



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 in higher education

Employer perspectives on part-time study

The literature on employer attitudes towards part-time study suggests that, while employees value opportunities to obtain accreditation for their learning by participating in courses which lead to a formal qualification, employers are more likely to support part-time study because it provides employees with opportunities for personal development and serves as a means of cementing employee loyalty to the organisation (Kewin and Casey, 2009; Connor and Hirsh, 2008; Cappelli, 2004; Green et al, 2000).

The research reported here is based on an analysis of data generated by a telephone survey of 294 employers plus 15 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2009, and a follow-up telephone survey of 145 employers plus 12 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2011/12. Employer participants were identified by students who had participated in the Futuretrack: Part-time students' survey, which asked if students would be willing to provide contact details for their employers.

The 294 employers who agreed to participate ranged from small companies employing 1-9 people to large organisations of more than 1000 employees. They were drawn from both manufacturing and service sectors, but were concentrated in education (one third of the sample) and other public services such as public administration and health (another third of the sample). An analysis of data generated by the Labour Force Survey suggests that public administration, education, health and social work account for about half of all part-time First degree, Foundation degree and Higher National students in employment - a large proportion, but not as large as the two-thirds in the Futuretrack sample. The analysis reported here takes this into account.

KEY QUESTIONS

What do employers perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of part-time study to their organisations and employees?

What kinds of conditions, if any, are placed on different kinds of employer support for part-time study?

What is the impact of part-time study on employees' salaries, career prospects, and job mobility?

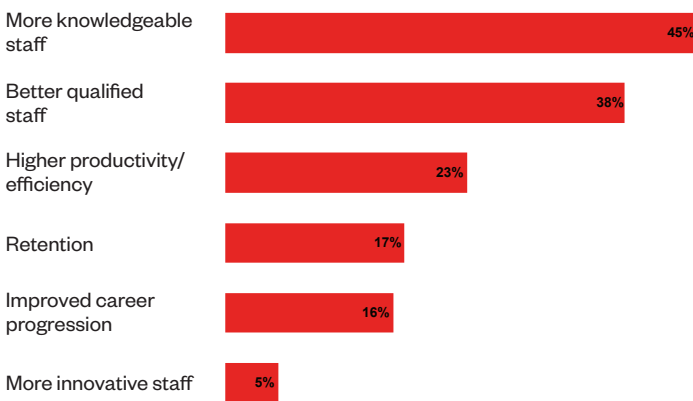
What impact has the recession had on employer support for part-time study?

What impact might higher tuition fees have on employer support for part-time study?

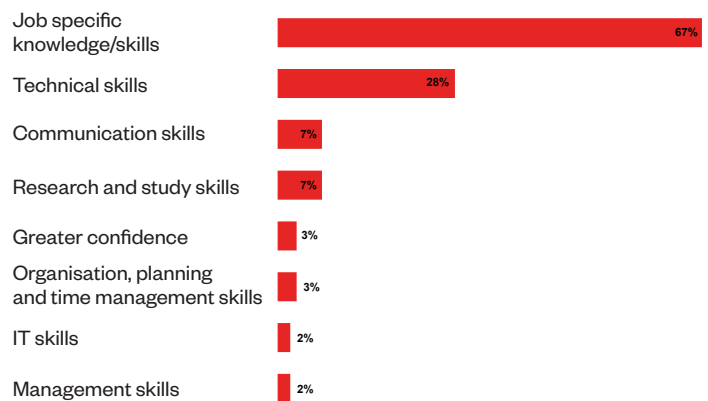
The benefits of part-time study

Why do employers provide support to employees who engage in part-time study?

PERCEIVED BENEFITS TO ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES STUDYING PART-TIME FOR A FIRST DEGREE



EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE EMPLOYEES DEVELOP WHEN STUDYING PART-TIME FOR A FIRST DEGREE



BENEFITS OF SUPPORTING PART-TIME STUDY

'If we can't identify a business need for sending somebody on a training course or a degree programme they wouldn't go'

Two-thirds of employers expected the skills and knowledge employees developed through their part-time study to be related to their job, reflecting the commonly held view that employer-supported study should be work-related. Few cited communication skills, organisational skills, IT skills or management skills as examples of the kinds of skills employees might develop through part-time study in higher education.

Employers supported employees to study for a first degree because they wanted more knowledgeable or better qualified staff (45% and 38% respectively), or because

they wanted to improve their productivity or efficiency (23%).

EVALUATING PART-TIME STUDY

'It is very difficult...to evaluate the actual value to the company. I would say that people doing [higher education] courses would definitely repay the company five or ten fold...but it's very difficult to quantify that'

Few organisations conducted a formal assessment to evaluate the benefits accrued to the company; most relied on their initial selection procedure to demonstrate how supporting employees to study part-time would benefit the organisation.

SUPPORTING PART-TIME STUDY VERSUS RECRUITING QUALIFIED STAFF

'It's a combination of both really. You need new blood coming in, people with new ideas

from university. But by the same token we've also got to have a bit of a 'grow your own' approach as well and give internal people opportunities'

Over 40% of employers supporting employees who were studying for a first degree disagreed that 'it is more cost-effective to recruit graduates straight from university than it is to support employees to study part-time for their degrees', and 60% agreed that 'graduates who gain their qualifications by studying part-time while in employment tend to have superior skills and knowledge compared to new graduates or those who gain their qualifications on full-time courses'.

EMPLOYERS ON... PART-TIME STUDENTS' CONTRIBUTION TO THEIR ORGANISATION

'[First degree students are] initiating better systems of working...showing greater awareness and initiative to look at the way we do things and how to do it better'

Education, 10-24 employees

'[Our Foundation degree student] has a better knowledge of child development and issues with child care; it helps on a practical level to

understand why things might be happening'

Social work, 1-4 employees

'[First degree students are] identifying improvements, being more analytical, more commercially aware'

Manufacturing, utilities and construction, 1000+ employees

'We've got a [first degree student] who... was

doing a business and management degree and he's taken on the project to restructure all of our business support within the council'

Public administration, 10-24 employees

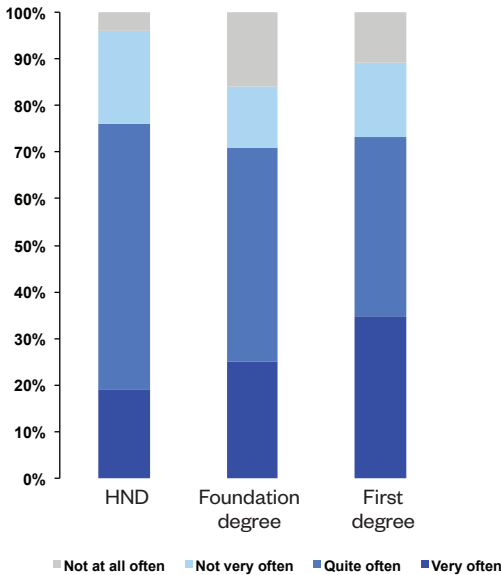
'Generally [HND students] become more committed to their course and their job and... end up doing more tasks rather than doing their basic main job. They take on more responsibilities'

Other services, 25-49 employees

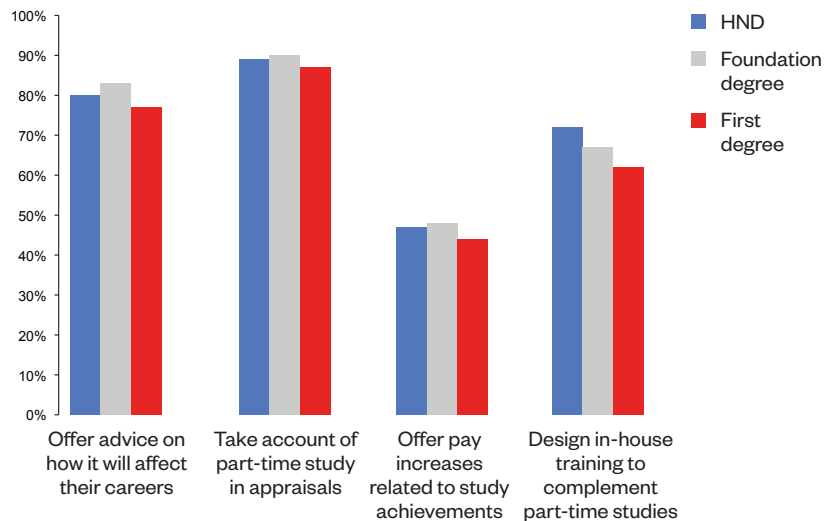
Employer support

Encouraging part-time study

HOW DO EMPLOYERS ENCOURAGE PART-TIME STUDY?



HOW OFTEN DO EMPLOYEES INITIATE PART-TIME STUDY?



SELECTING EMPLOYEES TO SUPPORT

'We look at what the business need is, and we look at the ability of the individual. At the end of the day we don't want to set anyone up to fail.'

Many part-time students are already quite well-qualified, and the Futuretrack employer survey data suggests that most part-time student employees were in associate professional, professional or managerial roles.

Research on training provision suggests that highly-educated employees receive more training than employees with few or no qualifications. For employers, it is logical to want to support employees who

have already proved themselves in higher education. For employees, it seems likely that well-qualified people are more likely to have the confidence to initiate the idea of part-time study.

ENGAGING WITH PART-TIME STUDY

Over three-quarters of employers offer employees advice on how studying part-time for a higher education qualification will affect their career and around 90% indicated that they take employees' part-time study into account when conducting staff appraisals. Around two-thirds reported that their organisations offer in-house training designed to build on employees' part-time studies.

IMPACT OF PART-TIME STUDY ON CURRENT JOBS & FUTURE PROSPECTS

'[You don't receive a salary increase just because you've qualified]. But, by qualifying, you become capable of taking on more responsibility or a bigger role, which would increase your remuneration'

There is some evidence that part-time study leads employees to take on more demanding tasks and responsibilities and progress into higher-paying jobs, but around a quarter of employers conceded that employees could be disappointed by the lack of opportunities to utilise their new skills and knowledge in their current role.

EMPLOYERS ON... SELECTING EMPLOYEES FOR PART-TIME STUDY

'A lot of it is down to self-selection...they select an avenue to go down and it is then looked at in relation to their own personal development and whether that fits in with the role they are undertaking, or a role they could undertake in future promotion'

Public administration, 100-249 employees

'It's entirely up to the individual...they'll let us know about the course. In the majority of cases it is related to their work, if it was something that wasn't then they would be expected to pay more of it themselves'

Education, 250-499 employees

'It is an open process so people are able to self-nominate...but if they don't meet our talent criteria

we won't support them. There would be no benefit to the company in doing that... [They don't warrant the extra investment until they become a high-potential employee]'

Other services, 500+ employees

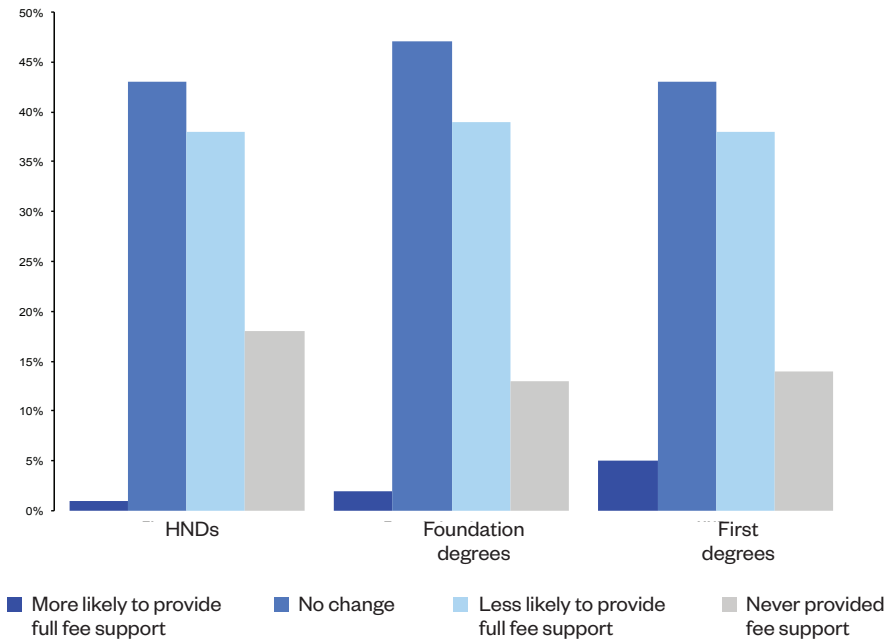
'If it benefits them and it benefits the organisation then we are prepared to consider it'

Public administration, 25-99 employees

Recession and higher tuition fees

What impact have they had on employer support for part-time study?

WHAT IMPACT WILL HIGHER TUITION FEES HAVE ON EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR PART-TIME STUDY?



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

From 2012/13, the maximum tuition fee English universities can charge for a part-time undergraduate course will be £6,750 a year. There are concerns that this increase may deter employers from offering financial support to employees who are engaging in part-time study.

The Futuretrack: part-time students 2011 employer survey found that many employers believed that the planned increases in higher education tuition fees would lead to a reduction in their provision of full fee support for employees engaged in part-time study.

Over a third (36%) of employers felt they needed more information about tuition fees and student loans, but only 46% of them believed they knew where to find this kind of information.

CONCLUSIONS FROM FUTURETRACK: PART-TIME STUDENTS

- Employees participating in part-time study are often already well qualified and in managerial, professional or associate professional occupations. This may reflect employers' willingness to sponsor employees who have already demonstrated that they will benefit from higher education, but also suggests that employees who are already well-qualified are more confident about initiating and undertaking part-time study.
- Most employers expected the skills and knowledge employees developed through their part-time study to be related to their job, reflecting the commonly held view that employer-supported study should be work-related.
- Employers stressed that achieving a higher education qualification would not automatically improve an individual's career prospects, but said they valued the skills and knowledge employees developed through part-time study.

EMPLOYERS ON... HIGHER TUITION FEES

We're starting to [support fewer people...] it's more to do with the economic situation here than with funding and fees'

Manufacturing, utilities, construction, 250-499 employees

'[We pay tuition fees in full] provided they complete the course and stay with the company for [a certain period] after the training... I wouldn't have thought [this would be affected by the fees increase]... The company would obviously take a view over the training budget, but I assume that all depends when the application goes in and what the position is at that moment in time'

Manufacturing, utilities, construction, 1000+ employees

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Bibliographic references for all the studies cited in this summary can be found in the Futuretrack: Part-time students: employer perspectives on part-time students in higher education research reports.
- Download research reports in full www.hecsu.ac.uk/futuretrack_part_time_students.htm

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