



FUTURETRACK: PART-TIME STUDENTS is a longitudinal survey of part-time students in higher education. The project is funded by the Department for Innovation, Business and Skills and the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU), a charity with 40 years experience in higher education research.

The study is being conducted by researchers at Birkbeck, London University and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

Part-time students

Choosing part-time study

Futuretrack: part-time students explores how and why students decide to study part-time courses in order to better understand part-time students' experience of career learning and help careers practitioners to improve the information, advice and guidance they provide to their part-time clients.

The literature on part-time students reflects the higher education sector's concerns to address student diversity, and many reports recognise that the needs of part-time students are often not catered for¹. However, a failure to acknowledge the unique status of students who are studying part-time has resulted in much of the discussion of part-time students being subsumed under other headings (e.g. non-traditional, working-class, mature etc). As part-time students become another disadvantaged group within the literature on widening participation, so 'part-

time' ceases to be seen as a mode of study, but becomes an attribute of the students themselves. As a result, there is a tendency to overlook the specific needs they have as part-time rather than full-time students. This is one of the reasons Futuretrack seeks to distinguish between the reasons part-time students give for wanting to study and their reasons for choosing to study part-time.

The research reported here is based on analysis of data generated by online and telephone surveys of part-time learners in their first or final year of study. Respondents were domiciled in the UK and were studying for a higher education qualification in engineering, technologies, social studies, law, business and administrative studies or education. This summary presents findings from the first phase of the project, which was conducted in 2008.

KEY QUESTIONS

What first prompted part-time students to consider further study?

Why part-time rather than full-time study?

What reasons did students give for their choice of course?

Did students seek any careers advice before applying for a place on their course?

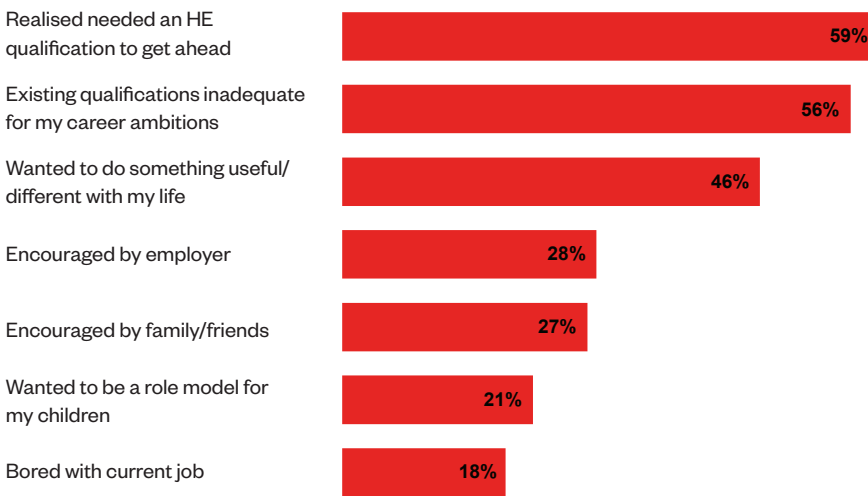
How did students plan to fund their studies?

¹ A full review of the literature on part-time students is available to download from www.hecsu.ac.uk/futuretrack_part_time_students.htm Callender, C. and Feldman, R. (2009). Part-time undergraduates in higher education: a literature review. Prepared for HECSU to inform Futuretrack: Part-time students. Manchester: HECSU.

Applying to Higher Education

What prompted students to consider part-time study?

WHAT FIRST PROMPTED PART-TIME STUDENTS TO CONSIDER FURTHER STUDY?



FINDINGS FROM PREVIOUS STUDIES

Several surveys exploring why part-time students decide to study for a higher qualification have found that the most common reasons for participating in higher education are: interest in the subject, expectations for personal growth, and aspirations for career progression or development (Feinstein et al, 2007; Callender et al, 2006; Schuller et al, 1999).

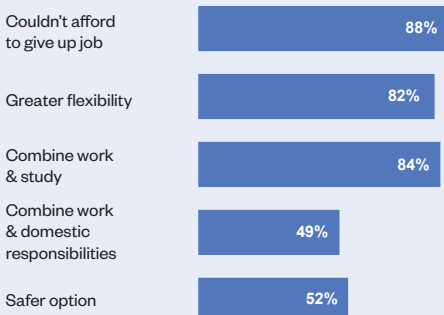
Few studies have investigated why students choose to study part-time, but research by Callender et al (2006) suggests that many students choose to study part-time for financial or domestic reasons (e.g. they cannot afford to give up their job or move away to study because they have family commitments).

FINDINGS FROM FUTURETRACK: PART-TIME STUDENTS

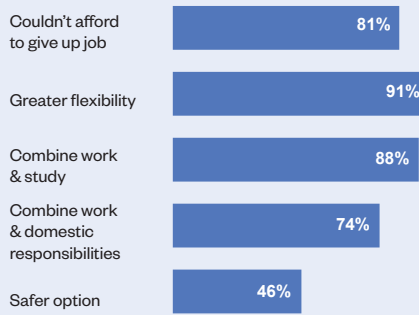
- Findings from the Futuretrack study confirm those of earlier studies and Kember et al's (2001) observation that students hold 'multiple orientations', which inevitably influence their attitudes towards higher education. Students' initial reasons for choosing to enter higher education and study part-time were primarily instrumental, influenced by their desire to fulfil a career ambition or do something different with their life, but they also valued the intrinsic rewards which come with studying something new or interesting and acting as a role model for other people.
- When asked how important various factors were with regard to their choice of course, 69% of students said it was very important that their course enabled them to develop new or existing skills, while 50% said facilitating entry to a particular profession or occupation was a very important factor in determining their choice of course.
- Students' reasons for studying part-time (as opposed to full-time) were both financial and pragmatic. Part-time study enabled those who could not afford to give up paid employment to study alongside their job, and afforded students the flexibility to fit their studies around their existing work and domestic commitments.

WHY STUDY PART-TIME?

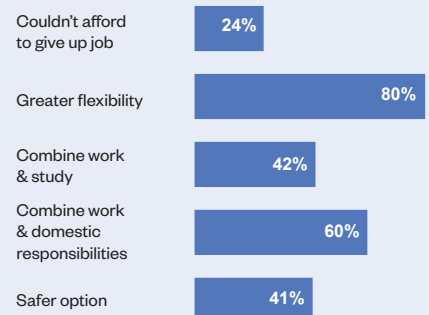
STUDENTS IN FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT



STUDENTS IN PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT



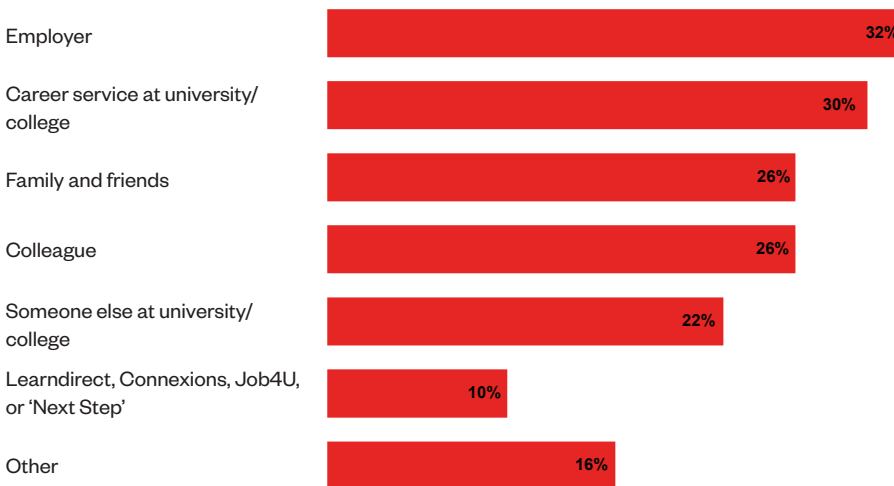
STUDENTS NOT IN EMPLOYMENT



Careers Information, Advice & Guidance

Did students seek careers advice before they applied for a place on their course?

WHERE DID STUDENTS SEEK ADVICE BEFORE THEY STARTED THEIR COURSE?



FINDINGS FROM PREVIOUS STUDIES

A number of studies have examined the links between students' desire for career improvement and the career outcomes of part-time study (e.g. Brennan et al, 1999; Feinstein et al, 2007; Jamieson et al, 2008; Woodley and Wilson, 2002), but few have examined students' understanding of the relationship between their course of study and their career aims.

In 2005 a review of the literature on the employability of part-time students by Little et al. argued that career development activities which 'prepare' students for employment need to be reoriented to provide support for part-time students seeking career advancement or career change, but, despite the emphasis on career management within current careers debates, very little literature exists as to the contribution careers services can or do make to the career learning of part-time students.

FINDINGS FROM FUTURETRACK: PART-TIME STUDENTS

- Nearly all students reported that their decision to study in higher education (89%) and their choice of course (92%) was related to their career aims.
- Students in full-time employment and those studying for Foundation or Higher National Degrees (HND) were more likely than other students to report that their course was closely related to their current occupation.
- Only a third of students sought careers information, advice or guidance before

they started their course. Younger students (25 and under), those from low-income households, and students from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely than other students to have sought careers information before they started their course.

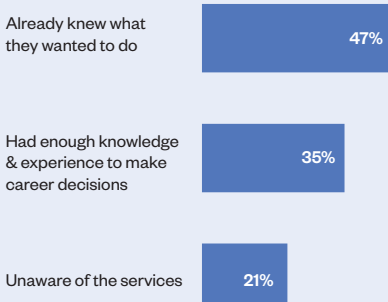
- Of those students who did seek careers information before they started their course, 32% approached their employer, 26% talked to a colleague at their workplace, 30% visited the careers service at their university or college, and 26% talked to family or friends.
- Only a third of students had some contact with their university careers service once

they started their course. However, over half of all students (57%) had accessed careers information or guidance of some kind (e.g. from their employer, colleagues, friends or family, lecturers etc), which suggests that there is considerable demand for careers guidance amongst part-time students which is not being met by university or college careers services.

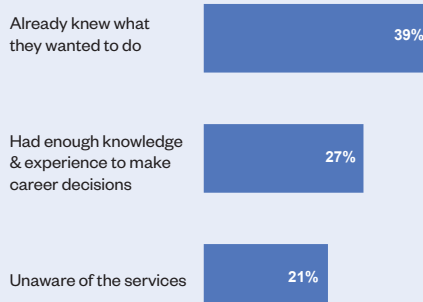
- Students who were in full-time (31%) or part-time (32%) employment were less likely than those who were not in employment (41%) to have had some contact with their university careers service.

WHY DIDN'T SOME STUDENTS USE THEIR UNIVERSITY CAREERS SERVICE ONCE THEY STARTED THEIR COURSE?

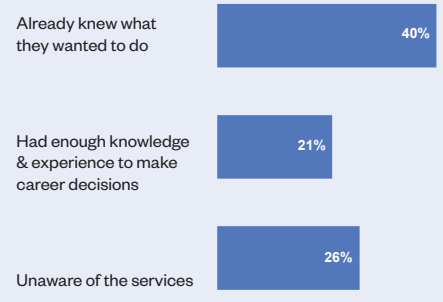
STUDENTS IN FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT



STUDENTS IN PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT



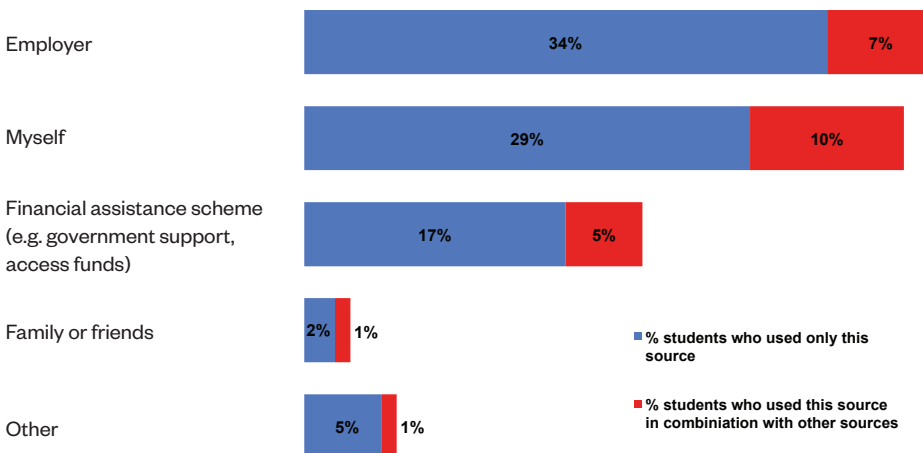
STUDENTS NOT IN EMPLOYMENT



Funding Part-Time Study

How did students plan to fund their studies?

SOURCES OF FUNDING



HIGHER EDUCATION: STUDENTS AT THE HEART OF THE SYSTEM (2011)

From 2012/13 part-time students will, for the first time, be eligible for student loans to pay tuition fees. Under the new financial arrangements, 30% of all part-time undergraduates will be entitled to a loan, but those who are ineligible (e.g. students who already hold a Level 4 qualification) will have to pay higher tuition fees up-front*.

* From 2012/13 the maximum tuition fee a university can charge for a part-time undergraduate course will be £6,750 a year

FINDINGS FROM FUTURETRACK: PART-TIME STUDENTS

- Nearly two-fifths of students had looked for information about financial support before they started their course. Students who were unemployed or employed part-time, those from a low-income household, and students coming from a family without any previous experience of higher education were the most likely to seek information about financial support.
- Most of those who sought financial support relied on their university or college for advice (63%). 25% visited the Directgov website, 11% sought advice from family and friends, 9% spoke to their local authority and 7% visited the then Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) or Department for Education and Skills (DfES) websites.

- Students from high or medium income households and those who already held a Level 4 or Level 5 qualification were most likely to be in receipt of financial support from their employer. Students who were in full-time employment were more likely than those in part-time employment to be receiving financial support from their employer (51% compared to 21%).

CONCLUSIONS FROM FUTURETRACK: PART-TIME STUDENTS

- There is considerable demand for careers guidance amongst part-time students which is not being met by university or college careers services. Around a third of students had not used their university or college careers service because they were unaware of its existence, but many more were reluctant to engage with a service they felt was unable to meet their needs, which suggests that careers professionals may need to provide more support for students who want to progress, develop or change careers rather than prepare for entry to the labour market.
- Part-time students' reliance on their employers and colleagues for careers advice is of concern as this advice is unlikely to be impartial and may be informed by the organisation's short-term needs rather than the long-term needs of the student. However, careers services should also acknowledge that employers

- may be better informed than advisers when it comes to identifying specific career opportunities in their particular field, and institutions should seek to help their part-time students identify, access and evaluate this kind of advice and guidance.
- The absence of a centralised source of advice about funding for part-time study means students have to rely on individual institutions for support. Employer support is unevenly distributed, with the students most in need of support least likely to receive it.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Download research reports in full www.hecsu.ac.uk/futuretrack_part_time_students.htm
- More information about the Futuretrack project www.hecsu.ac.uk/current_projects_futuretrack.htm

- Bibliographic references for all the studies cited in this summary can be found in the Futuretrack: part-time students research reports.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Summary report prepared by HECSU. Research by Claire Callender (Birkbeck, University of London), Rebecca Hopkin and David Wilkinson (NIER)