because I was already working for a council ..."*

*"...well, I would like to move up through the ranks [of the civil service] ....I haven't been looking on any job web-sites or anything, I haven't actively been looking ...I 'd be a bit sceptical of looking outside [the civil service] ...you know with everything like 'last in, first out' ..I probably would like a different job ,but I was put off for a while there...because of the money ..because my job's quite secure ..so I think I'm probably more secure staying internal...I don't want to stay where I am for the foreseeable future, I do want to progress..."*

Others did not anticipate moving because they recognised the benefits of their current employment, and despite the gains reaped from their course did not anticipate a pay increase. One student when asked if she had any particular job aspiration on completing her studies responded:

*"...not really...because the job I'm in, because it's in the voluntary sector, you have a lot of autonomy..if you're in the council nursery, there's always people higher up telling you what you must do ..whereas in the voluntary sector it's not like that .. our managers are our parents who are on the executive committee ..so we decide how we want to spend our budgets ..where we want to spend it, what we want to do, and I just love that side of the job ..so unless, I was made redundant, 'no thank you' I don't want to go and work in a council nursery ...that's another thing, when I've done this degree, it's not like I'm*

*going to get any more money ..I'll be doing the same job for the same amount of money because there isn't any more money in the sector..they can't reward me for having a degree , I know that because I'm the manager ..[laughs] but that's like the downside to it, you're doing because the government requires it .."*

Just over half (52%) part-time students surveyed employed full-time believed that that as a result of doing their course that their income over the next 3 years would increase either greatly or somewhat (Table 7.1).<sup>73</sup>

**Table 7.1 Income expectations over the next 3 years (percentage)**

	Employed full-time %
Greatly increase	13
Somewhat increase	39
Stay about the same	43
Somewhat decrease	3
Greatly decrease	2
<b>Base (unweighted N)</b>	<b>100 (123)</b>

Base: All respondents who expected to be working in 3 years time (N=170)

Notes: Excludes 7 respondents who reported that they will not be working in 3 years time

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2010

## 7.6 Conclusions

Most research on the impact of higher education concentrates on what happens to students on graduation, once they complete their studies, and have gained their higher education qualification focusing primarily on employment outcomes and the financial returns to study. Yet part-time students can start to reap the benefits study of long before they graduate (as well as after they graduate) because they are already employed. For many part-time students surveyed , just engaging in study had had a very positive impact on their working lives, especially in relation to their productivity and approach and attitudes to work. The majority of working respondents believed, that because of their course, they were more confident about their work (69%); their ability to do their work had improved (69%); they were better qualified to do their job (64%); had a deeper understand of their work (62%) and had taken on more responsibilities at work (50%). And for a substantial minority these improvements in job performance had been rewarded by their employer through a pay increase (29%) and promotion (28%).

The majority (66%) of students surveyed had used what they had learned on their course in their job. However, there was evidence that the skills students used 'a lot' in their job were not necessarily the skills developed 'a lot' in their course, especially team-working, interpersonal skills, and communication skills suggesting there is scope for course development in these areas.

<sup>73</sup> It is not possible to report on any differences for those working part-time or who were not employed because the sample sizes are too small.

Another feature of the existing literature on the impact of higher education is its focus on the financial returns to study yet, there are wider benefits to learning. The majority of part-time students surveyed believed that, because of their studies, they had developed as a person (81%); they enjoyed learning more and were more aware of its benefits (79%); their self-confidence had improved (70%); and their overall level of happiness had increased (55%) too.

Looking to the future, a sizable minority of respondents thought they would take another course once they had finished their current course. Those who had dropped or stopped out of study were more likely to report this than those who had continued their studies (82% compared with 68%). The majority (59%) wanted to change jobs once they had completed their course, especially with a different employer (33%), rather than staying with their current employer (26%). And the majority employed full-time believed that as a result of doing their course they would get a pay increase in the next three years.

Recent policy developments suggest that part-time study is central to the UK's skills and employability agenda because it provides flexible study aimed at those already in the labour market. This matters because of the need to up-skill and re-skill the ageing working population. Furthermore, as the 2011 White Paper *Higher Education: Students at the heart of the system* (BIS, 2011) confirms, part-time study can further the government's wider HE policy objectives. Specifically, it has a role in providing educational opportunities throughout people's lives, in increasing social mobility, and in creating a more diverse HE sector responsive to the needs of employers, the economy, and students by giving students greater choice and enhancing their HE experience. This study confirms the importance of part-time study and demonstrates its beneficial effects for employers, employees, and the wider economy and economic prosperity. It shows that these benefits start to take effect well before part-time students complete their studies.

## 8 TECHNICAL APPENDIX

### Introduction

The 'Futuretrack: Part time students' research project was commissioned by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) and the then Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). The research aimed to track the development of people studying part-time at universities in the UK, and to highlight the careers advice and support needs of this particular group of learners.

The research was conducted by Professor Claire Callender of Birkbeck, University of London, in partnership with the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) and IFF Research Ltd. IFF Research conducted the fieldwork for the research.

The research was conducted across two phases, with two cohorts of students. In phase 1, which was conducted in 2008, part-time learners who were in either their first or final year of a course of HE study across a total of 29 Universities were surveyed. For the second phase of the research, both cohorts of students were followed up in 2010, two years after the initial survey. This research design enabled us to collect information about student views over the duration of their course *and* information about how student experiences shape their career choices and progression in the three years after completion.

This technical report details the methodology employed and the outcomes of Phase 2 – a separate document covers the first phase of the research.

### Outline methodology

Phase 1 of the research involved sampling a number of part-time students from a number of HEIs. These individuals were initially invited - by email - to participate in a structured online survey. A second follow-up element was conducted using a telephone methodology.

A total of 1,941 interviews were completed with part-time students in their first year of study in an HEI and 1,763 with part-time students in their final year of HE study.

The second phase of the research involved going back to students interviewed in phase 1 using a combination of e-mail / online and telephone approaches.

### Sampling

The population of students that the survey was designed to represent was as follows:

- 1) Classified as home students – domiciled in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland
- 2) Studying part time, including those studying on block release or studying during the evenings only. Those studying full-time for less than 24 weeks in the academic year were also eligible for inclusion.
- 3) Studying towards one of the following types of qualification:
  - First undergraduate degree
  - Foundation degree

- HNC
- HND

4) Studying towards a qualification in one of the following subject areas (JACS Subject Code in brackets):

- Engineering (H)
- Technologies (J)
- Social Studies(L)
- Law (M)
- Business and Administrative Studies (N)
- Education (X)

This population was measured and profiled using the HESA database of students (2004/2005). From this profile, a shortlist of 35 universities with a high proportion of eligible part-time students in the overall student population was drawn up on which resources could be focused. (The Open University was pre-selected, because it constitutes more than 40% of the eligible student body.)

Each of these 35 HEIs were then approached with a request to provide details of eligible first year and final year students. Students from 29 of these HEIs were included in the survey; 17 institutions supplied student names and email addresses to IFF Research, whilst the remaining 12 were willing to send email survey invitations to eligible students but not pass on personalised data to IFF. This latter group of institutions was asked to provide anonymised lists of student contacts including a HUSID number so that if the student completed an interview and gave permission for their data to be matched with HESA records, there would be a common identifier, which could be used for this matching.

Details for a total of 11,300 student records were received by IFF Research, with a further 8,100 contacted directly by HEIs.

Of these, a total of 3,704 students completed the survey (1,545 online and 2,159 by telephone), and all of these students were eligible for the second phase of the research.

One of the key challenges of a project such as this one which is conducted over a long period of time during which the contact details of the respondents are relatively unstable, is to minimise the extent of “sample attrition” – i.e. the number of potential respondents dropping out because we lose contact with them or for whom we do not hold a valid contacting address or number. To this end, in February 2010 an e-mail was sent to all wave 1 students for whom we held an e-mail address giving them an opportunity to log onto a website to update us of any changes in their contact details and to keep them informed of the project’s development. A relatively low number of students - 148 - logged onto the contact details form, with 63 adding to or amending some of their details, and 85 confirming that all the details held were correct. Where we held a postal address but not a telephone number for a student, we also looked to match the details that we held to a telephone number using published listings.

Subsequent to this exercise a final phase 2 contact database was drawn up, consisting of updated contacts for all students for whom we held an e-mail or a telephone address. This left us with a total of 3,470 students to contact for wave 2 of the project, broken down as follows:

**Table 1: Starting sample breakdown**

	Starters		Completers		Total
Eligible records from Wave 1	1,941		1,763		3,704
	↓		↓		
Nature of contact details held ...					
At least one e-mail address	1,573	81%	1,458	83%	3,031
At least one telephone number	1,597	82%	1,445	82%	3,042
Either e-mail or telephone	1,814	93%	1,656	94%	3,470 <sup>74</sup>

### Survey Fieldwork

Two quite distinct questionnaires were drawn up for the survey: one intended for “starters” (who were anticipated to still be studying, albeit some were approaching the end of their course) and one for “completers” (who were anticipated to have already left their original course).

Both questionnaires were launched **online** in early September 2010, with e-mails being sent to all contacts for whom we held an e-mail address.

This soft launch threw up a couple of issues, which were highly significant to the survey design:

1. A higher number than expected of contacts from the “starters” cohort turned out to have completed their courses by the time we approached them for phase 2 interview (e.g. those taking shorter courses such as Foundation Degrees and Higher Nationals), and were therefore screened out of the phase 2 “starter” interview.
2. The online survey was taking considerably longer than planned to complete. This was problematic for the online survey and had the potential to be even more so for the telephone part of the survey

Given these two issues, the survey questionnaires were reviewed, along with certain elements of the survey / sample design. In particular, where foundation degree and HND students who were starters in the first wave of the research turned out to have completed their course by the time of re-contact, a mechanism was built which transferred them to the completers questionnaire. More generally, a number of the questions were reviewed, removed and/or cut back to bring the interview closer to its planned length.

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<sup>74</sup> Details were missing for 234 respondents. The missing records appear to be a combination of those where an “undeliverable” response was received from the e-mail, and those who were initially invited to participate through direct contact with their HEI (and who didn’t provide us with further contact details)

Following these revisions, the surveys were then re-launched online and on the telephone in early October. The online and telephone elements were run in parallel, with students contacted by telephone encouraged to log onto the online survey in an

The surveys were held open until mid November, by which time a total of 1,281 students had completed the survey – a response rate at the overall level of 37%. Table 2 below details the numbers of responses achieved among starters and completers against both the online and telephone data collection approaches. Table 3 then shows how the completed interviews against each survey broke down against the qualification that the students were studying for / had achieved.

**Table 2: Total response by survey and data collection approach**

	Starters	Completers	Total
Starting sample	1,814	1,656	3,470
	↓	↓	↓
Online completes	57	145	202
Telephone completes	204	875	1,079
<b>Total completes</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>1,281</b>

**Table 3: Total response by survey and qualification type**

	Starters	Completers	Total
Undergraduate degree	218	474	692
Foundation degree	14	317	331
HND / HNC	29	229	258
<b>Total completes</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>1,281</b>