

## UEA Students at Work

### 1. Introduction

The *Student Experience Committee* commissioned a survey of students' working experiences at its meeting in October 2008. The Union of UEA Students surveyed its members between January 12<sup>th</sup> and January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009.

### 2. Profile of respondents

There were 643 responses to the online survey which was publicised through two info@uea cross-campus emails and Facebook messages to students who are members of official Union of UEA Students' groups. Of the respondents:

- 68.3% were women
- 90% were white
- 37.2% were from Norfolk or Suffolk
- 21.2% were over 25 years of age
- 56.5% came from families with no experience of Higher Education
- 94.7% were full-time students.

As the survey was named "UEA Students at Work" it is likely that there was a higher response from students who undertake paid employment, with non-workers more likely to ignore the survey. This title may reflect why some groups of students were more likely to fill in the survey than others. The survey is therefore most useful in discussing the impact that employment has on students and their studies, as opposed to how widespread it is.

### 3. Executive Summary

Student-workers at UEA:

- Are mainly employed in unskilled jobs [65%]
- Are less motivated by a desire to acquire skills or to enrich a CV than students at other institutions.
- Are most likely to work under sixteen hours in semester-time and between 25 and 32 hours in vacation-time. However, 1 in 5 students work over 17 hours in semester-time.
- Work fewer hours than the national average.
- Are most likely to be motivated to work by a desire to fund social activities but a large minority cannot afford not to work and it is these students who consider work to have the most impact on their studies.
- Do not consider vacation-time work to have a negative impact on their studies.
- Would like to see improvements in the timetabling arrangements at UEA.
- Perceive that the current system of Higher Education funding is unfair.
- Often feel that their jobs make them unable to engage in volunteering [51.4%] activity or participate in clubs, societies or representation [50.7%].
- Are generally satisfied with their employers
- Praise the employment opportunities on campus.
- Are unlikely to be a member of a trade union.

- Are sometimes paid less than the National Minimum Wage for 22 year olds [28.9%]

Male students and female students have very similar experiences. Part-time students are likely to choose this mode of study because they perceive that they would not be able to afford a full-time degree or because they have a family to support. Non-white UEA students (a majority of them Asian or Asian British) are far more likely to be motivated to work to gain experience and skills or to put on a CV and are far less likely to be worried about debt. Students over the age of 21 are more likely to be motivated by money/debt, more likely to have a semi-skilled or skilled job and more likely to perceive a negative impact on their studies than students under the age of 21. Students from Norfolk and Suffolk are more likely to work than students from the rest of the UK and international students. Students whose parents had not attended university were more likely to work than students whose parents who had.

#### 4. Type of work

Question 11 of the UEA Students at Work survey asked what type of work UEA students did. *Table A* shows their answers in comparison to figures included in NUS' *Student Experience Report 2008*<sup>1</sup>.

*Table A*

What type(s) of paid work do you do?	UEA	National [NUS Student Experience Survey 2008]
Unskilled or hourly paid work (e.g. in a bar, shop, cleaning, promotions)	65.0%	70.0%
Work related to my intended career	20.4%	27%
Work related to my career before I became a student	10.5%	11%
Work linked to course/part of course	5.7%	6%
Academic research/teaching/lecturing	5.4%	3%
Administration/clerical work/office work	12.9%	1%
Others	10.6%	5%

<sup>1</sup> NUS Student Experience Report [NUS:GFK 2008] pp.69-79

See ><http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/350/NUS%20Student%20Experience%20Report.doc>< [Accessed 5/2/09]

In comparison to students from across the country, it seems that more UEA students are doing semi-skilled work such as administration/clerical work/office work than the national average. However, fewer UEA students are engaged in a job that is related to their intended career and perhaps this is one of the contributory factors to lower scores in UEA's employability statistics.

## 5. Working hours

Tables B and C show how many hours a week that UEA student-workers are employed. UEA student-workers appear to be working fewer hours than counterparts at other institutions.

Table B

How many hours a week do you work during semester time?	UEA	National [NUS' <i>Student Experience Report 2008</i> ]
0 to 8 hours	46.1%	24%
9 to 16 hours	33.7%	47%
17 to 24 hours	12.3%	21%
25 to 32 hours	2.9%	5%
33 to 40 hours	3.6%	2%
More than 40 hours	1.4%	1%

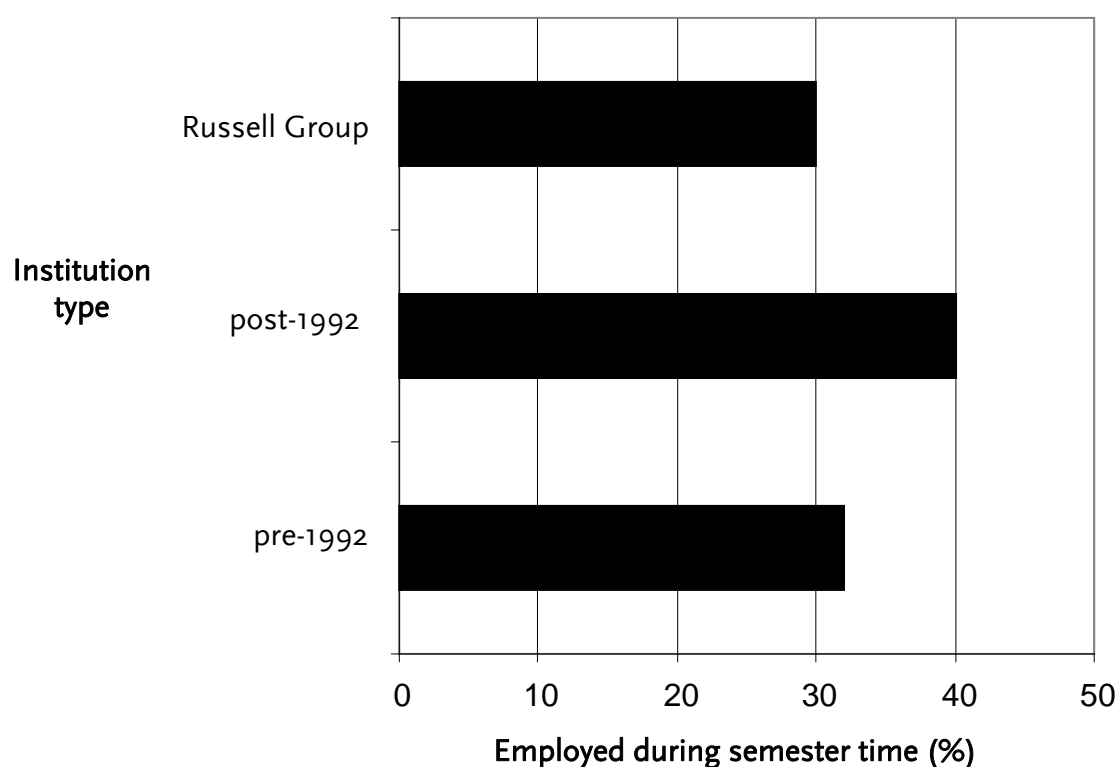
Table C

How many hours a week do you work during vacation time?	UEA	National [NUS' <i>Student Experience Report 2008</i> ]
0 to 8 hours	11.8%	3%
9 to 16 hours	11.0%	12%
17 to 24 hours	21.5%	19%
25 to 32 hours	18.5%	19%
33 to 40 hours	25.6%	35%
More than 40 hours	11.6%	12%

As this survey had too small a sample and was completed by a disproportionate number of students who were employed, it is not possible from this data to gauge how many UEA students are working during semester-time. However NUS' *Student Experience Report 2008* suggests that students are most likely to work

during semester-time if they are studying at a post-1992 institution. *Chart 1* shows the percentage of students working by institution-type<sup>2</sup>:

*Chart 1: Employed during semester time (%) by institution type*



*Chart 1* suggests that it is likely that UEA students are working less than their counterparts at “new” universities.

## 6. Motivations for working

*Table D* shows the variety of reasons why UEA students work:

*Table D*

Why do you work?	UEA	National [NUS' <i>Student Experience Report 2008</i> ]
To pay for extras such as clothes, holidays	55.7%	62%
To pay for socialising, meals, drinks out, etc.	57.7%	62%
To gain experience and skills	37.3%	50%
To put on my CV	36.3%	46%
My basic living costs exceed the	44.5%	46%

<sup>2</sup> NUS *Student Experience Report 2008* [NUS:GfK 2008] p71

amount I can borrow in student loans/from the bank		
I prefer not to get into debt	35.3%	45%
I want to reduce the amount of money I will owe when I graduate	28.5%	40%
To pay for books or other equipment related to my studies	42.0%	36%
I have a family to support	8.0%	6%
Other	8.0%	1%

As with their counterparts from across the country, UEA students are most likely to be motivated by paying for social activities. However, these students are also more likely to be working in order to pay for course-related resources than other UK students. As was seen in *Table A* UEA students also appear less motivated by employability/to put on a CV or the acquisition of skills than students at other institutions. In spite of this, there were also a considerable number of respondents who felt that their job played a valuable part in their student life:

“I would say that my job is as important as my studies as it is probably more crucial to my future career...Being able to manage your time and juggle multiple commitments is essential to life as an adult, and therefore I believe students who fit work into their degree may be better off than those who don't.”

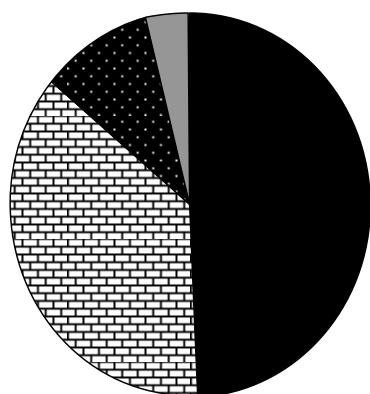
“I have had a job whilst studying for over 2 years now and it has never caused a problem. There is more than enough time in a week for me to do all of the things I want to do and I tend to work at times when I would be unlikely to study. I feel that my job has given me skills that I would not gain elsewhere and is as valuable for this as it is for the money.”

“Started working in May 2007. I work for the Norfolk Museum and Archaeology Service; great fun and I love both working and being a student being a student worker just means having to be more organised to have time to do my work.”

The reasons behind why UEA students seek employment have a clear relationship with the amount of hours worked. Those compelled to work by a lack of money to cover basic living costs will work longer than those who use employment to pay for socialising, meals, drinks out:

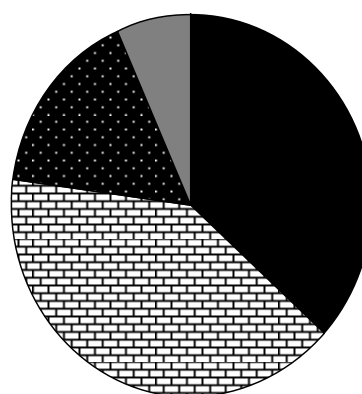
*Chart 2*

Hours worked with motivation: "To pay for socialising, meals, drinks out, etc"



*Chart 3*

Hours worked with motivation: "My basic living costs exceed the amount I can borrow in student loans/from the bank"

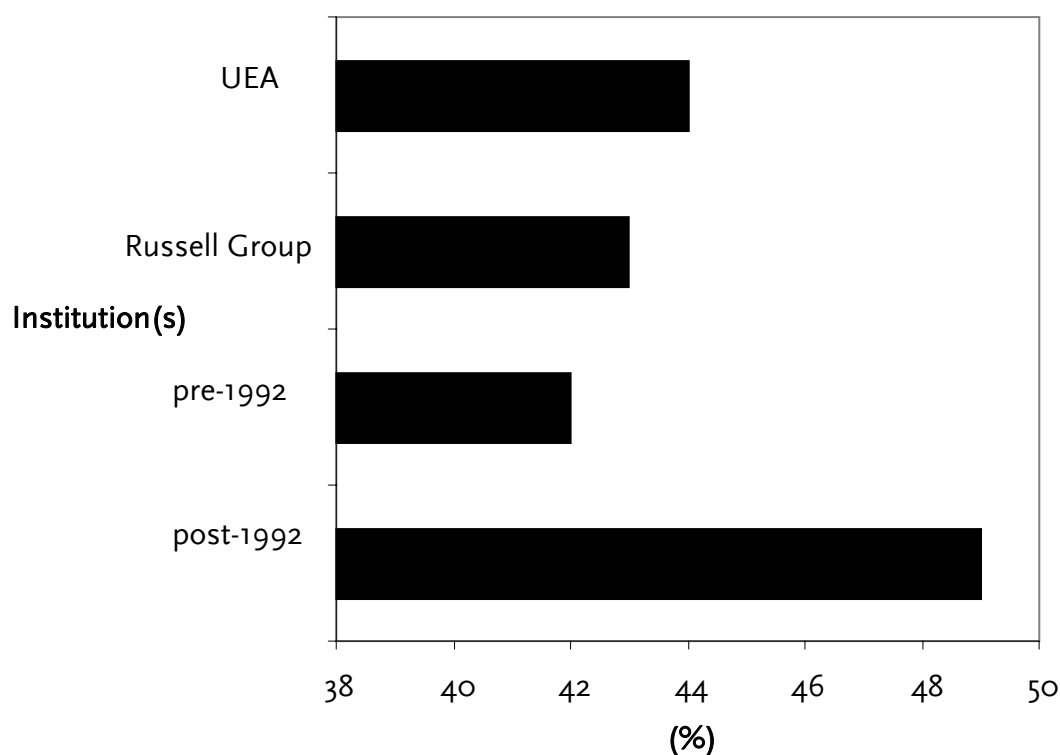


■ 0 - 8 hours    ▨ 9 - 16 hours    ▩ 17 - 24 hours    ■ 25 or more hours

*Chart 4* shows that the number of respondents to the UEA survey that were motivated by funding basic living costs is very similar to Russell Group and pre-1992 institutions<sup>3</sup>:

*Chart 4*

Motivation for working: "My basic living costs exceed the amount I can borrow in student loans/from the bank"



<sup>3</sup> NUS' *Student Experience Report 2008* [NUS:GFK 2008] p. 75

## 7. Impact on education

The *Student Income and Experience Survey 2004/5* found that 39% of working students feel that their work negatively impacts on their studies<sup>4</sup>. As can be seen in Table E, 37.2% of UEA respondents consider their semester-time job to have a negative impact on their studies. The table also shows that employment in the vacation periods, as one might expect, has little or no impact on most students' learning.

Table E

	Definitely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
My paid employment during semester time impacts negatively on my studies	11.4%	25.8%	29.8%	26.1%	6.9%
My paid employment during the holidays impacts negatively on my studies	2.0%	10.3%	16.8%	37.8%	33.0%

The main motivation of the students who definitely agreed or mostly agreed with the statement "my paid employment during semester time impacts negatively on my studies" is to fund basic living costs:

Table F

<i>Motivations for work with perception "my paid employment during semester time impacts negatively on my studies"</i>	
To pay for extras such as clothes, holidays	43.9%
To pay for socialising, meals, drinks out, etc.	48.1%
To gain experience and skills	25.0%
To put on my CV	21.7%
My basic living costs exceed the amount I can borrow in student loans/from the bank	60.8%
I prefer not to get into debt	26.9%

<sup>4</sup>*Student Income and Experience Survey 2004/5* Finch S, Jones A, Parfremment J, Cebulla A (NatCen), Connor H, Hillage J, Pollard E, Tyers C, Hunt W, Loukas G (IES) Research Report RR725, Department for Education and Skills 2006  
See ><http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pdflibrary/rr725.pdf>< [Accessed 5/2/09]

I want to reduce the amount of money I will owe when I graduate	23.1%
To pay for books or other equipment related to my studies	45.3%
I have a family to support	14.2%
Other	5.2%

It is the experience of students that need to work in order to fund basic costs and who acknowledge a negative impact on their education that is the most worrying, trapped as they are between having to seek employment and trying to limit the effects of this on their learning. Many of these respondents also perceived that the University does not understand the difficulties they faced:

"I think the University needs to be more understanding for those that are in full-time employment. Some people can not afford not to work."  
 "Just as I have found that employers do not seem to be understanding of the problems that students face, nor do university staff seem to be understanding of the problems that workers face. There does not seem to be any notion that sometimes our work may have to come first, since it is the only way we can afford to attend university. Equally, what with costs rising for students that are not off-set by government support, the work load given to students is the same as those who paid less and received more in the past."  
 "The most annoying thing is that the timetables are released so late I struggle to fit work in as I don't know my availability. They need to give us more notice about when we will need to be in and where, as for placements i could be in Lowestoft or Lynn which impacts on work."

It is comments like these that underline the importance of the early release of timetables, exam timetables, reading lists and placement information. Other respondents to the survey called for changes to the timetable to allow more concentrated time spent on campus (e.g. lectures and related seminars on the same day) rather than asking students to attend classes spread throughout the week. Perhaps the University would also consider making more widespread the practice of allowing students to sign up for specific seminar slots. Sadly, the survey did uncover some evidence of considerable negative impact on learning. One student told of her difficulties:

"I worked in my first year and failed a whole unit and got lower marks than I otherwise would because I spent the time I wasn't at uni working so that I could afford to study. Something had to give and I had to drop attention to one unit rather than mess up the whole year. This year I have tried not working and it's even worse because I have virtually no money left after I pay tuition fees from my maintenance loan. I spend half my time stressed about money."

Many students were understandably frustrated with the current system of Higher Education funding:



"I'd prefer for the financial facilities to be available to me in order that I don't have to work during term time as it places extra demands on my time and study sometimes suffers as a consequence."

"I have to work to be able to afford to come to university. My parents are unable to support me as I am part of a large family but when calculating for my student loan this was not taken into consideration. I find it hard to keep on top of my studies while working but unfortunately I have no other option."

"I feel annoyed most of the time that I have to work to be able to afford to be at university and that I don't get any amount of money as a grant when there are people I know who get grant money and so don't have to work and may not end up with as much debt as me."

"I wish I didn't have to work so I could concentrate fully on my education but because the loan is means-tested and my parents are both in well paid jobs I got the lowest loan possible that only just covers my accommodation fees, and I didn't get a maintenance grant. My employer doesn't understand that my uni work comes before my job which causes many issues in the work place. If only I received the same loan as everyone else instead of working every single day I'm not at uni..."

"It really feels like the current system is purposely designed to make poor students quit. I can't see how university life can be happy for anyone except for those who have rich parents giving them additional financial support."

"I am a postgraduate. I did not take out any student loans during my undergraduate degree. However, when I applied for this masters degree I thought that I would be able to get a student loan to help me pay for it. If I had known that postgraduates cannot get student loans I would not have applied for the degree, because I now have to have 2 jobs to help pay for it. These jobs make it very difficult for me to keep up with the coursework, and as a result I am not getting good grades or getting as much from the degree as I could."

## 8. The Student Experience: Clubs, Societies and Volunteering

The most definite impact on students who work is the lack of opportunity to participate in activities. 51.4% of respondents to the survey thought that their job prevented them from doing voluntary work and 50.7% of respondents thought that their jobs prevented them from taking a full role in clubs and societies. Students' comments supported this:

"Having a job definitely impairs on all the volunteering and extra-curricular activities I was hoping to do whilst at UEA."

"Bar work has helped my social life but in general my paid work has definitely had a negative impact on my social life and ability to join clubs."

"I work both at home and at uni - I find it a lot easier to work during the holidays than during term time. Very few of my friends work and other commitments such as volunteering or societies are usually on days when I have to work."

"This year it meant that I was unable to join sports clubs because I work in the evenings and the clubs seem to be training more than once a week, often in evenings and never on Wednesday afternoons as any other uni does."

This area is one of the most worrying findings of the report – a significant reduction in student volunteers could irrevocably shift (or even damage) the

student experience at UEA. Students rely on their colleagues being able to give up spare time to be committee members in over a hundred clubs and societies. Similarly, the Union of UEA Students has seven places on its Executive Committee for students to serve as part-time officers and it also relies on students being able to attend a number of democratic events like Union Council on specified days of the week. Furthermore, the University relies on a network of hundreds of student representatives able to give up their spare time in order to enhance the education that is on offer. The Union and University may have to implement considerable changes to a number of policies and practices if each year fewer students are able to take up these roles.

## 9. Students, their Employers and Working Rights

One of the most encouraging results of the survey is how satisfied respondents were with their conditions at work. *Table G* shows how content students were with their employer(s):

<i>Table G</i>	Definitely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
My employer understands student-workers	30.3%	34.6%	20.9%	9.5%	4.7%
My employer treats students and non-students equally	29.2%	34.8%	23.0%	9.1%	3.9%

Many students praised their employers:

"I worked in my current employment full time before becoming a student, and developed a good working relationship with my boss, and he now respects the importance of my course and appreciates that work fits in around it. I am very lucky that he has been so supportive"

"My employer understands student needs and is willing to compromise and allow me to make up shifts outside exam periods so that I can have free time to study running up to exams."

"My Employer is very reasonable with hours, and my contract is such that i do not have to work a specific number of hours per week, i am able to do as much or little in any given week as is suitable to myself."

"My employer knows I'm a student and has made concessions for which but there is only so much he is able to do. He is a small business owner so is far more flexible in hours than say a large business."

A number of students praised the employment opportunities offered by the University and the Union. Like this student from CAP:

"I am a student guide... its really good, the pay is good and I like talking about how great my course and the university are."

However, other students faced more of struggle:

"I worked for a supermarket each weekend. I would say this was quite difficult to manage, and my employer was not that understanding of my academic commitments."

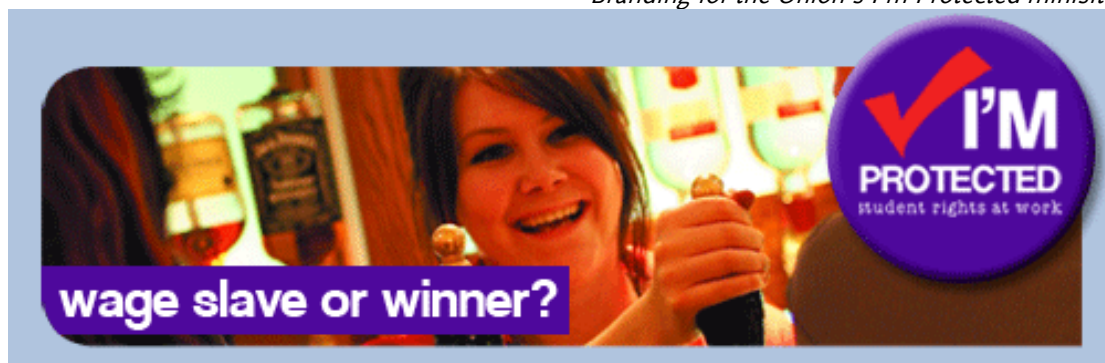
"I found that it did/does interfere with my Uni work, around essay time especially. I was asked to work lots of short shifts as well which were very inconvenient. My employer never put pressure on me to work if I was really busy but they are running a business and so I always felt bad when I wanted time off. I really could do with the money, but I'm going to quit this term because I don't want to jeopardise my degree."

"My biggest complaint is the sheer lack of possible work I can do being a student. I'm lucky to have this job as the vast majority of businesses I had applied to were unwilling/unable to give me hours I could possibly do. I'd prefer to work weekends only as I'm in uni every weekday but instead I'm stuck doing shifts when I can get one day off work a week if I'm lucky."

"There have...been a few issues with being able to attend seminars etc that have been rescheduled at short notice for a day when I have said I can work. My employer usually tries to be understanding but has had to say at several points that whilst he understands I have my studies I do also have a commitment to them meaning many times I have had to leave early or not attend at all."

Although the Union of UEA Students provides guidance on employment rights to its members<sup>5</sup>, it cannot represent every student in their workplace. It is therefore vital that strong links are built with local trade unions and there is clear scope for improvement in this area. With 65% of respondents working in unskilled employment and often on temporary or rolling contracts, it is worrying that none of the 18 year olds surveyed had joined a trade union. It is also disappointing that 28.9% surveyed were being paid less than the minimum wage for 22 year olds (£5.73). However, the 29% of respondents who had worked for either the Union or the University received pay well above the £5.73 rate.

*Branding for the Union's I'm Protected minisite*



<sup>5</sup> For instance, see ><http://www.ueastudent.com/protected>< [Accessed 5/2/09]

## 10. Equality

### 10.1 Gender

This study found no differences between genders. The responses from male and female students on motivations, working hours and experiences were roughly the same.

### 10.2 Part-time students

Thirty-two part-time students completed the survey, and although this is a very small number of respondents to allow quality analysis, it is obvious that the part-time student experience is a very different to that of a full-time student. Most of these students worked over 25 hours in both semester-time and vacation-time and the leading motivation was that of a having “a family to support”. A *Universities UK* Part-time student survey conducted in 2006 found that 82% choose to study in part-time because they cannot afford to give up their job in order to study full-time<sup>6</sup>. The same *UUK* study also found that only 23% of part-time students are eligible for any financial support. The removal of Equivalent or Lower Qualification Funding [ELQ], implemented in the academic year 2008/09, is likely to have had a further negative impact. Responses from part-time students to this survey support such grim statistics:

“I study part-time specifically in order to work. If I didn't work I wouldn't be able to afford to go to university. It is a balancing act”  
“I work full-time and am doing the degree on top. Is difficult to balance study, family and work, gets stressful and v tiring and no one gives any leeway. I may not be able to complete my studies.”

The 2010 review of Higher Education and its funding must examine the support offered to part-time students. These students are still waiting for action on Dearing's recommendation that there should be a student support system that “supports lifelong learning... by making the choices between full and part-time study... financially neutral”<sup>7</sup>.

### 10.3 Ethnicity

The small number of non-white respondents (a majority of whom were international students and 56.3% of whom classed their selves as Asian or Asian-British) had differing motivations for working than other respondents. These students were far more likely to work to gain experience and skills or to put on a CV and far less likely to be worried about debt:

13. Why do you work?	Non-White	White
To pay for extras such as clothes, holidays	46.2%	57.0%

<sup>6</sup> Callender, C., Wilkinson, D. and Mackinnon, K. *Part-time students and part-time study in higher education in the UK* Universities UK and Policy Studies Institute London: 2007

<sup>7</sup> See ‘Student Support and graduation contributions’ The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (“The Dearing Report”). See ><https://bei.leeds.ac.uk/Partners/NCIHE/>< [20.2]

To pay for socialising, meals, drinks out, etc	46.2%	59.3%
To gain experience and skills	55.8%	35.8%
To put on my CV	40.4%	36.2%
My basic living costs exceed the amount I can borrow in student loans/from the bank	25.0%	46.5%
I prefer not to get into debt	23.1%	36.2%
I want to reduce the amount of money I will owe when I graduate	17.3%	29.7%
To pay for books or other equipment related to my studies	32.7%	43.4%
I have a family to support	17.3%	6.7%
Other	13.5%	7.4%

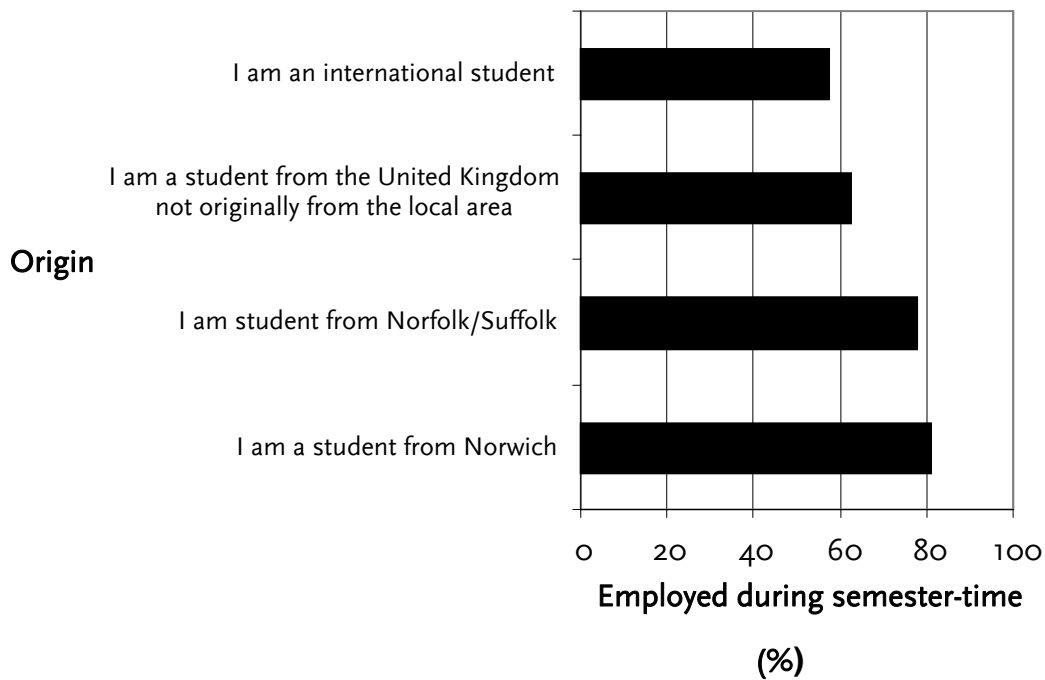
#### 10.4 Age

There are a number of clear differences between students aged 18, 19 and 20 and students aged 21 and above. In the type of work, only 50.3% of students in the 21 and older category had an unskilled job whereas 80.1% had an unskilled job in the younger age group. Motivations were clearly different too: the most common motivation for students 21 and older was “My basic living costs exceed the amount I can borrow in student loans/from the bank” [51.3%] whereas for those students younger than 21 the most common motivations were “To pay for extras such as clothes, holidays” [71.5%] and “To pay for socialising, meals, drinks out, etc” [73.2%]. There were also differing perceptions about the impact of paid employment: for those 21 and older; 43.3% suggested that semester-time employment had a negative impact on their studies compared to 30.1% in the younger group. The older group of students were also far more likely to be paid better [81.2% were paid more than £5.75 compared with 60.5%] and to be members of a trade union [14.4% compared with 4.3%] than their younger counterparts.

#### 10.5 Origin

*Chart 5* shows a clear correlation between a UEA student’s place of origin and the amount of semester-time work undertaken. Evidence suggests that more and more students are studying at their local HEI, maintaining existing friendship and support networks and keeping jobs that they had had previous to studying at the University [21% of students from Norwich had kept the same job/career upon starting their degree].

**Chart 5**  
**Place of origin and semester- time employment**

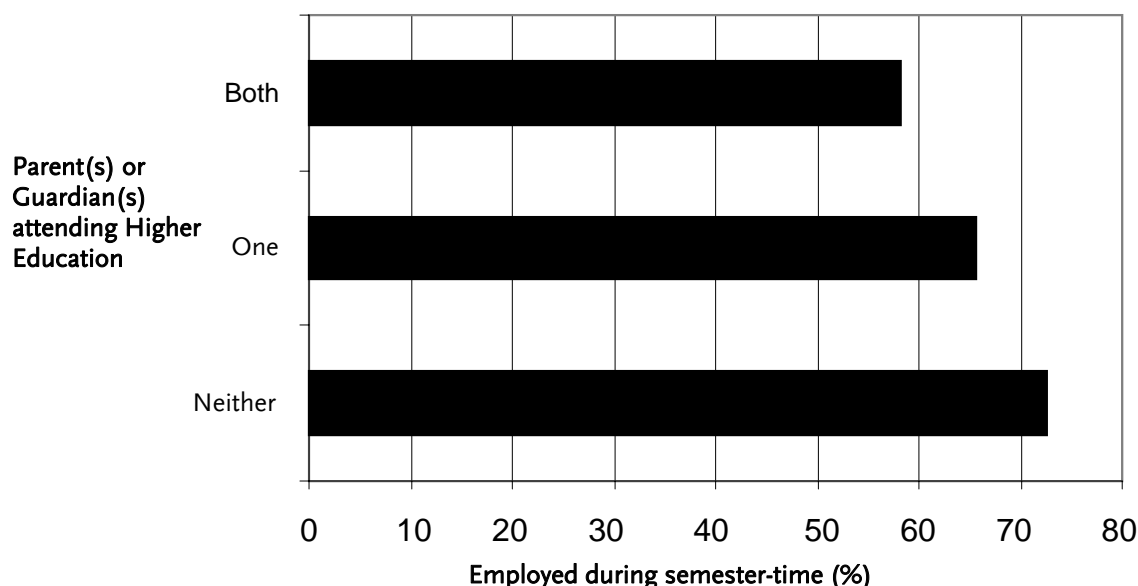


#### 10.6 Previous family participation in Higher Education

The *Student Income and Experience Survey 2004/5*<sup>8</sup> found that a higher proportion of working students came from backgrounds where their parents had no experience of higher education. Just over half, 53 per cent, of students whose parents had been through higher education had some form of paid employment. This contrasted with 60 per cent of those students whose parents had not been through higher education working. Given that a higher education is widely seen to improve job prospects, *Chart 6* shows how related UEA students' working habits are with the amount of higher education experience undertaken by their parents or guardians:

<sup>8</sup> *Student Income and Experience Survey 2004/5* Research Report RR725, Department for Education and Skills 2006

*Chart 6:*  
**Parent(s) or guardian(s) participation in Higher Education and semester-time employment**



## 11. Executive Summary

### Student-workers at UEA:

- Are mainly employed in unskilled jobs [65%]
- Are less motivated by a desire to acquire skills or to enrich a CV than students at other institutions.
- Are most likely to work under sixteen hours in semester-time and between 25 and 32 hours in vacation-time. However, 1 in 5 students work over 17 hours in semester-time.
- Work fewer hours than the national average.
- Are most likely to be motivated to work by a desire to fund social activities but a large minority cannot afford not to work and it is these students who consider work to have the most impact on their studies.
- Do not consider vacation-time work to have a negative impact on their studies.
- Would like to see improvements in the timetabling arrangements at UEA.
- Perceive that the current system of Higher Education funding is unfair.
- Often feel that their jobs make them unable to engage in volunteering [51.4%] activity or participate in clubs, societies or representation [50.7%].
- Are generally satisfied with their employers
- Praise the employment opportunities on campus.
- Are unlikely to be a member of a trade union.
- Are sometimes paid less than the National Minimum Wage for 22 year olds [28.9%]

Male students and female students have very similar experiences. Part-time students are likely to choose this mode of study because they perceive that they

would not be able to afford a full-time degree or because they have a family to support. Non-white UEA students (a majority of them Asian or Asian British) are far more likely to be motivated to work to gain experience and skills or to put on a CV and are far less likely to be worried about debt. Students over the age of 21 are more likely to be motivated by money/debt, more likely to have a semi-skilled or skilled job and more likely to perceive a negative impact on their studies than students under the age of 21. Students from Norfolk and Suffolk are more likely to work than students from the rest of the UK and international students. Students whose parents had not attended university were more likely to work than students whose parents who had.

## 12. Bibliography

Callender, C., Wilkinson, D. and Mackinnon, K. *Part-time students and part-time study in higher education in the UK* Universities UK and Policy Studies Institute 2007

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*I'm Protected* ><http://www.ueastudent.com/protected>< [Accessed 5/2/09]

'Student Support and graduation contributions' *The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education* ("The Dearing Report"). [20.2] See ><https://bei.leeds.ac.uk/Partners/NCIHE/>< [Accessed 6/2/09]