

FUTURETRACK PART-TIME STUDENTS: THEIR USE OF CAREERS INFORMATION, ADVICE, AND GUIDANCE

This document is based on the findings of a survey of 3,704 part-time undergraduate UK domiciled students conducted in 2007/08. The students surveyed were drawn from 29 Higher Education Institutions from across the UK. The study was funded by HECSU and BIS and undertaken by Prof Claire Callender of Birkbeck, University of London and David Wilkinson from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

Two groups of students were surveyed – students in their first year of study referred to as ‘starters’ and students in their final year of study, referred to as ‘completers’. In this way, students’ progress and careers at different points of time can be charted and followed over time.

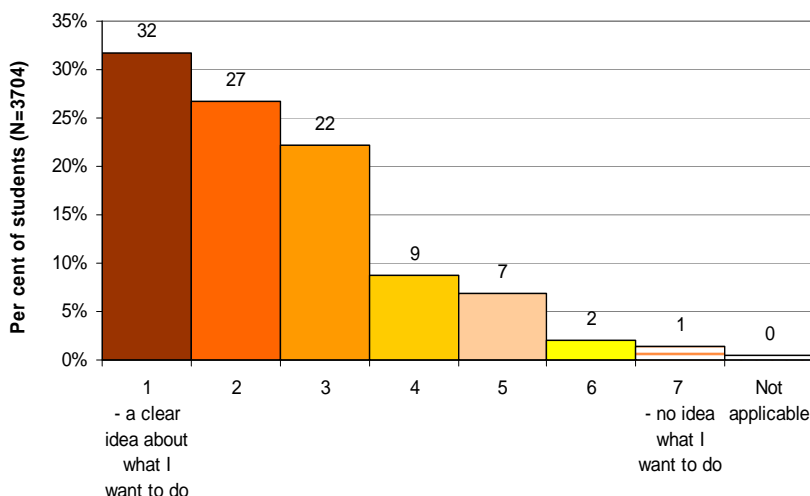
All were aiming for a First Degree, Foundation Degree, or Higher National and were studying one of the following subjects Engineering/technology; Social Sciences; Law; Business and Education.

This document examines issues related to the part-time students’ career plans and their use of careers information, advice and guidance.

Part-time students’ career plans and ambitions

- A unique feature of this research is its exploration of part-time students’ career plans. 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 (Figure. 1).

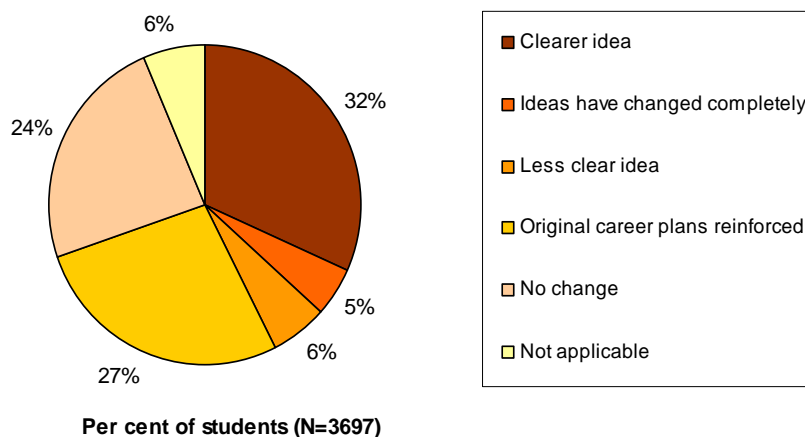
Figure 1 How part-time students rated the clarity of their long-term career plans



Base: All students Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2008

- Most students had developed a clearer idea about their career plans since starting their course (Figure 2). For a sizable minority (27%), their ideas about their careers had crystallised as a direct result of taking their course, especially amongst those nearing the end of their course and among those more vulnerable students who were not employed, entered higher education with low-level qualifications, and came from low-income households.

Figure 2 How part-time students' ideas about their career plans had changed since starting their course



Base: All students

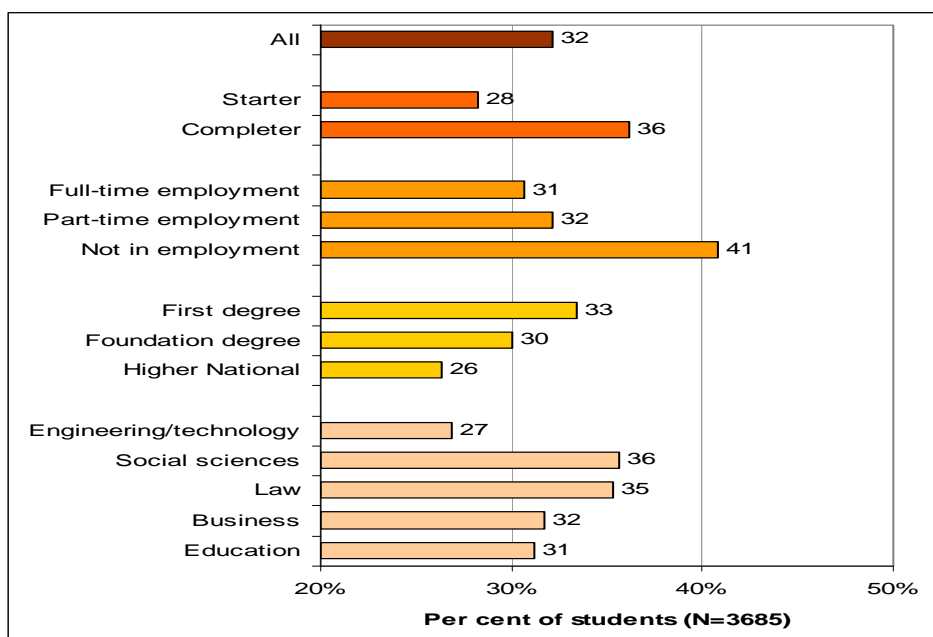
Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2008

- For the vast majority of students, both their decision to study (89%) and choice of subject (92%) were firmly linked to their career aims.
- However, for around a half of those students not taking vocational qualifications (Foundation Degree or Higher Nationals) or studying education, their courses were not always directly related to their current employment or occupation. This suggests that they were using their studies as a springboard to realise their ambitions in a different job or area of work.

The careers information, advice, and guidance sought by part-time students and their use of university/college career 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 career service once they got to university (Figure 3). This is an important finding given the absence of other research on part-time students' use of university career services.

Figure 3 Percentage of part-time students who had had contact with their university career's service in the 2007/08 academic year

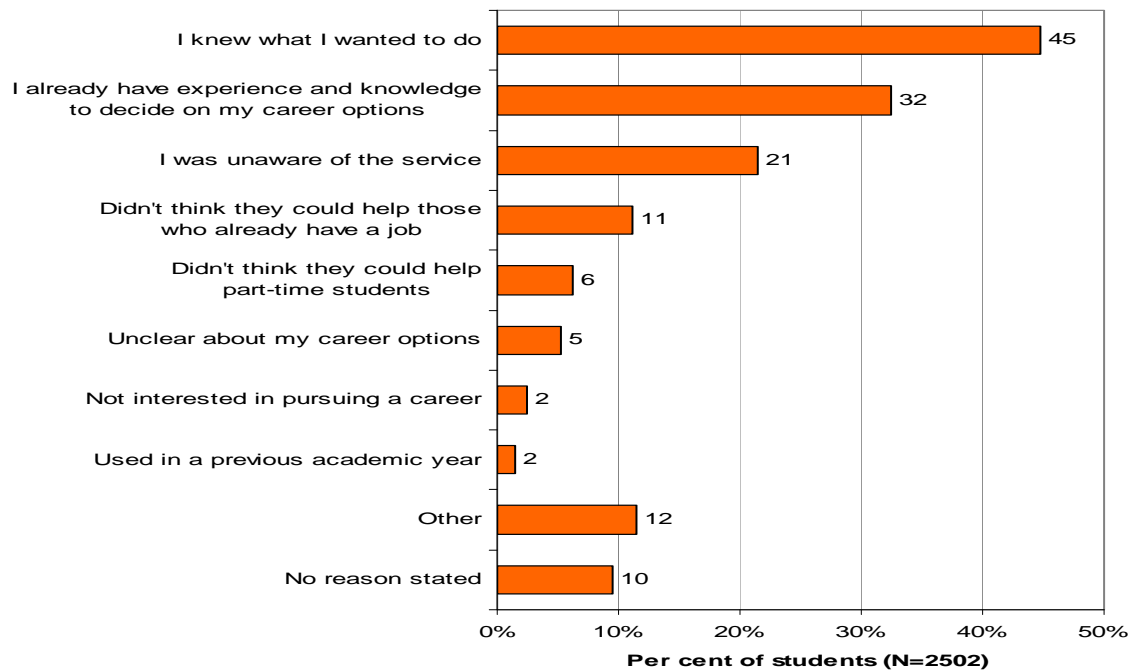


Base: All students

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2008

- Those most likely to have had some contact with their university/college career service while at university were in their final year of study, were not employed, were without a higher education qualification at the start of their current course and came from minority ethnic groups.
- Of the two-thirds of part-time students who had not used their university/college careers service during the academic year, nearly three in ten (58%) knew what they wanted to do and/or had the knowledge and experience to make up their own minds about their career options (Figure 4).
- 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. The length of time a student had been at university had no impact on their awareness of their university/college career service. Students in their final year of study were just as likely as those in their first year of study to be unaware of the service.
- This suggests that some universities may not be adhering to the QAA's code of practice about career education, information advice and guidance. For example, they may not be addressing the principle that "Institutions provide students with information about the extent and range of CEIAG [career education, information, advice and guidance] services available to them before, during and after their time registered at the institution."ⁱ
- Clearly, university/college career services need to do much more both to market their facilities and to broaden their provision in order to increase student awareness of the service and to improve students' use of the service.

Figure 4 Reasons why part-time students had not used their university/college career service in the 2007/08 academic year

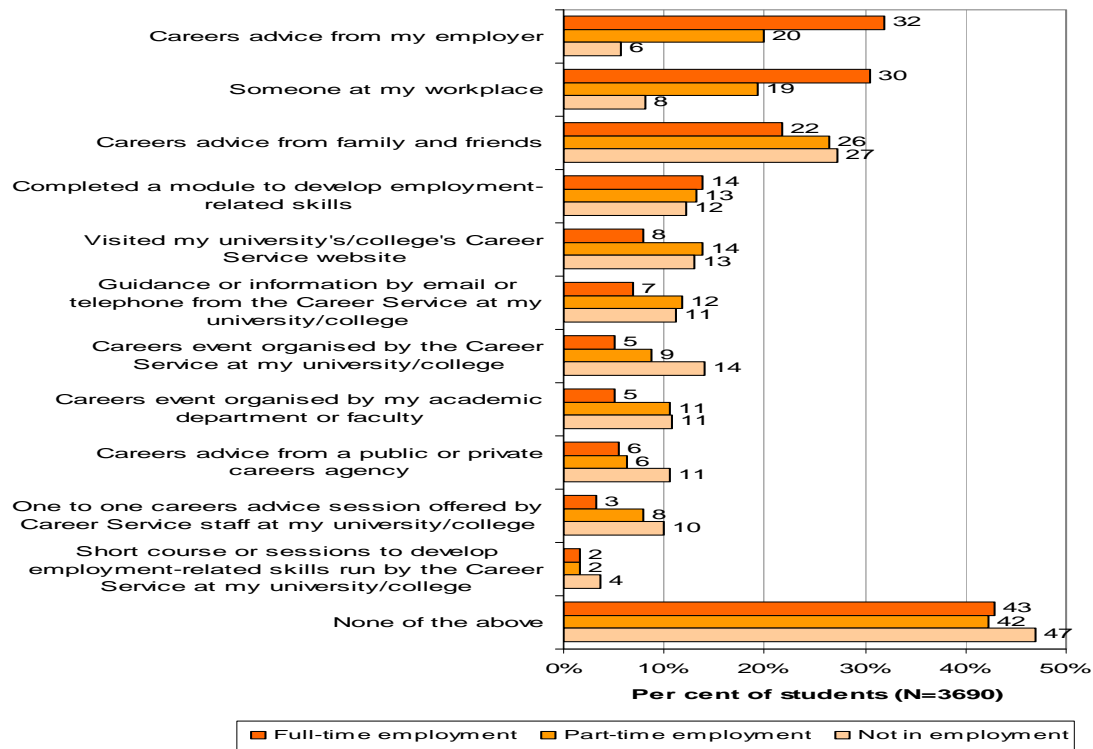


Base: Students who did not have any contact with their university/college career service

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2008

- 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 (Figures 5 and 6).
- 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.
- 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 (Figure 5).
- This demonstrates an appetite for such help and support, and potential missed opportunities for university/college career services. So, while there is a demand for careers information, advice, and guidance among part-time students, university/college career services are not fulfilling that demand.

Figure 5 Sources of careers information, advice and guidance used by part-time student in the 2007/08 academic year by current employment status

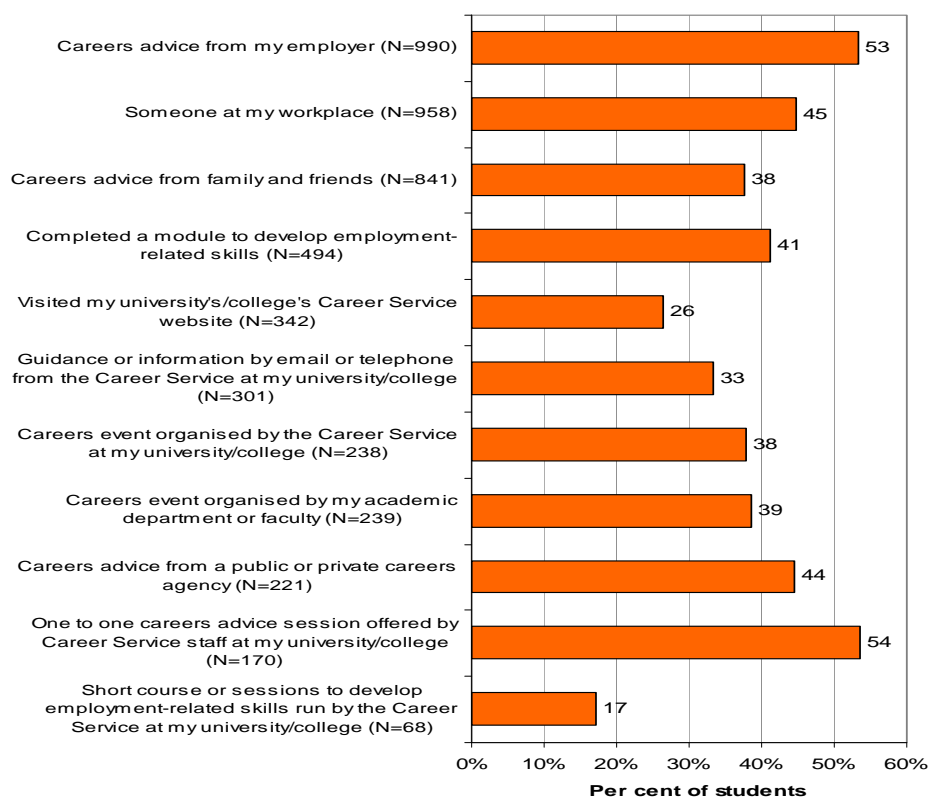


Base: All students

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2008

- To meet that demand universities and colleges need to priorities the requirements of part-time students and allocate more resources to them. Specifically, they need to re-orientate their services away from services preparing younger students to enter the labour market to those catering for older students already with experience of the labour market who want information, advice, and guidance on career progression and career change.
- Our study also found that university and college career services need to acknowledge part-time students' preferences for a more personalised approach and for face-to-face interaction with a careers advisors rather than delivering services for instance, via websites. As Figure 6 shows, the sources of information, advice, and guidance part-time students found the most helpful were primarily those involving one to one sessions with an individual.

Figure 6 Percentage of part-time students who had used each source of careers information, advice and guidance who thought that the source was the most helpful.



Base: Students who reported at least one source of careers IAG used in 2007/08 academic year

Source: Futuretrack Part-time, 2008

Conclusion

- Part-time students know where they are going in terms of their career plans – they adopt an instrumental approach to their studies.
- They make limited use of university career services both before starting their course and while at university because they:
 - know what they want to do
 - have experience to call upon to make their decisions
 - are unaware of service/unsuitable
- Instead, part-time students rely on informal networks for IAG – their employers, someone at their workplace, or family and friends
- There is potential unmet demand for IAG. University career services need to rethink their offer if they want to capture the part-time student population.

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ⁱ Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2010) *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section8/Section8careereducation2010.pdf>