

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

0217

Assessing the extent of student part-time employment and the effects on engaging in Higher Education.

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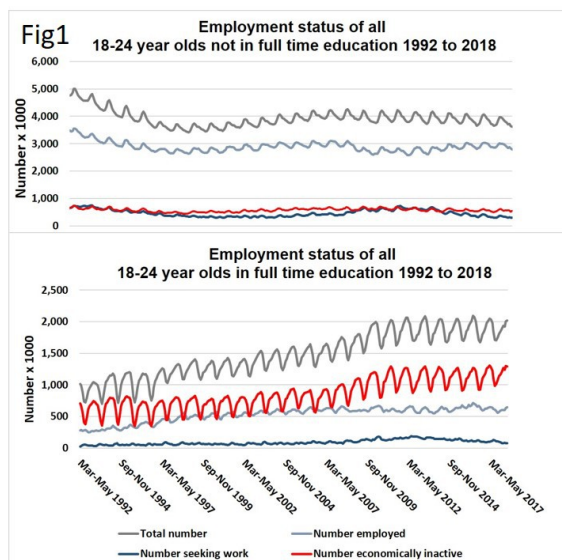
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Research Domain: Access and widening participation (AWP)

Abstract: It is accepted that many students in full-time university education have part-time jobs. Government employment data reveals that this is increasing year on year. Existing evidence shows that part-time employment can impact negatively on student progress. However, institutions do not gather detailed evidence of student commitments and the impact on attainment or progression. Many set nominal limits on working hours but do little to check this. The annual Student Academic Experience Surveys, done by Advance HE with the Higher Education Policy Institute, provides a valuable window on the extent of commitment by students and how they view their interaction with their university over recent years. This study looks at the historical trends in student part-time employment in the UK and considers the relationship to student time for study. A call is made for institutions to link attainment and progress with data on student working patterns.

Paper: Patterns of employment of students often continue from school days and it is possible to gain insight into their working lives by accessing historical data relating to employment of young people from age 16 to age 24. The data is part of the large datasets from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) that covers the employment and the labour market in the UK [1].

Shown here are the results for all 18-24 year olds in full-time education since 1992 to May of 2018 (Figure 1). The data for those not in education are also shown for comparison. It is shown as overlapping quarterly releases and is not 'seasonally adjusted'. It is easy to see that the numbers show a cyclical pattern that coincides with the summer months. Many not in employment during the academic year find employment in the summer.



The data from April to May last year showed that 32% were in employment whilst also in full time education. Worryingly a significant proportion were seeking work as unemployed.

The annual AdvanceHE and Higher Education Policy Unit (HEPI) student survey also provides a valuable insight. The 2018 report [2] shows that, over five years, 16% were working up to 9 hours per week and 20% over 10 hours per week. However, 64% report that they have no paid employment. This

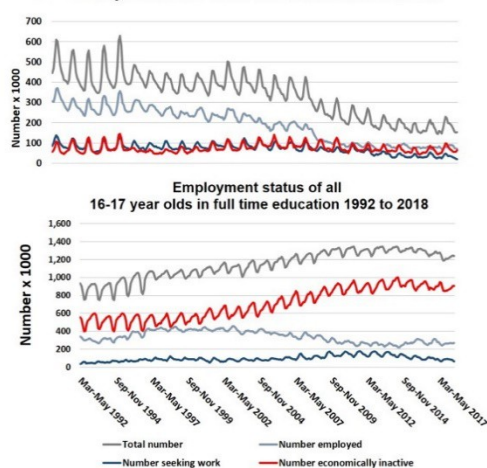
broadly aligns with the ONS quarterly employment data [1]. Analysis here of the combined data from annual Student Experience Surveys between 2012 and 2019 [3] reveals a similar increase in student employment over time. Although postulated that those from more disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to seek employment, the data shows this is not generally the case. Those in employment (using survey data from 2017 when POLAR data was included) ranged across all POLAR [4] participation area quintiles and state and independent schools. Instead, the distribution of hours in employment shows that those from state schools and lower participation quartiles tend to work for more hours. Furthermore, data from 2019 [5] included commuting distances and it was postulated that such students might work fewer hours. However, they work more hours than their non-commuting peers.

Most students have time to spare at university.

Whilst most students have no employment when at university, different degree courses have very different time demands [2]. In 2018, those studying Medicine reported working an average of 46 hours on their course with 19 hours contact with staff per week. In contrast those studying History and Philosophy degrees reported a total of 27 hours and only 8 hours contact time with staff. Thus there is considerable disparity between courses a considerable amount of time available to many students.

Those seeking a place in Higher Education also have to find time to study.

Fig 2 Employment status of all 16-17 year olds not in full time education 1992 to 2018



There is a similar pattern of employment for full-time students aged 16 to 17 (Figure 2). However, the numbers of those not employed has increased steadily in recent years. More are devoting all of their time to education. Schools have structured programmes and the goal for many is to access Higher Education. However, there remains a significant number of 16 to 17 year olds in employment or seeking work. Those that proceed to Higher Education are to be congratulated. Unfortunately, all of the indicators are pointing to fewer students from lower income backgrounds attending the elite universities and then attaining lower degree classes [7].

Social mobility and widening participation.

A gap is opening up between those not in employment and those that have to find a job (Figure 1). It is reasonable to assume that many full-time students seek employment because of a shortfall in funds. The data shows that they may not be confined to those from low participation POLAR quintile areas or state schools; indicating a wider problem. The move to maintenance loans in England set a major challenge for such students. Accommodation costs can range from around £5,000 for 36 weeks to £7,000 for the whole year [8]. Although the maintenance loan for those outside London rose from £6,236 to £8,700 pa from 2018/2019, there is still a shortfall and time will tell if this lowers the levels of employment.

The equality challenge.

There is a widening gap between those with family support and those that have to find employment. This may not be confined to students from lower income backgrounds who nevertheless tend to drop out more often and achieve lesser degrees [7]. A wider spectrum of students may be disadvantaged in the time they have for studying.

The increasing divergence in equality of opportunity must be addressed. Every institution should gather information from their students about the time that they have available to study regardless of their perceived circumstances. This could be done through each student producing a personal study plan that includes all of their time spent studying or in employment. A tutor should assess and guide each student through the process. National standards should also be set to increase the time spent studying full time to a minimum level. After all, the OECD defines employment of 30 hours or less per week as part-time work. This might be a reasonable baseline. A minimum standard for accommodation and access to books and IT should be in place. Any student finding that they cannot meet the standards should be supported. This means guaranteeing good accommodation, an increase in availability of bursaries and reinstating maintenance grants. All of this will have to happen if every student is to get an equal chance to succeed.

References.

- [1] Office for National Statistics <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket>
Note: Not in full-time education includes people in part-time education and/or some form of training. Estimates of the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training. People in full-time education are employed if they have a part-time job or unemployed if they are looking for part-time employment. The denominator = all persons in the relevant age group for economically active, total in employment and economically inactive; economically active for unemployment.
- [2] HEPI Student Experience Survey 2018. <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2018/06/07/2018-student-academic-experience-survey/>
- [3] The combined Student Experience Survey data using the large 'Youthsight' student panels from 2012 to 2019 was made available by Jonathan Neves and colleagues at Advance HE and HEPI and gratefully acknowledged.
- [4] Office for Students: POLAR – Participation of Local Areas. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/>
- [5] HEPI Student Experience Survey 2019. <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2019/06/13/student-academic-experience-survey-2019/>
- [6] National Student Accommodation Survey 2018 – Results <https://www.savethestudent.org/accommodation/national-student-accommodation-survey-2018.html#rent-costs>
- [7] IFS 2014 Socio-economic differences in university outcomes in the UK: drop-out, degree completion and degree class. <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/wps/WP201431.pdf>
- [8] UCAS Living costs for full-time students 2018. <https://www.ucas.com/student-finance-england/living-costs-full-time-students#maintenance-loan>