# Managing
# Study and Work

## The impact of full-time study and paid work on the undergraduate experience in Australian universities

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Education, Science and Training.

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# Executive summary

More full-time undergraduate students now rely on paid work as their main or sole source of income. They work an average of around 15 hours per week, but almost four out of every ten work 16 hours or more, and 18 per cent work 21 hours or more per week. The extent to which full-time undergraduate students combine full-time enrolment with substantial hours of paid work emerged as an issue for Australian universities in the last few years. Our title, *Managing study and work*, is directed to both students and universities. It reflects a belief that the new realities of study and engagement with university are not just matters for individual students but also present universities with a set of circumstances that require strategic management. This investigation— based on a survey of 1 563 full-time enrolled working students—explores the impacts of paid work on full-time students' experience of university life and their academic performance. It also briefly reviews how universities are responding to these challenges.

Students work to provide the basic necessities of life and support themselves, to get experience for post graduation employment, for reasons of independence, to supplement Youth Allowance or Austudy, to support a lifestyle, or a combination of these. Whatever the primary reason, however, there are other strong imperatives for students enrolled full-time to work, especially younger students. Employers expect that graduates can provide evidence of consistent paid work experience; economic and social pressures increasingly encourage combining study and work at all ages.

The picture we have from our investigation of how full-time students are coping with study and paid work is mixed and often complex. This should not be surprising, given individual and institutional variations, the very different circumstances students find themselves in, and variation in their levels of resources.

From this study, there is evidence of high levels of commitment to university. We found that four out of every five respondents surveyed had a strong desire to do well in their course and seven out of every ten agreed that university study ranks at the top of their priorities. Two-thirds were enjoying their course. Average weekly hours worked varied significantly according to field of study and the age at which they enter university.

Substantial proportions acknowledge money worries and stress from studying and working; 40 per cent agree that their paid work gets in the way of their academic studies; 34 per cent that worrying about money makes it difficult for them to concentrate on their studies; and a high 63 per cent, significantly more women than men, say they are often overwhelmed by all they have to do.

Nevertheless, overall levels of conflict between study and work, reported from our investigation, are not as high as we might expect. Those who cope well are using some well-established and some newer strategies to deal with competing pressures on their time. They work long hours, juggle commitments, are well organised, concentrate on assessment tasks rather than wide reading, and sometimes increase or decrease their paid work hours as study demands change. Others who do not cope so well opt to merely pass, scale down their expectations, frequently miss lectures, work on only some of the subjects they are enrolled in, or formally shift between full-time and part-time enrolment.

We did not find that substantial proportions of working students were frequently missing lectures because of their employment (only 13 per cent said they did so). Somewhat more than a third of the respondents were certainly prepared to miss lectures, but it appears that this is largely because they can get what they want from other sources, either online or from other students.

Somewhat surprisingly, we found that high or low weekly hours of paid work did not have a significant impact on average grades. Important determinants of grades are academic commitment and involvement, and study motivation and management; and for younger students only, ENTER or equivalent score, being prepared to miss lectures and classes, study and work conflict, and having 21 or more course contact hours.

Many of the jobs students have are relatively low paid and are not directly related to their study. There are strong incentives to hang on to well paid jobs that do relate to their study, and students in professional courses especially, try to juggle full-time work and full-time study in the final year of their course.

Overall, the majority of students are making rational decisions about the hours of work they can cope with. They recognise and worry about the competing demands of study and work. When the two clash, most prefer study to have priority but the investigation revealed that a substantial proportion (more women than men) find it difficult to say no to employers if they are asked to work more hours. In addition, their own financial needs and desires for a reasonable income sometimes take over. Irregularity of hours of work presents great difficulties for students and they often opt for regular hours and less income if they have the chance. The critical point in juggling competing demands often comes at exam time. Some do not recognise their need for help until it is too late.

The on-campus experience of full-time enrolled working students clearly suffers. Many have little sense of the richness that a campus-based experience can offer. University is only a small part of their lives and they spend only the hours they have to on campus. The rational decisions they make to get

through a course while working sometimes excessive hours means losing opportunities for close engagement with the learning process.

An increasing number of services at universities are being offered out of business hours, such as counselling and financial services. We listed a range of responses from libraries and information services that involve major shifts in infrastructure commitments.

We conclude that the sheer diversity inherent in the patterns of paid work amongst students makes this an issue of considerable complexity for universities. This calls for a more comprehensive analysis at the institutional level of student populations, and the changing patterns of student engagement. Institutional responses need to address, in the context of changing student expectations and realities, the question of how the educational experiences of students can be structured to enhance the learning outcomes that universities value.

# 1 New realities for full-time undergraduate students

## 1.1 Overview

In 1999, the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE), University of Melbourne, carried out its second national study of the first year experience at Australian universities. One of the most significant changes noted since the earlier study in 1994 was in relation to full-time students' paid employment. First, there was an increase in the percentage of first year full-time enrolled undergraduate students with some income from paid employment and second, an increase in the number of hours they spent in paid work per week. A number of institutional and departmental studies at Australian universities, together with what has become almost a deluge of anecdotal evidence and more recently, a national study of student finances (Long & Hayden 2001) confirm that it has become the norm for full-time undergraduate students at all year levels to combine study and paid employment. What was identified in the report of the 1999 first year experience study (McInnis, James & Hartley 2000) as an emerging issue is now recognised as a new reality for Australian universities.

This study examines two aspects of full-time undergraduate students' employment that to date have not been systematically researched in Australia—the impact on their experience of university life and their academic performance. Evidence from recent studies strongly suggest that there is likely to be an impact in each of these areas because the pattern of full-time students' engagement with higher education has changed over the past decade and especially in the last two or three years.

Full-time commencing students are spending less time on campus. From the first half of the 1990s to the end of the decade, the percentage of commencing students spending four or five days per week on campus declined and the proportion spending three days a week on campus increased roughly in proportion (10–11 per cent). In other ways too, students enrolled full-time are beginning to more closely resemble students enrolled part-time—in their study habits, the level of their interaction with other students and teaching staff and their paid work activities.

A recurring theme in this report is that part-time and casual employment is only one of a number of factors currently operating to change the experience

of university for many students. The introduction of HECS, a larger and more diverse student population, more entrepreneurial, instrumental attitudes towards education reflected across the higher education sector, and a changed economic and social context in which young people move to full adult citizenship are all having an impact. So, while part-time and casual employment is the main focus of this report, we can better understand its impact if we explore, if at times only briefly, how this relates to the broader social, economic and institutional contexts.

## 1.2 The emerging interest in students' paid employment

For many years, full-time students have sought part-time employment to support themselves or to supplement other income. While it is still the case in some countries that the long summer vacation is the primary opportunity for paid work (Baldwin & McInnis 2001), this is no longer so in Australia. However, interest in the extent of full-time students' part-time work has recently increased in a number of contexts.

The first is a growing interest in the nature, quality and relevance of on-campus university experience. McInnis (2001) attributes this interest to the conjunction of four factors in particular:

- the mass participation of students, their diverse backgrounds and expectations of university;
- the introduction of new technologies allowing more flexible forms of learning;
- the increase in market competition for students by public and private providers; and
- the emergence of quality assurance processes and performance indicators including progress and retention rates.

The notion of a full-time undergraduate student experience as a campus-based experience and the manner in which students engage with the university, especially in their first year, has served as the guiding framework for viewing student performance and progress. During the 1980s, a large body of research (for example Pascarella & Terenzini 1991) identified the effort that students put into their studies and their involvement in university life as important factors in student success. These researchers have now reviewed their previous work in the light of changes to higher education, including more online learning and more students spending less time on campus (Pascarella & Terenzini 1998). They argue that if the majority of full-time students are spending less time on campus and no longer participating in 'university life' in

ways that students did in the past, then the nature of that experience has changed to the point where the framework needs revision.

Australian academics are increasingly voicing concerns about the high proportion of students who seem to lack commitment to their studies and who are not involved with their university, let alone attending lectures. McInnis (2001) suggests that these and other 'signs of disengagement' call for a re-conceptualisation of the undergraduate experience as a process of negotiated engagement.

A second context in which tertiary students' part-time employment is being discussed is the changing patterns of young adult lives as they respond to recent trends in education and work—especially to mass participation in post-secondary education, increasing privatisation of education, the breaking of a simple nexus between education and work and casualisation of employment (Wyn 2001). For young people, the relatively straightforward connection between completing education and entering the workforce has changed. Completing the years of compulsory schooling or post-secondary education is no longer the almost universal ticket to a job it used to be under conditions of full employment. Some undergraduate degrees do not ensure entry into a desired career in the way they used to.

The almost total disappearance of full-time jobs for 15–19 year-olds, widespread casualisation of work and greatly increased participation rates in post-secondary education and training, make the metaphor of 'pathways' and 'transitions', current in the 1990s, much less appropriate. Research in Australia, Canada and the UK suggests that mixed 'patterns' is a much more appropriate metaphor for describing young people's lives, especially to describe the relationship between study and work (Wyn & Dwyer 2000).

The pattern of mixing education and work is widespread and for many students begins in secondary school. A substantial proportion of secondary school students have paid jobs. In addition, connections between schooling and work are encouraged in various formal ways; for example, by secondary school programs that promote structured workplace learning and industry experience. Lucas and Lammont (1998) suggest that it is thus meaningful and useful to conceptualise the school-to-work transition as part of a lifetime learning process of transferable skills accrual.

It is argued that one of the implications of young people combining school and work is that workplaces tend to promote 'a pragmatic perspective on education' (Dwyer, Tyler & Wyn 2001, p. 43). This increasingly competes with the broader perspective of education that schools and universities regard as fundamental with respect to values and outlooks. Through their paid work, students learn that to be successful, people must be flexible and adaptive.

'Notions of career are thus pragmatic and less related to personal identity than for previous generations'(p. 43). Compared with past generations, identities are therefore less based around achieving a career and postponing 'life' while they invest in study (Wyn & Dwyer 2000).

Young adult lives are now conceived as more complex and less certain than in the recent past. The demands of often highly 'flexible' workplaces and somewhat less flexible educational institutions have to be balanced. At the same time, research confirms that establishing and maintaining satisfying intimate relationships, friendships, a social life and leisure activities are very important elements of young adult lives.

A third context for the recent interest in paid work by full-time enrolled students is renewed concern about student finances and the adequacy of student allowances. A national survey of almost 35 000 undergraduate full-time and part-time students (Long & Hayden 2001) found 'consistent evidence of financial barriers to full-time study' and evidence that a substantial number of full-time students are in paid employment in order to get sufficient income to continue their studies.

There is also concern about levels of poverty amongst university students. An Australian Council of Social Service analysis in July 2001 (ACOSS 2001) showed that single adult students (i.e. those aged over 25 years) fare the worst on social security payments, being further below the relevant Henderson poverty line than are other groups, i.e. single, independent unemployed under-21-year-olds and over-21-year-olds, sole parents, and couples with two or more children where the breadwinner is unemployed.

Those most at risk are considered to be younger students who come from regional, rural and isolated areas and who have to live away from home while studying, as well as younger students from families with incomes which do not allow them to qualify for Youth Allowance (Long & Hayden 2001). A number of submissions to the 2001 *Senate Inquiry into The Capacity of Public Universities To Meet Australia's Higher Education Needs* (Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee 2001) include examples of students in dire financial situations.

Related to levels of student poverty are concerns that general financial worries affect students' capacity to commit and apply themselves to university study. Over one-third of commencing students in 1999 said that worrying about money interferes with their study. The study showed clearly that money worries lead to declining levels of application and motivation (McInnis, James & Hartley 2000).

Inadequate income and the stress of part-time and casual work affect student health, which in turn affects academic performance and experience of

university life. Several recent studies provide an understanding of the relationship between work, health and performance. A study of University of Ballarat students found that part-time work fails to protect some students from financial insecurity and its associated stresses (Newton & Turale 2000). It also found that borrowing from other students and the stress of having to find more work had a major impact on self-esteem and self worth and reduced students' ability to study.

Poverty, financial and emotional stress, poor health, lack of time for study and inability to attend classes interact for some students (Wilson 2000). Financial issues rated as having the most significant impact on study for students in regional campuses of La Trobe University and these students are also more likely than other students to consider withdrawing from study as a result.

Research regarding the experiences of older undergraduate students who enter university through mature age or special entry schemes (e.g. Price, Hart & Cole 1991; Scott, Burns & Cooney 1993; Ramsay, Tranter, Sumner & Barrett 1996) highlights how academic adjustment and performance are influenced by non-university factors such as employment responsibilities, family commitments, level of support from a partner or other significant people, as well as personal capacities such as time management skills. As patterns of university life for full-time enrolled students come to more closely resemble those enrolled part-time, conceptual frameworks for discussing academic outcomes for younger full-time students will need to take more account of these 'non-university' factors.

## 1.3   What we know about full-time students' employment from recent research

Research in Australia and elsewhere is beginning to provide a more comprehensive picture of students' part-time and casual employment; however, it is also revealing the complexity of students' decision making and a range of differential impacts for students. Here, we briefly review available evidence on the proportion of Australian university students employed, who is employed, the dimensions of part-time and casual work, and the impact of part-time and casual employment on students. Information which comes from a further analysis of data from the 2000 First Year Experience study (McInnis, James & Hartley 2000) is referenced as 'First Year Trends, CSHE'.

### 1.3.1   How many work?

In Australia, 78 per cent of full-time enrolled students have some paid employment and 72.5 per cent have paid employment during semester

(75.7 per cent of females and 68.6 per cent of males) (Long & Hayden 2001). Developments in Australia are not dissimilar to those in England and the US and in the following discussion we refer to several UK and US studies; however, we need to be cautious in comparing findings across countries as patterns are affected by differences in student allowance or loan arrangements, university systems and patterns of course organisation.

Over 60 per cent of students in a nationally representative sample of students in the UK had been employed at some time during the academic year and 46 per cent had worked during term-time (Callender & Kemp 2000). As in Australia, this is linked in part to the costs of higher education being increasingly shifted from the state to individuals and families. At the same time, and in recognition of employer demands that graduates have a range of generic work-related skills, the UK government is considering ways in which all higher education students can experience paid and/or voluntary work during their studies (Little 2001).

## 1.3.2   Who works?

Financial imperatives are a key factor determining whether full-time students seek employment or not; nevertheless, both financial and attitudinal factors influence term-time working (Metcalf 2001) and the two often interact. Females are more likely than males to be employed (Long & Hayden 2001; McInnis, James & Hartley 2000). Commencing undergraduate students born in Australia and who speak English at home are more likely to be studying and working than studying only. Students born overseas or who live in a home where a language other than English is spoken are more likely to be studying only than working (McInnis, James & Hartley 2000). Commencing students who attended Catholic and Independent/private schools are more likely to be employed than not, while the reverse is true for students from government schools (First Year Trends, CSHE).

Findings concerning the influence of family socio-economic background suggest that a number of factors interact in sometimes complex ways. The 1999 first year study found that commencing students who were employed were significantly more likely than students who are not employed to have fathers with a professional occupation, and those who did not work at all were more likely to have a father in a 'blue collar' occupation. Students whose fathers are not in professional occupations are more likely to be receiving some income from Youth Allowance. In addition, we speculated that this finding may reflect student and family beliefs that academic results should not be put at risk by working unless it is absolutely necessary.

### 1.3.3   Dimensions of part-time work

Analysing and reporting on students' paid work presents some problems. Defining the dimensions of the work, calculating and using average hours of work, and variations across institutions and fields of study all require careful consideration. Systematic attempts to 'unpack' the dimensions of part-time work and to investigate their differential impacts have occurred only relatively recently. In addition to the number of hours worked, Ford, Bosworth & Wilson (1995) suggest that the following dimensions of employment profiles are important:

- single versus multiple jobs;
- concentrated versus fragmented working;
- regular versus one-off employment;
- flexible versus fixed hours;
- the presence or absence of 'perks' or incentives, such as free meals; and
- the level of financial rewards.

To these, we might add the degree to which part-time or casual employment is related to a student's course; whether employment is during the semester, during holidays and long vacations or a mixture of both (an element of concentrated versus fragmented working); and whether hours of employment are dictated by the employer or by the student.

Most discussion refers to the average hours worked. Averages are useful; they help to identify the majority experience and provide baselines against which we can track trends. At the same time, it is obviously important to remember that across the whole body of full-time enrolled undergraduate students, there are substantial numbers employed either for many more hours than the average or for fewer hours. Averages also disguise critical differences in the way the work hours are distributed. There are major variations in the extent to which work hours are concentrated or spread out over any given week.

Student employment rates vary across institutions and fields of study. Reasons include differences in the socio-economic profile of the student body, flexibility of course and institutional arrangements and the extent of opportunities for part-time work in the area, especially in some regional areas. Metcalf (2001) found substantial differences between term-time and vacation only employment among the four UK universities in her study, according to the status of the university (whether they were 'old' or 'new' and had high or low entry requirements). The high status university had less than half the rate of term-time employment as the low status university.

Fields of study obviously vary considerably in course organisation, contact hours and assessment requirements. Arts and Humanities students have considerably more non-class time at their disposal than students in vocationally specific courses such as Medicine.

# 2   The Investigation

## 2.1   Aims of the study

The project brief was focused on ways in which full-time students who are in paid employment manage their study and their university experience. It was also concerned with their perceptions of the relationship between their study and work and the impact on their academic study and their experience of university life. It was decided to focus on other than commencing undergraduate students as CSHE already has good baseline data from two studies of commencing students carried out during the 1990s.

The major questions guiding the 2001 study were:

- What factors influence students to seek part-time and casual work?
- How do students manage their study and employment commitments?
- Do students perceive that the demands of study and employment compete?
- How do they set priorities if study and employment commitments clash?
- Does part-time and casual employment have an impact on the academic performance of full-time students and their commitment to study?
- Does part-time and casual employment have an impact on engagement with university life?
- Do the types of jobs available to students have specific impacts on their performance and their experience of university life?
- How are students' hours of employment spread and does this have an impact on performance and experience of university life?

Additionally, we were asked by DETYA to give consideration to how universities are responding to changed patterns of student attendance in providing student facilities and services.

## 2.2   Methodology

In summary the methodology involved:

- Further analysis of data on employment of full-time students from the CSHE First Year Experience study, a national study of 2600 commencing students in seven Australian universities conducted in 1999.

- A survey, carried out in September 2001, of second and later year undergraduate full-time enrolled students from nine universities across four Australian states. On-site convenience surveys were conducted at seven universities—the aim was to collect between 125 and 150 at each—and the same survey was also mailed to a random sample of 1 500 second and later year undergraduate students from each of two other universities.
- Telephone interviews with a total of 30 students from the participating universities about their paid work.
- Interviews and/or focus groups with a small number of teaching staff, student services staff and student facilities staff from the seven on-site universities.

An on-site survey was chosen as the main means of gathering information from students for the following reasons:

- In previous studies, on-site surveys have proved an effective means of distributing survey instruments to substantial numbers of students in a relatively short time.
- Our experience indicates that a personal approach is often persuasive in getting sometimes survey-weary students to complete a survey instrument.
- Since the target group was students who were employed, it was an efficient way to ensure that only students who were in scope received and completed the instrument.
- The inclusion of focus groups and individual interviews with academic and other staff required researchers to visit the institution, so on-site surveys were relatively simple to organise.

We aimed to maximise the response rate on each and every item by keeping the survey relatively short and easy to complete but tightly focused on the key questions for the investigation. The convenience sample, with its personal approach and opportunity to briefly check whether items were completed, was also designed to maximise the gathering of complete data for all respondents. At four of the seven universities where an on-site survey was conducted, one of the interviewers was an international Vietnamese student. We employed her with the clear intention of enhancing cooperation and encouraging reliable data collection from overseas and local students from an Asian background.

The survey included questions about (a) students' background, course, semester marks and sources of income, (b) their paid work, (c) the relationship between their paid work and their academic study and (d) their university experience. In order to draw a picture of full-time students' engagement in paid employment, we asked respondents for information on the number of hours they worked, when they worked, the type of job(s) they

had, their hourly rate of pay and who determined their hours of casual work. Further details of the methodology and discussion of some methodological issues are in Appendix A.

## 2.3   Characteristics of the 2001 survey respondents

A total of 1 563 students responded to the 2001 survey, some 960 from the ' survey' institutions (an average of 137 from each) and just over 600 from the two 'mailed survey' institutions. Based on what we know from existing research of the proportions of full-time undergraduate students who are employed at each, we estimate the response rate for the mailed surveys as 36 per cent from one university and approximately 33 per cent from the other.

There are more female than male full-time undergraduate students in our target group overall (see Appendix A) and we know that females are more likely to be in paid employment than are their male counterparts (76 per cent compared with 67 per cent) (Long & Hayden 2001). We would expect therefore that approximately 59 per cent of survey respondents would be female. The actual figure was 64 per cent, largely as a result of more females responding to the mailed survey. We have therefore weighted males in the survey (see Appendix A for details). The weighted figures are used in all reporting of findings of the group as a whole. Actual figures are used in reporting findings by gender.

Three-quarters of the respondents were born in Australia, eight per cent in China or a South East Asian country (the largest proportions in Malaysia and Hong Kong) and 16 per cent in a diverse range of other countries. The fathers and mothers of 11 per cent of respondents were born in China or a South East Asian country and 23 per cent of respondents came from a home where a language other than English is spoken.

Thirty per cent of respondents were in the final year of their course, and the spread of second, third and later year students correspond roughly to the national figures for full-time second year and later undergraduates (Appendix B).  Respondents' field of study is also comparable to the national distribution (Appendix B).

On the basis of their age and year level, respondents were grouped into three categories—'traditional entry' students, i.e. their age and year level indicates that they went from school to university; 'delayed entry' students (entering university between ages 20–24) and 'mature age' entry (entering at 25 years and later). Seventy-four per cent of respondents were traditional entry; 18 per cent were delayed entry and eight per cent were mature age entry students.

While the proportion of mature age students may seem low, many mature age students are part-time and those who are full-time are less likely than younger students to be employed. We know that compared with younger students, significantly fewer commencing students aged 25 years and over (i.e. mature age entry students) are working part-time and significantly fewer rely on part-time or casual work as a major source of financial support. Significantly more rely on support from a spouse or partner, unemployment benefits or other financial means (First Year Trends, CSHE). It is difficult to estimate whether younger students are over-represented amongst survey respondents; however, we are confident that the total number of respondents and the numbers of delayed and mature age entry respondents allow for valid comparisons between the three groups.

The majority of respondents (72 per cent) were deferring their HECS payments until the end of their course, 19 per cent had paid their HECS fees up front, two per cent were Australian fee-paying students and five per cent were overseas fee-paying students. Most of the 'others' were paying part of their fees upfront.

## 2.4 National perspectives, institutional and individual variations

The study includes nine institutions, some of which are quite diverse in their history, size, orientation and the composition of their student body. A national study of this size, while soundly based methodologically, faces difficulties in conveying such institutional diversity which results not only from the factors mentioned but also from variations in the way they cater for diverse student populations and locational influences on the type and availability of part-time work. Wherever possible we have acknowledged this variability and attempted to do justice to the complexity of many of the trends and issues raised in and by the study. However, in seeking an overall view of what is happening and identifying broad trends in regard to full-time students' and paid employment, we are aware that some of the variability and the uniqueness of different institutions is inevitably lost or down played.

So too is it difficult to convey the breadth of student experience in relation to full-time study and part-time employment. We report findings by gender, age, whether respondents entered university directly from school or not and field of study, as appropriate; however, there are other important groupings, such as students from rural areas who have to shift to the city for study and full fee-paying overseas students. During the consultations with universities, concerns were expressed about the impact of part-time work pressures on

some overseas students. We have included comments on their particular circumstances in the body of the report; however, in Chapter 7, we present a rationale for a more detailed investigation in the future.

The part-time work of full-time mature age students also requires further investigation. The life circumstances of students in their thirties, forties and fifties differ in substantial ways from students in their early twenties; nor are older students a homogenous group.

The changes occurring in relation to full-time students and part-time employment are ongoing and most universities are in the process of responding to them. Even the principal terms used—full-time study, paid employment, part-time and casual employment—require examination, as consultations with academic and other staff and interviews with survey respondents made clear. These and other issues are taken up throughout the report.

## 2.5  Paid work and unpaid work

For simplicity, we use the term 'work' to refer to paid work and to distinguish it from both 'study' and 'unpaid work'. However, we acknowledge that there are many types of work; study itself is legitimately regarded as 'work'. It is also the case that unpaid work has at least an equal and sometimes a greater impact than paid work on the time available for study and participation in university-related activities.

Much unpaid work comes out of the necessity of caring for oneself and having responsibilities for and obligations to other people, most frequently family members. Some people manage the full-time care of family members as well as being full-time enrolled students; others have paid or unpaid responsibilities in a family business as a son or daughter or a partner or spouse.

Other unpaid work is truly voluntary in that it is freely chosen; some may be a mixture of choice and necessity. Whatever the nature and motivation for unpaid work, it has an impact on the amount of time and energy available for paid work and for study.

# 3   Patterns of paid employment

## 3.1   Importance of paid work

Paid work is the only or main source of income for 75 per cent of respondents and a minor source for 23 per cent (Table 3.1). Twenty-six per cent rely on Youth Allowance or Austudy as their only or main source. Roughly the same proportion (24 per cent) rely heavily on income from parents or other family members, nevertheless 40 per cent said they received no income from this source. Overall, savings did not figure as an important source of income although one-third said it was a minor source. The apparent anomalies in Table 3.1 (the four per cent who said their only source of income was Youth Allowance or Austudy and the four per cent who said that income from paid work was not a source of income) is likely to be because the question we asked referred to income 'during the university year' and we know that four per cent of respondents worked during university breaks and holidays only.

Table 3.1      Income sources during the university year (% of respondents), n = 1563

|  | Paid work | Youth Allowance or Austudy | Parents/family | Savings |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Only source | 20 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| Main source | 55 | 22 | 20 | 7 |
| Minor source | 23 | 15 | 36 | 33 |
| Not a source | 3 | 60 | 40 | 58 |

Table 3.2 shows sources of income for traditional entry, delayed entry and mature age respondents. It confirms the importance of paid work for respondents of all ages but especially for younger students, who rely heavily on it. Although parents and family members are a major source of income for 25 per cent of traditional entry and 20 per cent of delayed entry respondents, those living at home are likely to be receiving some financial benefit in doing so through free board or reduced rent, sharing of resources etc. Youth Allowance or Austudy is most important for delayed entry and mature age respondents. This suggests that we have tapped a group of older respondents who do not have access to substantial support from others and/or who have not had sufficient time to build up their own financial resources.

Table 3.2    Main or only sources of income during the university year for traditional entry, delayed entry and mature age respondents (% of respondents), n = 1563

|  | Paid work | Youth Allowance or Austudy | Parents/family | Savings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Traditional | 77 | 21 | 25 | 8 |
| Delayed | 70 | 35 | 20 | 10 |
| Mature age | 58 | 46 | 15 | 8 |

## 3.2   Hours worked per week

On average, the 1563 respondents worked 14.7 hours in the most recent week they were employed. This corresponds closely to the average of 14.5 hours of semester-time work for full-time students found by Long and Hayden (2001).

The average for 2001 survey respondents (all of whom were second year and later undergraduates) is around two hours more than the average number of hours worked by commencing students (McInnis, James & Hartley 2000). A conservative estimate of hours worked was adopted in the latter study, so we are cautious about making any general statements comparing hours worked in commencing and later years.

Perhaps contrary to expectations, in the 2001 survey, there was no significant difference between the average hours worked per week by respondents in the final year of their course and continuing students. The interviews and consultations suggest that several factors may be operating here to cancel out the possibility of differences. They are discussed later.

While the average number of hours worked per week is within the 10–15 hours range which academics seem intuitively to believe is about right for most students, Table 3.3 shows that 38 per cent of respondents are working 16 hours or more and 18 per cent are working 21 hours or more per week. Even higher percentages of respondents have at some stage recently worked over 16 hours per week (section 3.3 below).

As might be expected, we found a significant relationship between hours of paid work and weekly course contact hours. Respondents with 15 and less contact hours worked an average of 15.3 hours, but once course contact hours went over 15, paid work hours began to drop—to 14.7 hours for those with 16–20 course contact hours and to 13.2 hours when respondents' contact hours were 21 or more per week. The differences were statistically significant.

Table 3.3    Hours of paid work in the most recent week of work (% of respondents)
n = 1563

|  | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| 1 to 5 hours | 10 |
| 6 to 10 hours | 27 |
| 11 to 15 hours | 24 |
| 16 to 20 hours | 20 |
| 21 to 25 hours | 11 |
| 26 to 30 hours | 3 |
| 31 or more hours | 4 |

## 3.2.1    Diversity in patterns of hours worked

We explored the data for any significant differences in field of study, entry type, gender, place of origin and ENTER scores. Table 3.4 shows the average weekly hours worked, the average number of days spent on campus and average course contact hours by selected fields of study and those doing a Combined degree. (Numbers in Law, Agriculture, Architecture and Veterinary Science are not sufficiently large to report findings with confidence.)

The data suggest a close relationship between course contact hours and hours of paid work each week. Overall, there is an inverse relationship between the number of hours of paid work, and average days spent on campus and the number of course contact hours. Compared with all other respondents considered together, those studying Commerce/Business/Administration had significantly fewer course contact hours and they spent fewer days on campus. It is not surprising then to find that they had the highest average weekly hours of work (16.4 hours). On the other hand, respondents studying in the Health and Engineering/Surveying fields had the highest course contact hours (20+) and the highest average number of days on campus. They worked fewer hours than other respondents (13.3 and 13.2 hours).

For other fields of study, average hours worked were: Arts/Humanities/Social Science 15.3 hours, Education 15.3 hours, Science 14.4 hours and Combined courses 14.2 hours.

Table 3.4    Average weekly hours of paid work, average days spent on campus per week and average course contact hours by grouped fields of study, n = 1563

|  | Hours of paid work | Days on campus | Course contact hours |
|---|---|---|---|
| Commerce/Business/Admin. | 16.4 | 3.4 | 13.0 |
| Arts/Humanities/Social Science | 15.3 | 3.8 | 13.1 |
| Education | 15.3 | 3.3 | 12.9 |
| Science | 14.4 | 4.2 | 17.9 |
| Combined | 14.2 | 4.0 | 15.5 |
| Engineering/Surveying | 13.7 | 4.4 | 21.1 |
| Health | 13.3 | 4.4 | 23.3 |

As we might expect, as well as differences in the average number of hours worked by students in different fields of study, the likelihood of being employed also varies according to field of study. The First Year study found that commencing Arts and Humanities students are more likely to be employed and Engineering students more likely not to be employed (First Year Trends, CSHE).

On average, delayed and mature age entry respondents are working around an hour and a half longer per week than younger respondents (a statistically significant finding); they are also significantly more likely to be working 26 or more hours than their younger counterparts. This finding is likely to be confounded by field of study differences as overall, mature age students are less likely to be studying in areas with high contact hours and more likely to be in areas with lower contact hours.

We know that full-time students over 25 years are less likely than younger students to be working part-time (Long & Hayden 2001; McInnis, James & Hartley 2000). Over 25 year-olds are less likely than younger students to rely on part-time or casual work as a major source of financial support, and they are significantly more likely to rely on support from a partner or spouse, unemployment benefits or other financial means (First Year Trends, CSHE). It is commonly observed that these students are more likely to make their delayed investment in higher education a priority. Nevertheless, older students who have not been able to build up substantial savings through a history of employment, or who do not have access to financial support from a partner, spouse or from elsewhere often find it extremely difficult to cope financially.

We found no difference in the average hours worked by women and men. Again, field of study is likely to have an impact here as women are less likely to be found in, e.g. Engineering (one of the few if not the only field of study with a majority of males) which has high contact hours, and more likely to be studying Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, with lower contact hours.

No overseas full fee-paying students said that they worked more than 20 hours per week; around half said that they worked 6–10 hours, 17 per cent worked 11–15 hours and 14 per cent worked 16–20 hours. Under government regulations, international students are allowed to work up to 20 hours per week.

In the 2001 survey, we asked respondents for their ENTER or equivalent score. We found a relationship between hours of paid work and ENTER scores. Respondents with high ENTER or equivalent scores are significantly more likely to be working 1–10 hours per week than 21 hours and over; conversely, respondents with the lowest ENTER or equivalent scores are more likely to be working longer hours. (Some older students may be excluded from this analysis because they entered under special schemes and were not able to provide an ENTER or equivalent score). The finding is likely to be related to

field of study as respondents doing Health studies, for example, had high ENTER scores and Health also has high course contact hours (Table 3.4).

### 3.2.2 Motives for working long hours

The interviews mostly suggested that respondents working long hours were doing so for the money. The following cases show just how students find themselves pushed towards the danger zone of overwork—not always by choice. Some get almost trapped into longer hours because they find it difficult to say 'no' to employers and/or because they believe the extra burden is going to be for a limited time only.

**Hung** is an accounting student in his second last year of study. He has to work to 'live and to pay off his HECS'. When he filled out the survey, he was working 24 hours per week but this had increased to 32 hours by the time he was interviewed as he had been offered the position of assistant manager where he works and he decided to take it because of the extra money. However, he did not count on the extra time associated with his new position, which means he often has to stay behind to do additional unpaid cleaning and report writing.

**Jenny** has almost finished her journalism course. She is not eligible for Youth Allowance and her parents are unable to support her. She lives with her boyfriend who is also a student. She averages 25–30 hours per week as a bartender/waitress, is often overwhelmed by everything she has to do and gets by, by being super organised.

**David** lives with his parents and works to pay off his car, to pay for entertainment, a mobile phone, sporting activities and other things he can not ask his parents to pay for. He says he did not really choose to be working the 25 hours per week he is currently working. He used to do 15 hours but because others were away or sick he was rostered on for more work for several months and didn't feel he could say no. He does not know anyone else at his workplace who is a student; most work full-time or part-time but don't study. David feels a bit caught. He used to have a casual job that had the advantage of flexibility but it became 'too casual' and he wasn't earning enough so switched to his current regular part-time job.

**Cheryl** is in the second year of her course but it is her third year at university. She decided to try a year of full-time enrolment on the basis that she could always drop back to part-time if it proved too much for her. She has nurse training and was working for 12 hours a week until her partner lost his job. She then increased her hours to 24 but feels she will have to take a break around exam time. She has two school age children.

### 3.2.3 The increasing phenomenon of full-time study and full-time employment

A small percentage of respondents are working full-time hours. At each of the universities where consultations were held, academic and student support staff said they knew of students who were enrolled full-time and holding down one full-time job or the equivalent of full-time hours in more than one job. There is a view that this is increasing. Three main motives seem to drive decisions to work full-time hours. The first is financial. The second is a desire to get a foot in the door to establish a career. While not restricted to final year students, this was thought to be more common as students neared the end of their course. In fields which are highly competitive, for example some business and commerce courses (but not only in such courses), students look for career-based part-time jobs in order to get a start. Such jobs may well become more demanding of their energy and time than other less career-oriented jobs.

Third, some students are motivated to work virtually full-time hours in order to qualify for the independent rate of Youth Allowance. They are prepared to put up with the stress of doing so because they know it is for a limited period only. (Currently, in order to qualify, students are required to earn $14 196 over 18 months since leaving school; have worked full-time for 30 hours per week for at least 18 months since leaving school; or have worked part-time for at least 15 hours per week for at least two years since leaving school).

Whatever the motivation, full-time work reportedly puts full-time students and their academic performance under considerable stress. Counselling staff report impacts on student physical and psychological health that may well lead to a decision to switch to part-time study. Our interviews tend to support this. The fluctuation between full-time and part-time enrolments related to employment stress is discussed later in this report.

## 3.3 Regular and irregular patterns of employment

Most people can organise themselves around regular work commitments, but constantly changing hours and short notice times make it much more difficult. Regularity and irregularity of paid work is likely to have an impact on how students are able to manage their study and their job. We have a number of indications that somewhere between two and four out of every ten respondents have irregular hours of paid employment.

- Twenty three per cent disagreed that they were employed according to a fairly regular schedule (68 per cent agreed that they were; the remainder

were unsure). Females were significantly more likely than males to say they had a fairly regular schedule.

- Forty one per cent of females and 35 per cent of males said that the hours they worked in the most recent week they worked were either more than, or less than, the average number of hours they usually worked.

- Around one in five of the respondents interviewed had had some change in the hours they worked between the time they filled out the survey and when they were interviewed by telephone (a period of between two and five weeks), either as a result of their own decision or changed conditions at their place of employment.

Variability of hours is also shown in responses to a question regarding casual work. We asked respondents who defined their jobs as casual, the least and most number of hours they had worked in any week during the past month. The hours ranged from an average low of 8.5 to an average high of 20.5.

The spread of hours for individuals was wide, with 21 per cent reporting that the hours they worked varied by between 11–15 hours and 15 per cent between 16–20 hours. While some of this variability is likely to be the 'normal' variation of casual work, it could also be due to a range of other factors, including respondents' decisions to cut back or increase hours. The interviews suggested that some respondents found highly variable work very stressful and they were prepared to make sacrifices to get greater stability of hours and hence have more predictable incomes—if they are lucky enough to be able to find a way of doing so. However, stability can have a financial downside:

> **Judy** is a trained nurse. She went back to study after the breakup of a long-term relationship to retrain in law, something she had always wanted to do. She does not get Austudy. Last year, she was working casual hours in the emergency department of a hospital but found it was too irregular. She could not plan ahead for the following fortnight and never knew whether she would have enough money to last out the fortnight. So this year, she decided to take a permanent shift. This has been much better as far as stability and planning are concerned, but she is actually working more hours for the same amount of money. She has been working anywhere between 20 and 30 hours per week but cut it back to 16 hours in second semester as she was falling behind in her university work.

### 3.3.1   Who determines hours?

Variability of hours, especially in casualised jobs, can be a matter of personal choice, be determined solely by the employer, or be a mixture of both. About equal numbers of casual workers said the hours and time of their

work were mostly determined by when they wanted to work, and by their employer(s) (46 per cent and 47 per cent respectively) while eight per cent said that both applied.

A substantial proportion of respondents (53 per cent) agreed that they find it difficult to say 'no' to an employer when they are asked to work more hours than they normally do; 36 per cent said that this was not a concern for them. While there was no appreciable difference between female and male responses in regard to who determined their hours of work, females found it more difficult to say 'no' to an employer. Females were almost twice as likely to agree than disagree that it was difficult to say 'no' (59 per cent compared with 31 per cent). Males were about equally likely to agree or disagree (around 44 per cent for each) and significantly less likely to find it difficult than did females. We can speculate that this may be due to different levels of female and male assertiveness and/or feelings of responsibility. It may also relate to differences in the way in which females and males interpret and report the difficulty of saying 'no'.

### 3.3.2   When respondents work

Ninety-two per cent of respondents work both during the semester and in university breaks and holidays; only three per cent during semester only, and four per cent during university breaks and holidays only. In later reporting of some findings on the impacts of employment, we have excluded respondents who work only during university holidays and breaks, as their paid work is not likely to have any impact on their study.

Most respondents' hours of work are spread across both weekdays and weekends. The most common pattern is to work on both weekdays and weekends; 40 per cent of respondents did so. Around 30 per cent work mostly on weekdays and the same proportion mostly on weekends. This means that seven out of ten respondents have some weekend work. (We defined weekend work as including Friday night as well as Saturday and Sunday.)

From the interviews it seemed that as we expected, during the long university break it is common for students to increase the hours they work in their semester-time job, to full-time if possible, by taking on extra shifts. In this way, they are able to get some money behind them for expenses during the following year, or for a specific purpose such as a future holiday or, as in the following instance, to assist in paying HECS fees.

> **Sharon** is doing a Commerce (marketing) degree. She usually works 20 hours per week (two nights per week and a whole day on Sunday) but goes up to full-time during the vacations. She has had

the same job for several years and is aware that her employer relies quite heavily on her experience. She is also very conscious of her responsibilities. She lives with her parents but tries to pay her way as much as she can, including sharing with her parents the payment of upfront HECS fees. Running a car is her biggest expense but she needs a vehicle because she drives to work and has to get home safely as she is there until late at night.

We do not know how many students are able to get full-time vacation work that is closely related to their course and better paid than the work they do during semester time. There are distinct advantages for students who are able to find full-time vacation work that pays well and allows them to build up a bit of a reserve to fall back on. However, such work is not always easy to find. Having the right networks helps:

In the fourth year of his five-year Engineering and Commerce degree, **Brett** decided to give up the casual job he had during term-time and holidays in previous years in order to concentrate on his course. He receives the independent rate of Youth Allowance as a result of his previous work. He has to work full-time during the holiday breaks and is grateful that he has been able to get jobs through friends and colleagues in his sporting networks. He believes that if you have the choice, it is more valuable to do course-related paid work than to work long hours in poorly paid jobs as some students do. For him, it is not worth the stress of working long hours for small pay and jeopardising his academic results. He likes his holiday work because it is directly course-related, gives him access to a lot of career-related information including what people in different areas actually do, and helps him decide what it is he wants to do when he finishes his degree.

In the past, the pattern of paid work for young full-time undergraduate students tended to be to work in the long vacation only (Baldwin & McInnis 2001). They would work full-time in the long vacation and save enough to get themselves through the coming year, generally with help from parents, a student allowance, a bursary or scholarship.

## 3.4   Other aspects of employment

In Chapter 1, we discussed the established pattern for secondary school students to have part-time or casual work and to sometimes continue in the same job when they move to higher education. Half of the respondents said they had paid employment during Year 12, with significantly more females

than males likely to have done so, and 26 per cent said that at least one of the jobs they currently had was a carryover from secondary school.

Nine per cent of respondents had a job in a business run by a member of their family. Working in a family business is likely to have potential advantages and disadvantages depending in part on the type of business, the responsibilities involved and the financial returns. Some choose not to be involved in a family business for reasons of independence. One interviewee said she had turned down an offer of employment from her father because she 'wants the feeling of not being dependent on a parent', even though she admitted that the road she had chosen made her life a lot harder and more stressful.

Respondents who worked in a business owned by a member of their family were more likely than those who did not to be male than female, to have attended an independent school, to be paying their fees up front, and to live with their parents or other family members. Their paid work ranged across the spectrum from managers to labourers. It appears that for these respondents, work in family businesses was either a second job, or it was done only in the long vacations and university holidays. People working in family businesses were more likely to say their job was a carryover from high school and perhaps more importantly, to say that they had a choice in the times they worked.

Unlike the US, Australian universities do not offer many opportunities for students to work on campus and there are indications of substantial variation in the extent of such opportunities across institutions. Only eight per cent of respondents to the 2001 survey said they had at least one of their jobs on campus. On one campus, student service staff reported that around 25 per cent of the available casual employment hours are filled by students, especially in the food area. Contracting out of some on-campus services by universities also has an impact on the availability of on-campus work for students. All institutions reported some unresolved industrial relations issues around student employment. Some awards do not have the flexibility to allow the employment of students on a casual basis.

## 3.5   Types of jobs

We asked for information about first and second jobs only. Twenty-seven per cent of respondents provided information about two jobs and a smaller percentage added details of a third job, confirming comments from student support staff that some students are holding down multiple casual jobs. Younger respondents are more likely than mature age respondents to hold a

second job. We can speculate that because of their age and experience, some mature age students have the types of first jobs that are likely to pay reasonably well. They are also more likely to have family responsibilities that preclude the taking of a second job. In addition, commencing mature aged students in general have a greater sense of purpose and commitment to study than those who went directly from school to university (First Year Trends, CSHE), hence they are perhaps less likely to jeopardise their study by taking on two jobs.

We coded respondents' jobs according to a four-digit ASCO code to provide detailed information about their employment. First, however, the broad outline based on major job classification showed that 61 per cent of first jobs come within the elementary clerk, sales and service workers classification, reflecting the predictably substantial number of respondents who work in jobs such as sales assistants, bar attendants, waiters and other staff in food outlets. The next highest proportion (16 per cent) is classified as intermediate clerks, sales and service workers. This includes a range of clerical workers, receptionists and sales people. Smaller proportions hold professional, technical, trade and labouring jobs. The managerial positions included some respondents who managed convenience stores or small shops.

As we might expect, respondents over 25 years are more likely than younger respondents to work in the professions, in technical jobs and in intermediate clerk, sales and service positions, and younger respondents are more likely to hold elementary clerk, sales and service jobs (Table 3.5). Consistent with gender differentiation of the labour market, females are significantly more likely than males to be sales and service workers, and males significantly more likely than females to be in labouring and trades jobs.

Table 3.5    Types of first jobs held by respondents, broad ASCO classifications (% of respondents), n = 1563

|  | Traditional entry | Delayed entry | Mature age entry | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Manager | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Professionals | 7 | 12 | 22 | 9 |
| Technicians | 6 | 9 | 15 | 7 |
| Tradespersons | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| Intermediate clerks, sales and service | 14 | 18 | 24 | 16 |
| Elementary clerks, sales and service | 69 | 52 | 29 | 61 |
| Labourers | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 |

The largest single category of first jobs (around 22 per cent of all first jobs for younger students and 10 per cent for older students) was sales assistant; next were the directly food and drink service related jobs—waiters/food servers, bar attendants and 'restaurant' unspecified—which tended to be spread across

different age groups, but again were most common for younger students. Cashiers, and undefined jobs in supermarkets and convenience stores accounted for seven per cent of jobs for younger students. Beyond this, there was considerable variety, including labouring jobs, telemarketing, market research, security guards, swimming pool attendants, fitness instructors, plant nursery workers, customer service, paid sporting activities and the army reserve.

Older respondents were more likely than younger respondents to be tutoring (at primary, secondary or tertiary level) and to be in technical positions and general administrative positions. The 22 per cent of jobs classified as professional held by mature age students included jobs in nursing and other health professions, teaching and education, art and creative performance, information technology, public relations and libraries.

The distribution of second jobs is somewhat different. Considerably fewer were elementary clerks, sales and service positions; more than twice as many were classified as professional positions, and slightly more as technical and intermediate clerks and sales and service positions. Further analysis suggests that these generally higher paying jobs fall into several categories. Some are tutoring jobs; others are either consulting or other professional positions or creative/artistic jobs. It is perhaps worth noting that, in the case of tutoring, the relatively high hourly rate which respondents say they receive for the job includes preparation and marking time. Consultancy jobs also command a relatively high hourly rate, but the income from them may well be infrequent.

Some older students who have spent time in the workforce before beginning a course are able to retain their previous job at reduced hours. While this is a bonus for some, it may bring additional problems. Because they are experienced workers, employers sometimes expect them to carry quite high levels of responsibility and to be available when needed. On the other hand, some respondents interviewed said their employers were generally accommodating and prepared to be flexible.

> **Trish** worked for several years before she started her course. She has been able to retain the job she had with a medical insurance company and now works for two full days during the week. Her workdays are organised around her course requirements. Her workplace is generally accommodating but because they are, she feels some obligation to work more hours when she is asked to and she often finds her hours creeping up beyond the comfort point. She never works less than 17 hours per week and generally around 24.

> **Razia** was able to retain her job as a court stenographer when she went back to study after she left her marriage and began a course, determined to get some marketable skills. However, the demands on

her to work more hours eventually led her to give up working for a period. She is now finding it difficult to get appropriate work partly, she says, because employers seem to have expectations about university students, their skills and the sort of work they are looking for that she, as an older student, doesn't fit.

The interviews and consultations identified a range of issues related to the types of jobs students hold, which are likely to have a negative impact on their studies.

• Casualisation and de-regulation in many of the industries where students work means that they often have to work long hours to get a reasonable return.

• Some students take jobs which they feel are demeaning, such as bar work requiring wearing sexually suggestive outfits, as it is the only work available that fits with their hours of study.

• There are limited opportunities for part-time and casual work in some areas, particularly regional areas, where in addition, work may be irregular or highly reliant on local economic conditions.

• Working night shifts or not having enough sleep then having to go to lectures the next day has substantial effects on students' capacity to cope with study.

• Some jobs bring additional stress because of the likelihood of being held up or threatened.

On the other hand, paid work sometimes has potential benefits for study in that it allows time for reading, catching up and assignment work, e.g. some car parking attendant work, and jobs where there are slow times during evening or weekend shifts.

## 3.6   Rates of pay

The rates of pay respondents receive reflect the predominance of sales and service type jobs. Table 3.6 shows the distribution of hourly rates of pay for females and males. While overall the pattern was similar, males were significantly more likely than females to be receiving $18 or more per hour. The mean hourly rate for females is $14.59 and for males $16.22, a statistically significant difference.

The distribution of hourly rates of pay for second jobs is somewhat different, reflecting the differences between first and second jobs discussed above. The majority are in the $12–$18 range, suggesting that they are similar to first jobs and that, if extra hours were available in the first job, respondents would be

likely to take them up. The major difference between first and second jobs is the higher percentage of second jobs that pay $20 and over an hour.

Table 3.6    Hourly rates of pay for first jobs, females and males (% of respondents), n = 1563

|  | Females% | Males% | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|
| $5 and less | 10 | 11 | 10 |
| $6–$10 | 26 | 28 | 27 |
| $11–$15 | 25 | 23 | 24 |
| $16–$20 | 20 | 21 | 20 |
| $21–$25 | 12 | 8 | 10 |
| $26 and more | 7 | 9 | 8 |

The relationship between first and second jobs is somewhat problematic and needs further exploration. We asked respondents to describe 'Job 1' and 'Job 2' which in itself does not assume one is more important than the other as a source of income. Although Job 1 is quite likely to be the major source of income, we cannot necessarily assume this. Information about hourly pay rates, discussed above, suggests that many have two jobs which pay similar rates so are probably regarded as equally important. Others are able to call on income from higher paid but less frequent jobs. The issue is that it is highly likely that most students would opt for less hours of better paid work if a range of better paid and more course-related jobs was available.

## 3.6.1   Cash in hand work

We cannot vouch for the accuracy of our finding concerning the extent of 'cash in hand' work as it is likely that some respondents are reluctant to give information about employment practices that are not legal. Nevertheless, 15 per cent of respondents agreed that the work they did was in this category. The proportion of females and males was the same and traditional entry, delayed entry and mature age respondents were equally likely to have cash in hand work. The only conclusions that can be drawn regarding the types of jobs associated with cash in hand work is that they were spread across a wide range of employment areas but were most likely to be in the food and drink service areas. We were unable to confirm anecdotal accounts of international students working excessive hours for cash in hand.

## 3.7 Relationship between paid work and course of study

Not surprisingly, given findings about the types of jobs held, the great majority of jobs were not directly or even indirectly related to a respondent's course of study. However, a scan of people's courses and jobs did reveal some relationships. Examples were: some Pharmacy students had jobs as pharmacy assistants or sales assistants; a respondent doing radiography was working as a clinical assistant; a Fine Arts student was working in an arts supply shop; a Computer Science student was doing irregular consultancy; a Commerce student was a share clerk; and a number of law students were law clerks.

Some other not so readily apparent but nevertheless potentially valuable connections were identified in the interviews. A Computer Science student was working in the sales and general assistance section of a large office supplies store. He helps people with computer inquiries and learns about software when he sometimes has to follow up queries with a manufacturer. An Education student said his cleaning job in a city arcade brought him into contact with homeless young people; the job had taught him patience and led him to understandings that would help him in his teaching.

### 3.7.1 Other positive aspects of jobs

Positive aspects of jobs that were not directly related to courses were also identified in the interviews. They include:

- general workplace experience;
- opportunities to gain a range of workplace skills;
- a chance to do something different from university work and study;
- time out from study, especially when things were getting on top of them;
- opportunities to meet different people;
- feelings of independence;
- self-respect; and
- a strong impetus to be better organised.

In addition, while most interviewees said working had some social benefits, for others, their workplace was a major part of their social life, providing them with companionship and social interaction that they did not have time to pursue in other arenas of their lives. This of course raises the question of the workplace becoming a substitute source of the social networks traditionally developed in the campus-based university experience.

## 3.8  Reasons for seeking paid work

We asked respondents to assess the importance of eleven reasons for taking on paid work. Four factors resulted from analysing their responses. They were: 'Financial need', 'Career and employment preparation', 'Independence' and 'To supplement other income'.

### 3.8.1   Working for financial need

The first factor related to reasons for seeking paid work is 'Financial need'. Items which loaded on this include: meeting basic needs such as rent, food and transport; paying off current and future loans and debts, including HECS; supporting family members, and meeting requirements of a course (Table 3.7). Just over two-thirds of respondents said that meeting basic needs was an important reason for working. The item 'to meet specific requirements of my course' could well have been interpreted in different ways by respondents. It is apparent from interviews and unsolicited comments on the surveys that for some it meant being able to provide books and other course material. A comparison of means on the scale showed that, as might be expected, mature age and delayed entry respondents in paid employment are significantly more likely than are traditional entry respondents to be working for financial need.

Table 3.7      Reasons for working: Financial need (% of respondents), 5 point scale collapsed to 3 categories, n = 1563

|  | Not important | Neutral | Important |
|---|---|---|---|
| To meet basic needs (such as rent, food, transport) | 16 | 17 | 68 |
| To pay off current loans and debts | 54 | 16 | 30 |
| To pay off future loans such as HECS | 58 | 17 | 25 |
| To meet specific requirements of my course | 56 | 20 | 24 |
| To support my family | 81 | 11 | 8 |

### 3.8.2 Preparing for post-graduation employment

'Career and employment preparation' is a second factor related to reasons for working. It includes the two items in Table 3.8. Thirty-eight per cent of respondents said improving their chances of getting employment after university was important, and 30 per cent that gaining experience in their area of study or for a career was important in their decision to work. Responses to this scale did not differ significantly across entry groups.

Table 3.8    Reasons for working: Employment preparation (% of respondents), 5 point scale collapsed to 3 categories, n = 1563

|  | Not important | Neutral | Important |
|---|---|---|---|
| To improve my chances of getting employment after I finish university | 41 | 21 | 38 |
| To gain work experience in my area of study or for a career | 56 | 14 | 30 |

## 3.8.3   Working for independence

Items defining the third factor 'Independence' are listed in Table 3.9. They include working to provide for some living expenses, to save for future needs and purchases, and to be less dependent on families. Not surprisingly, younger respondents are more likely than delayed entry and mature age respondents to be working for independence. Almost four out of five students note affording 'extras' as important.

Table 3.9    Reasons for working: Independence (% of respondents), 5 point scale collapsed to three categories, n = 1 563

|  | Not important | Neutral | Important |
|---|---|---|---|
| To afford 'extras' (such as entertainment and holidays) | 7 | 14 | 79 |
| To become more financially independent of my family | 15 | 14 | 72 |
| To save for other future needs or purchases | 15 | 17 | 68 |

Women were significantly more likely than men to be working to become more financially independent of their family and to save for other future needs or purchases. This is consistent with the tendency for women to leave the parental home at earlier ages than do men.

## 3.8.4   Working to supplement other income

'To supplement other income' is a further reason for working. Given findings regarding income sources, working to supplement Youth Allowance or Austudy is likely to be common. Sixty-two per cent of respondents said that working to supplement other income is important; 21 per cent were unsure and 17 per cent said it was not important.

## 3.8.5   Most important reason for working

When asked to nominate one of the listed reasons as the most important for them at present, the largest percentage of respondents (33 per cent) said that meeting basic needs was most important. The second most frequently noted reason was to afford 'extras' such as entertainment and holidays (20 per cent of respondents).

Two points need to be made here. First, working for basic needs and working for 'extras' are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories. Even those who are working for basic needs are still likely to be working for 'extras'. Second, although there is likely to be widespread agreement that rent, food and transport are basic needs, respondents may well have different interpretations of what for them is an 'extra'. They are also likely to have different types of entertainment and holidays in mind when responding to the statement about 'extras'. A holiday for some may be an overseas trip; for others, it may mean two weeks of not having to go to work.

### 3.8.6   Older and younger students' reasons for working

As expected, the findings indicate differences between the reasons mature age respondents and younger students seek paid work. However, neither younger nor mature age students are a homogenous group and there is substantial variation in the amount of financial support they can call on. Individual reasons for working are often mixed. For example, financial need and independence may overlap for students living with parents on modest or low incomes.

There are compelling and varied reasons why young adults want to, need to, or are required to contribute to family income and/or provide for themselves in substantial ways. As well as strong social and psychological motivations to be independent, like Sandra, they may feel uncomfortable if they are not contributing financially.

> **Sandra** lives with her parents. Her father is not in a particularly well paid job but she is not eligible for Youth Allowance. She compares her situation with that of a friend whose father is in the same type of job but the friend is eligible because she is a year older and has enough full-time work behind her to qualify for Independent Austudy. Sandra feels strongly that she can't depend on her parents to support her at her age (22). Her brother, also living at home, is employed and contributing to the family; Sandra feels it is unfair if she too is not contributing. She is paying her university fees upfront, again in order to save her parents expense and she runs a car. University life itself is expensive, especially the text books which she pays for. During term-time she averages about 24 hours of work per week. During the long break, she will work up to 40 hours per week and will not have a holiday.

Parents too often have strong expectations that a son or daughter living at home will work to pay their way. Changing family patterns also have an impact. A substantial proportion of young adults live in step-families where a step-parent may be unwilling to support an older stepchild, or with a parent who is stretched financially because they are supporting a younger second family.

Some older full-time undergraduate students are looking to retrain and change careers in a volatile and often capricious labour market, others to establish a career. Most research indicates that they are strongly motivated and committed to doing well. However, without substantial savings or financial support from a spouse, partner or other family member, they have to find paid employment and the research indicates that, even if they receive Austudy, without rental assistance, they are certain to be struggling financially.

An analysis by ACOSS (2001) noted that what puts some older students really behind (their Austudy social security payment is 37 per cent below the poverty line) is their ineligibility for Rent Assistance and their low basic payment, which is the same as that for 18–25 year-olds. Students aged 18–25, living independently of their parents, receive the same basic rate as single older students but they are eligible for Rent Assistance. However, even if they receive the maximum rate of Rent Assistance, their payment is still 18 per cent below the poverty line.

## 3.9   Hours of work: realities and preferences

We asked respondents: 'What is the ideal number of hours of paid work per week that would allow you to pay your bills and keep afloat?' Interestingly, the mean ideal number of hours was 14.7, the same as the average number of hours respondents worked in the most recent week they worked. However, there was considerable variation, with almost 30 per cent saying they would ideally have to work 20 hours or more per week (Table 3.10).

Table 3.10    Ideal number of hours of paid work to pay the bills and keep afloat (% of respondents) n = 1563

|  | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Less than 10 hours | 19 |
| 10 hours to less than 15 hours | 28 |
| 15 hours to less than 20 hours | 25 |
| 20 hours to less than 25 hours | 18 |
| 25 hours or more | 10 |

## 3.10 Summary

On average, respondents work 14.7 hours per week. However, almost four out of every ten work 16 hours or more and 18 per cent work 21 hours and more per week. Students work long hours for financial reasons, to gain a foothold in the employment market and to establish eligibility for the independent rate of Youth Allowance. Field of study has a substantial impact on the number of

hours worked, especially through the number of course contact hours required in different areas of study. Respondents studying Business/Commerce/ Administration had the highest average weekly hours of paid work and those studying in the Health and Engineering/Surveying areas, the least. Mature age and delayed entry respondents tend to work slightly longer hours than younger respondents, a finding which is likely to be influenced partly by their different participation rates across fields of study.

Around one in four respondents have an irregular schedule of work. This is partly because of the nature of the casual jobs in which they work. However, it also appears that respondents increase and decrease their hours of work as they attempt to balance shifting study and work demands and other circumstances in their life. The largest proportion (40 per cent) work on both weekdays and weekends and a total of 70 per cent have some weekend work. It is common to seek increased hours of work during the long vacation, in their term-time job if this is available.

Overall, despite variations according to field of study, final year respondents had significantly fewer contact hours and spent significantly less time on campus than those continuing their course. They therefore potentially have more hours available in which to do paid work. There is also a tendency for some final year students to want to get a foothold in the labour market by seeking career-related work in their final year. Near the end of courses, there is sometimes a real clash for students between course demands and the desire for work. On the other hand, there is pressure to do well in the final year of study. Opinions varied about whether it was important to work fewer hours in the final year in order to concentrate on finishing a course and getting a job; 48 per cent agreed that it was important; 27 per cent were unsure and 27 per cent disagreed.

Jobs are spread across the range of classifications but as expected, there is a heavy concentration in elementary and intermediate clerk, sales and service jobs, with the majority of younger respondents working in retail and the food and drink industry. Jobs held by women and men reflect to some extent the gender differentiation of the labour market. On the whole, jobs are not related to respondents' course of study; however, they are not without their benefits and positive aspects. For some, they were sources of social interaction and a social life, general employment experience and a relief from the pressures of study.

Paid work was an important source of income for a majority of respondents, but especially for traditional entry and delayed entry students. However, older respondents were more likely to be working for financial need than were younger students. Conversely, younger students are more likely than older students to be working for greater independence. However, the categories are not always mutually exclusive and for some, especially for younger students living in families with modest or low incomes, reasons for working are varied.

# 4 Impact of paid work

This chapter first reviews findings about how respondents experience their paid work in relation to university study, then discusses the impact of paid work on academic performance, approaches to learning and levels of engagement with aspects of university life. It draws on the survey findings and interviews with respondents and university staff. Respondents who work only during vacations are excluded from the discussions, as we are primarily interested in how paid work during the semester affects academic performance and experience of university life.

## 4.1 Paid work and university work

How respondents experience their paid work in relation to their university work is likely to affect its impact. Two scales were derived from a factor analysis of items concerning paid work. We call them 'Study and work conflict' and 'Overwork'.

### 4.1.1 Study and work conflict

Items in the 'Study and work conflict' scale are concerned with juggling the demands of study and work, making decisions about priorities and fitting work and study schedules together. Eight items loaded on the scale (Table 4.1)

Overall, the majority of respondents do not experience a great deal of conflict between their study and their work. On most items, more than two-thirds of respondents disagree with the negative sentiments of the eight items. However, one-third of respondents have seriously thought about taking a break from their university course in order to earn more money. This is around the proportion of commencing students considering deferring for all reasons (McInnis, James & Hartley 2000), so it is noteworthy that the item refers specifically to taking a break to earn more money. Almost 20 per cent of respondents worry about failing because of their paid work and 15 per cent have seriously thought about changing their course to fit with their need to earn more money.

Other items in the scale reflect difficulties of balancing study and work schedules. Almost a quarter of respondents choose classes that fit around their job; 21 per cent find it difficult to find subjects, and 19 per cent class times, that fit with their hours of employment, although only 13 per cent agree they frequently miss lectures, labs and tutorials because of their job.

Whether or not 13 per cent is regarded as an acceptable proportion of students missing lectures etc.—given the availability of course material from other sources—or a matter for deep concern depends on one's perspective. The item referred to 'frequently' missing lectures, labs or tutorials; the figure therefore means that one in eight respondents make a fairly regular practice of missing these activities. On the other hand, it is perhaps encouraging that 77 per cent of these full-time enrolled employed students disagreed that they frequently miss lectures. In their study of student finances in Australia, Long and Hayden (2001) report that one-third of full-time students with part-time employment during semester say they sometimes or frequently miss classes because of their employment.

Time spent travelling to and from work can be a very important factor in balancing study and work commitments; 17 per cent agreed that the time they spend getting to and from work gets in the way of their academic study. The interviews suggested ways in which travelling time had an impact, e.g. respondents had to make decisions about whether it was worthwhile to go to university between shifts or whether the time was better spent going home to study. They also faced decisions about whether to spend more time on public transport in getting to work or to buy a car. For some, car travel was the only way, or sometimes the only safe way, to travel to and from work which meant pressure to earn more in order to maintain a car.

Table 4.1    Study and work conflict (% of respondents), 5 point scale collapsed to 3 categories, n = 1501

|  | Disagree | Unsure | Agree |
|---|---|---|---|
| I have seriously thought about taking a break from uni to earn more money | 59 | 9 | 33 |
| I generally choose classes that fit around my job | 64 | 12 | 24 |
| It is difficult to find subjects that can fit with my hours of employment | 64 | 15 | 21 |
| I often worry about failing university because of my paid work | 69 | 12 | 19 |
| It is difficult to find class times that can fit with my hours of employment. | 65 | 16 | 19 |
| The amount of time I spend travelling to work gets in the way of my academic work | 72 | 10 | 17 |
| I have seriously thought about changing my course to fit with my need to earn more money | 78 | 7 | 15 |
| I frequently miss lectures, labs and tutorials because of my job | 78 | 9 | 13 |

Findings in Table 4.1 suggest that the organisational conflict between study and work is not as high as we might imagine. However, this does not tell us how this impacts on the engagement with academic study and the relative priority given to it.

## 4.1.2   Overwork

We call the second scale 'Overwork'. A substantial proportion of respondents (41 per cent) agree that their paid work gets in the way of their academic study. The interviews suggest that this 'getting in the way of' has a number of dimensions but having enough time and being able to organise one's time are major issues. Some respondents working long hours said that they were under constant time pressure; they only manage because they are forced to be well organised, they are focused and work long hours when they have to. Others tend to feel the pressure only when assignments are due, although in some courses, assignments are regular and constant. The pattern of continuous assessment means fewer times when students feel they can let up.

Thirty-nine per cent of respondents agree that stress from their paid work conditions affects their capacity to cope with their academic work. We cannot say whether respondents interpreted this item in general terms or whether they had in mind particular conditions of their work (e.g. physical demands, work relationships, poor pay) that led to stress. However, our interviews revealed examples of these conditions, from noisy and pressured work environments to poorly paid, monotonous work.

The items in the 'Overwork' scale include 'I find it difficult to say 'no' to my employer when asked to work more hours than I usually work' and 'I work more hours for pay in an average week now than when I was in first year' (Table 4.2). Fifty-three per cent of respondents agreed to the first item and 48 per cent to the second. In relation to saying 'no' to an employer, some are likely to be fearful of losing their job and others may find it difficult to say 'no' because they need the money. Either way, there is an impetus to work more hours.

We can compare these findings with those of Long & Hayden (2001) who report that 57 per cent of their respondents said that paid employment has 'somewhat' of an adverse effect on their university studies and 15 per cent say it has 'a great deal' of effect.

Table 4.2     Overwork (% of respondents, 5 point scale collapsed to 3 categories, n = 1501

|  | Disagree | Unsure | Agree |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| I find it difficult to say 'no' to my employer when asked to work more hours than I usually work | 36 | 10 | 53 |
| I work more hours for pay in an average week now than when I was in first year | 34 | 18 | 48 |
| My paid work gets in the way of my academic work | 40 | 19 | 41 |
| Stress from my work conditions affects my capacity to cope with my academic work | 44 | 18 | 39 |

### 4.1.3   The two scales: group comparisons

A comparison of means on the two scales indicates some differences according to field of study and entry type.

The following findings are based on an analysis of mean scores for each separate field of study group compared with all other respondents. Respondents doing a combined degree were allocated to their two separate field of study areas, for example, 'Law' includes all respondents studying Law whether as a separate degree or as part of a combined degree. In this way, we have maximised numbers in each field of study. Even so, several field of study groups are not large enough to report comparisons with confidence. Only statistically significant findings are reported. (T-tests were used where the group variances are equal; Mann-Whitney tests were used when the group variances were not equal. See Appendix A for further details).

Respondents studying Humanities have a higher mean score on 'Study and work conflict' compared with all other respondents. So too did those studying Law. In regard to the 'Overwork' scale too, Humanities and Law students have a higher score compared with all other respondents. Those studying Science had a lower mean score on 'Overwork'.

Both delayed and mature age entry respondents have higher mean scores on 'Study and work conflict' than do traditional entry respondents. Other findings suggest reasons for this; older students are more likely to be working longer hours and are less likely to have financial support from their families. On the 'Overwork' scale, it is delayed entry respondents who have the highest mean score, higher than that for mature age and traditional entry respondents. This is another indication that this group of students have particular needs that set them apart from school leaver students and those who take up study at a mature age.

## 4.2   Impact of paid work on university experience

Six scales were derived from items concerning respondents' university experience: 'Academic commitment and involvement' 'Preparedness to miss lectures and classes', 'Financial worries', 'Study motivation and management', 'Course and work focus', and 'Off-campus social life'.

### 4.2.1   Academic commitment and involvement

A substantial majority of respondents are committed to their course; 81 per cent have a strong desire to do well in all their subjects and indeed 44 per cent strongly agree with this item. Somewhat fewer but still a

substantial majority (65 per cent) are really enjoying their course (Table 4.3). These two items were included in the 1999 CSHE First Year Experience study. The level of agreement with the items is very similar to that found for 1999 full-time commencing students who were not employed (and also for those who were employed). This suggests that employed students have the same levels of desire to do well and general commitment to their course as do students who are not working.

Working with other students on course issues, and having staff available to discuss academic matters, are related to academic commitment and involvement.

Table 4.3    Academic commitment and involvement (% of respondents), 5 point scale collapsed to 3 categories, n = 1 501

|  | Disagree | Unsure | Agree |
|---|---|---|---|
| I have a strong desire to do well in all my subjects | 6 | 13 | 81 |
| Overall, I am really enjoying my course | 12 | 22 | 65 |
| I work with other students on course areas where I have problems | 24 | 16 | 60 |
| Staff are usually available to discuss my work | 22 | 26 | 52 |

Desire to do well did not differ across entry groups but mature age entry respondents were significantly more likely than traditional entry respondents to say they are really enjoying their course. This is consistent with the generally higher level of commitment and sense of purpose found amongst older students.

## 4.2.2   Preparedness to miss lectures and classes

The substantial increase in the availability of online course material increasingly provides students with an alternative to attending lectures and, in the opinion of some academic staff, encourages students not to attend. Although around a third of respondents felt it was acceptable to miss lectures, they had reasons (or justifications) for saying so.

The findings suggest that they are prepared to miss lectures because they can get the material elsewhere, or because they feel they can pass their course without going to lectures, more so than because they feel they do not learn anything from them. Thirty-six per cent agreed that they felt OK about missing lectures because they could get the information from friends and other sources; 33 per cent because most of the notes and materials were on the internet; 30 per cent because they believed they could miss a lot of lectures and still pass the course they were doing. This compares with the lower than expected 17 per cent who feel OK about missing lectures because they 'don't learn much from them' (Table 4.4). In other words, they acknowledge that the

lectures are an important part of learning but they can get what they need from other sources.

Table 4.4    Preparedness to miss lectures and classes (% of respondents), 5 point scale collapsed to 3 categories, n = 1501

|  | Disagree | Unsure | Agree |
|---|---|---|---|
| I feel OK about missing lectures, because I can always get the information from friends or other sources. | 45 | 19 | 36 |
| I can afford to miss lectures because most of the notes and materials are on the internet. | 53 | 15 | 33 |
| You can miss a lot of lectures and still pass the course I am doing | 49 | 20 | 30 |
| I don't learn much from lectures, so I feel OK about missing them. | 65 | 18 | 17 |

## 4.2.3   Financial worries

Items in this scale are listed in Table 4.5. Forty-four per cent of respondents agree there are a lot of financial pressures on them at present; 36 per cent are worried that HECS obligations will be a burden when they finish university; 34 per cent say that worrying about money makes it difficult for them to concentrate on study and 14 per cent are currently thinking about deferring their course for one or more terms. This represents a substantial proportion of respondents whose money worries are likely to affect their academic study and confirm again the 1999 First Year pattern of 36 per cent of full-time students agreeing that money worries makes it difficult for them to study (First Year Trends, CSHE).

Table 4.5    Financial worries (% of respondents), 5 point scale collapsed to 3 categories, n = 1501

|  | Disagree | Unsure | Agree |
|---|---|---|---|
| There are a lot of financial pressures on me right now | 39 | 17 | 44 |
| I am worried that HECS obligations will be a burden once I finish uni and start to work full-time | 49 | 15 | 36 |
| Worrying about money has made it difficult for me to concentrate on study | 48 | 18 | 34 |
| I am currently thinking about deferring my course for one or more terms | 76 | 10 | 14 |

## 4.2.4   Study motivation and management

Items listed in Table 4.6 make up the scale we have called 'Study motivation and management'. Motivation and good time management are likely to be important aspects of coping well with the demands of study and work; conversely, lack of motivation and poor time management make the task much more difficult.

Despite the relatively positive attitudes and commitment to courses shown in the 'Academic commitment and involvement' scale above, 58 per cent of respondents agree that they are finding it difficult to get themselves motivated to study. Just under half of the respondents agree that they have good time management skills. On the other hand, the finding that 53 per cent either disagree or are unsure about their time management skills is a cause for concern.

There is a significant difference between traditional entry and mature age entry respondents in regard to finding it difficult to motivate oneself to study, with more younger students finding it difficult. We know that commencing undergraduate students who are employed are significantly more likely to find it difficult to get motivated than those who are not employed (First Year Trends, CSHE). However, 58 per cent is substantially higher than the 50 per cent of employed full-time commencing students who agreed to the item in the 1999 CSHE First Year Experience study. We can speculate that longer average hours of working and greater demands in second year and later contribute to difficulties in getting motivated, especially for younger students.

Table 4.6    Study motivation and management (% of respondents), 5 point scale collapsed to 3 categories, n = 1501

|  | Disagree | Unsure | Agree |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *I find it difficult to get myself motivated to study | 25 | 18 | 58 |
| I have good time management skills | 27 | 26 | 46 |

*Item one was reversed in constructing the scale

## 4.2.5   Course and work focus

A substantial majority of respondents (71 per cent) rank university at the top of their priorities. However, a high 63 per cent often feel overwhelmed by all they have to do (Table 4.7). The items in this scale reflect a relatively common theme in the interviews. Respondents had a strong focus on university as a priority, often felt overwhelmed by everything they had to do (study, paid work and all their other commitments) and spoke of having little time left over for leisure activities or a social life. They made comments about 'not having a life', feeling that they were in some respects putting their social life on hold and not devoting enough time to friends and family. Cutting back on leisure activities may be partly a matter of necessity because of the limited time available; however, it also indicates respondents are prepared to cut back on their social life for future job prospects.

Table 4.7    Course and work focus (% of respondents), 5 point scale collapsed to 3 categories, n = 1501

|  | Disagree | Unsure | Agree |
|---|---|---|---|
| University ranks at the top of my priorities right now | 12 | 16 | 71 |
| I often feel overwhelmed by all I have to do | 20 | 17 | 63 |
| I don't have enough time for leisure activities | 36 | 17 | 47 |

Women's and men's experiences of study and work are significantly different in some respects. A disturbingly high proportion of female respondents (71 per cent) feel overwhelmed by all they have to do. However, there was no significant difference between the proportion of males and females saying they did not have enough leisure time. As expected from our findings so far, mature age entry respondents are significantly more likely than traditional entry respondents to say they do not have sufficient time for leisure activities. The following comments from five respondents are typical of those who felt they were putting areas of their life apart from study and work on hold.

> 'If I wasn't living with my boyfriend, we would never see each other. The sacrifices (in working for an average of 25–30 hours per week) have been in terms of a social life at university and "a life" generally.'

> 'What social life? I don't have any. I haven't seen my mates in weeks. Most of my relationships are with people at work, but the others suffer.'

> 'Just trying to have a life is the most difficult part. Trying to keep important relationships going–mine has just broken up and that's caused me a lot of stress–and getting to see my parents occasionally. They live in the country.'

> 'It's hard to get all the facets of my life working as well as I want them to. I've got a two-year-old relationship and that takes working at. I often say no to friends when they ask me to go out with them.'

> 'It's always full on the whole time. This year I've felt overwhelmed. As well as work and study, I help my father out with my younger sister as mum died earlier this year.'

While a heavy work and study load restricted leisure activities for some, other interviewees said they were careful to build in time off, and participate in a sport or other activity, realising that this contributed to their being able to cope.

## 4.2.6   Off-campus social life

The final scale reflects what has been clearly established in recent years. Full-time students are spending less time on campus and are less involved in university activities. University is not the primary focus of a social life for the

majority of respondents; 70 per cent said that their social life was mainly off campus and outside of the university; 57 per cent that they do not spend much time on campus other than to go to classes (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8    Off-campus social life (% of respondents), 5 point scale collapsed to 3 categories, n = 1501

|  | Disagree | Unsure | Agree |
|---|---|---|---|
| My social life is mainly off campus, outside of the university | 17 | 13 | 70 |
| I don't spend much time on campus other than to go to my classes | 31 | 12 | 57 |

## 4.2.7   Study and university impact: group comparisons

When the responses of respondents in each field of study were compared with those of all other respondents, those studying Health have a higher mean score on 'Academic commitment and involvement' and those studying Engineering and Business have a lower mean score.

Business studies respondents are more prepared to miss lectures and Health studies respondents less likely to miss them, when compared with all other respondents. This is likely to reflect differences of course organisation and requirements for each.

Humanities respondents have a higher mean score on 'Financial stress' compared with all other respondents. Respondents in both Business studies and Health have a lower mean score on 'Financial stress' than all other respondents. Reasons for this are likely to differ for the two groups as they are at opposite ends of the spectrum as far as course contact hours and paid work hours are concerned (Table 3.2). On average, Business studies respondents have fewer course contact hours and more hours of paid work, so have the potential to earn more and perhaps as a consequence experience less financial stress.

Mean scores on 'Off-campus social life' indicate that respondents studying Education have a higher mean score on the scale and Engineering/Surveying respondents a lower score, when compared with all other respondents.

Mature age entry respondents have a higher mean score on 'Academic commitment and involvement' than do traditional entry students. On average, they also have a higher mean score on 'Study motivation and management' and 'Course and work focus' than both delayed and traditional entry respondents. At the same time, mature age and delayed entry respondents score higher on 'Financial stress' than do traditional entry students.

Traditional and delayed entry respondents are more prepared to miss lectures than are mature age respondents. Delayed entry respondents have a higher mean score on off-campus social life than do traditional entry respondents.

## 4.3   Paid work and academic performance

One of the major concerns expressed by academic staff is that students' academic performance is adversely affected by working long hours. We have seen that a relatively high proportion of respondents (41 per cent) say that their paid work gets in the way of academic study. Respondents are aware of anxiety and conflict around work and study commitments and they experience varying levels of stress in dealing with the demands on their time. The issue is whether this has a direct impact on academic performance.

Marks are only one measure of outcomes from a university course, nevertheless they are frequently important in determining post-university pathways and they often influence how students feel about themselves and their satisfaction with their course and the quality of teaching. As we have seen, most respondents want to do as well as they can and marks are a primary measure of 'doing well'. We asked respondents what was their average overall mark for the first semester and we used this mark as the dependent variable in a multiple regression to explore relationships between aspects of respondents' employment and their course marks. Independent variables included in the regression were the scales regarding reasons for seeking employment, the two employment scales, the six university experience scales, respondents' ENTER or equivalent score, being female, being a delayed or mature age entry student, having high average hours (21+) of employment per week, having low (1–10) hours of employment per week, having high (21+) course contact hours per week, having low (1–10) course contact hours per week.

The regression analysis indicated that, if all other factors are held constant, the following have a positive impact on a respondent's average mark:

- their ENTER score;
- being a delayed entry student;
- study motivation and management; and
- academic commitment and involvement.

All other factors being equal, the following have a negative impact on average mark:

- study and work conflict, and
- having 21 or more course contact hours.

Table 4.9 shows the coefficients for each significant variable. The values have been transformed. Variables with higher significant coefficients have a greater impact than those with lower coefficients.

Table 4.9       Average mark for first semester: regression coefficients

|  | Coefficients |
| --- | --- |
| ENTER score | +.415 |
| Academic commitment and involvement | +.179 |
| Study motivation and management | +.172 |
| Study and work conflict (Negative impact) | −.151 |
| Delayed entry | +.046 |
| 21+ course contact hours (Negative impact) | −.037 |

The positive impact of each of these variables on average mark is perhaps not unexpected. All other things being equal, we would expect that a higher ENTER score would mean a higher average semester mark. 'Academic commitment and involvement' and 'Study motivation and management' are also likely to have a positive impact on average mark. While both are important factors for all students, whether employed or not, it is easy to see why they are likely to be particularly important for employed students. As we have seen, there is a considerable amount of stress involved in studying full-time and working. Without quite high levels of motivation, high levels of commitment and good time management, the business of managing often competing demands on one's time, allocating priorities as they come up, and maintaining clear goals, becomes much more difficult. The impact is likely to show up in academic performance.

All other things being equal, study and work conflict is likely to have a negative impact on marks. This scale is about juggling the demands of work and study and managing the schedules of both. We have seen throughout the discussion so far that older respondents tend to have stronger motivation and commitment to their course than do younger respondents; delayed entry has a positive impact on average mark, other things being equal.

All other things being equal, having 21 or more course contact hours has a negative effect but of the factors we examined, it has one of the smallest impacts on average mark.

Because we have consistently found significant differences between respondents according to their age, two further separate regressions using the same independent variables listed above were carried out, one for traditional entry respondents and the other for delayed and mature age entry respondents combined. Table 4.10 lists the variables found to have a significant positive or negative impact on average mark for traditional, and delayed/mature entry respondents.

The Table indicates seven variables were significant for the younger group. ENTER score, 'Academic commitment and involvement', 'Study motivation and management' and being female had a positive impact and 'Study and work conflict', 'Preparedness to miss lectures' and having 21 or more course contact hours had a negative impact. They are listed in 'order according to the magnitude of the coefficient. Two variables—'Academic commitment and involvement' and 'Study motivation and management'—were significant for the older group.

Table 4.10    Significant independent variables for traditional entry and delayed/ mature age entry respondents; regression, dependent variable: average first semester mark.

| Traditional entry respondents | Delayed/mature age entry respondents |
|:---:|:---:|
| *Positive effect* | *Positive effect* |
| ENTER score | |
| Academic commitment and involvement | Academic commitment and involvement |
| Study motivation and management | Study motivation and management |
| Being female | |
| | |
| *Negative impact* | |
| Study and work conflict | |
| Preparedness to miss lectures and classes | |
| 21+ course contact hrs | |

What is unexpected in the findings in Tables 4.9 and 4.10 is the absence of a significant impact associated with high (21+) or low (1–10) hours of employment. Since considerable focus is often put on the potentially negative impact of the number of hours some students are working, we explored further the relationship between hours of work and average mark.

In a separate analysis, we found that there is in fact a significant relationship between working longer hours and having a lower average semester mark. However, the relationship is statistically significant only for traditional entry respondents (that is, students who went straight from school to university).

Together, this finding and the regression analysis suggest that there are concerns for traditional entry students working long hours. Their marks are likely to be affected by their level of academic commitment and involvement in their course; their course motivation and management; above average hours of paid work; preparedness to miss lectures and classes, and high course contact hours combined with work. On the other hand, with good time management and high levels of commitment and organisation, high marks are by no means out of the question. Voula's circumstances illustrate how hours of paid work are not necessarily the most important consideration.

> **Voula** works regular hours in a small business, 28 one week and 23 the next in a two week cycle. She has a high level of responsibility.

It is important for her to do well in her course. She really pushes herself and is not satisfied unless she gets good marks, which she does. But, she says, she has to stick to a timetable that she draws up at the beginning of each semester. What makes it all work for her are regular rather than irregular hours (she previously had casual work and found the irregularity really difficult), flexibility to say she can not work sometimes, and being very organised and disciplined.

While students who enter university sometime after they leave secondary school experience sometimes high levels of conflict and stress regarding their study and work, on the whole they seem to be making reasonable assessments about the number of hours of paid employment they can manage. All other things being equal, the number of hours older respondents work does not seem to have a significant impact on their semester mark.

For all students, however, high course contact hours, combined with substantial work-study conflict are likely to cause problems.

While marks are important in some respects, there are other desirable outcomes from university study. The following section looks at broader aspects of academic performance and examines impacts on respondents' approaches to learning and experience of university.

## 4.4   Approaches to learning

*Does my paid work have an impact on my study? Yes and no. Not in terms of academic results but certainly in the time I have available for study (female student in her final year, working 10 hours per week.)*

*Self discipline is a problem even though I try hard to be conscientious. I also get really tired. The course contact hours are fixed and so is the paid work (14–15 hours). The thing that is flexible is the study, so it tends to get put off.*

Fifty-eight per cent of all respondents say they find it difficult to motivate themselves to study (Table 4.6) and 60 per cent of traditional entry students do so. This compares with 46 per cent of non-employed and 50 per cent of employed commencing students agreeing to the item in 1999 (First Year Trends, CSHE).

Studying with other students, either by informally discussing course issues and problems with others, or working in more structured situations on collaborative tasks and assignments, tends to promote and enhance learning. Sixty per cent of respondents work with other students on course areas where

they have problems; 24 per cent do not and 16 per cent are unsure. We cannot compare this finding directly with commencing students who are not employed, as the question we asked in the 1999 First Year Experience study referred to how often respondents studied with others. However, in 1999, 44 per cent of students said they studied with others on areas where they had problems either daily or weekly and over 50 per cent did so 'irregularly' (McInnis, James & Hartley 2000). It seems then that the 2001 survey respondents are no less likely to study with others than are commencing students in general.

In recent years, more academics are emphasising and/or requiring collaborative study as an integral part of a course and it appears that students see the value of discussing their study with others (although they do not necessarily like studying in groups). However, collaborative academic work and group assignments often provide problems for employed students. A number of interviewees noted that it was sometimes very difficult to find common times when all members of a group are available. Since many are employed during the weekend, it is difficult for them to find times to get together between lectures and in the relatively short periods they are on campus.

Some academic staff expressed concern that students with substantial hours of paid employment are coping by doing the minimum amount of study required to get by and are not achieving the standard of work of which they are capable. Neither are they able to engage in deep or reflective learning. While we cannot make any general statement about the extent to which this is so, we have seen that 41 per cent of respondents agree that paid work 'gets in the way of' of their academic study. On the other hand, a majority of respondents did not agree (39 per cent) or were unsure (19 per cent) whether their paid work had a distracting influence.

The pressures of time and tiredness from paid work are potentially key factors in how respondents approach their learning and long hours of paid work are bound to have some impact, even if, as we have seen, it is not directly on their marks. The most frequently mentioned effects in the interviews were not having enough time to do in-depth work, doing limited reading or only the minimum reading required, scrambling to finish assignments on time, missing classes and focusing mainly on assessment tasks and assignments. In short, the quality of the learning process suffers and the lifelong impacts are more significant than we can assess from this study.

However, individuals have different approaches to their learning. Some of the students interviewed were obviously under pressure but they were doing well and putting as much as they are able into their university studies. Overall, they were satisfied with their performance and the quality of their university study. Others acknowledge that their university study and their expectations about

doing well are compromised by paid work. A third group are somewhat uncertain, emphasising on the one hand that they are doing quite well and are relatively satisfied but on the other, saying that paid work does affect the way they study. The comments below illustrate the three approaches which we call 'Satisfied students', 'Compromises and lowered expectations', and 'Managing but work has an impact'.

### Satisfied students

*In the first couple of years, it wasn't important to get good marks. I was only getting passes but now it is important and I'm doing better, getting credits and some distinctions. Maybe my work (20 hours a week) has an impact. I'm not sure because even if I wasn't working I think I'd feel as if I was racing and never had enough time to do things. I certainly don't have much free time (she works all day Sunday and two nights during the week). I found that I learn best when I go to lectures and tutes and I need to bounce things off other people and talk to them. So I don't miss lectures and I feel I have enough time to talk to people. The only thing that really suffers is I don't get enough time to read widely.*

*It's important for me to do well and work definitely compromised that then I was working 24 hours a week. I felt I never stopped. All I could think of when I was at work was what I had to do at home and for study. I managed but only just. Now I'm working only 12 hours a week, I don't feel that work compromises my study. I use work as time out from study and I enjoy the company.*

### Compromises and lowered expectations

*It used to be important that I did as well as I could, but not now. I just think about getting it down and getting a qualification. Mostly it's been OK up to now but having more time for study would make it a lot easier. (He is currently working 32 hours a week). I guess what I don't get is enough time to talk to lecturers and tutors, to do research, and look at things in detail. I just read the summaries rather than reading the detail.*

*In some units I don't spend much time at uni, so although I do get together and talk to friends about study sometimes, I generally study by myself. And I guess I don't do things in as much depth as I would like to. Often it's fatigue as much as not having enough time. I work at night and that means I study in the morning quite a lot and I know I'm often not really at my best. I get tired and I know I'm not functioning very well. (Student is averaging 25–30 hours per week.)*

*At school it was important for me to get good marks, but now I'm just aiming to pass. I just want to get by. I find it hard to get motivated because there is a lack of routine and because of all the other things I have to do to keep going–earning money to live, washing, cleaning. (Student is on Austudy and was working but recently had to quit as he had a car accident and can't work for a while.)*

### Managing but work has an impact

*I average about 24 hours of work a week. It's not a huge problem. I'm not doing too badly and I manage to get everything done. My marks are not bad. And working has certainly improved the way I organise things. I know I have to do certain things at certain times and I've never had to ask for an extension. But I know I probably could do better if I didn't work or didn't work so many hours. I often have to rush things and I occasionally miss classes because I have to get to work. I'm on the go a lot and I certainly get tired sometimes and quite stressed when there are lots of assignments due. And I don't have time for any wider reading.*

To balance the picture, it is important to acknowledge that some students suggest that it is not their paid work, but rather aspects of their course (a heavy work load, large classes, lack of opportunities for interaction with other students) that make it difficult for them to approach their study as they would like to.

*It's pretty important for me to do well but I've come to the point of regarding some subjects as just a pass option. My marks are pretty good overall. It's not so much paid work that interferes with my academic work. With me, it's more likely to be the workload itself that means I fall asleep in lectures or miss them because I have homework to do. It's just the hard slog of it all.*

*I sometimes feel I don't get to talk to other students enough, but that's because of large classes and the way the course is organised, not because of my paid work.*

## 4.5　Experience of university

*'I definitely feel there's a change in university life but I'm not really clear why. I don't sit on the lawn with friends very much any more.' (female final year student)*

There is widespread agreement amongst academic and student support staff we interviewed that there has been a change in university culture and whatever sense of 'community spirit' existed on campuses in the past is diminishing. With less time spent on campus, full-time enrolled students are under more pressure to do what they have to do in a shorter time. They spend less time in outside class activities on campus and many have little time for clubs and societies. Less common free time has an impact on the cultural life of the campus.

Not all of this is due to more full-time students in paid work. Online delivery of courses contributes to students spending less time on campus and changes the way people think about university. The introduction of HECS and increasing proportions of fee-paying students in universities promotes a different student orientation towards university study, where students expect and demand more and they look elsewhere if they do not find what they want.

Some of the students we interviewed, like the two quoted below, felt that they were not getting what they wanted from lecturers and other staff.

> *Am I getting the most out of university? Yes and no. Yes, because I'm learning a lot, learning to put things into practice. No, because of some of the lecturers and their lack of support and help. I don't feel I'm getting the help and clarity of explanation I need. Most of what I talk about with other students is course-related matters. We help each other when we don't feel we are getting it from lecturers.*

> *I feel we don't get enough information about courses and where they lead at the beginning and I've found it's not very easy to change universities and get cross credits.*

Another seemed to be making the point that even though she was busy, she would use facilities if they were available when she needed them:

> *As far as university culture is concerned, there is not much at (my university) and I feel I miss out here. I don't have time for clubs and societies and there not much going on here, for example, the bar closes at 4.30.*

Course organisation in some cases does not promote connections between students, nor help them to feel a part of a course cohort:

> *I don't feel I'm getting as much out of university life as I could because of the way the Arts course is organised. Everyone does their own units, there are not set subjects. It makes it difficult to establish social networks and make friends because you don't see the same people every day. I know it's different in other courses.*

## 4.6  Summary

Survey findings, consultations and interviews strongly suggest that while many employed students have a strong desire to do well and high levels of commitment to their course, their experience of university life is largely restricted to going to class and getting the required course work done, often under time pressure. Getting through everything requires good time management skills and high levels of commitment and motivation. Traditional entry students especially are at risk of not achieving as well as they could if they are not well organised and not able to maintain a high level of focus and commitment.

# 5   Strategies and thresholds

It is not uncommon for full-time enrolled commencing students to imagine that they are going to have a substantial amount of free time when they see that they have relatively few hours of lectures, tutorial and/or laboratory classes. In response, some departments and individual staff members are making concerted efforts to advise students of the amount of study they are likely to have to do to pass a subject. Students are encouraged to have realistic expectations about the time they need to put aside for study. By the time students reach their second year, we would expect that they might have a reasonable idea of what is required. Nevertheless, some are committing themselves to long hours of work each week.

In this Chapter, we draw on the survey and the interviews to discuss the varied ways in which respondents manage their study and work commitments.

## 5.1   Student strategies for managing study and work

> *Students' time is so fully allocated, they have to make compromises somewhere.* (Academic staff member)

As we saw in Chapter 4, it is common for respondents with heavy demands of study and work to cut back on leisure time and a social life. They are making choices in the present to achieve a future advantage and while many are prepared to put these parts of their life on hold for a limited period of time, they have regrets and feelings of guilt about not seeing friends and family very often.

Chapter 4 also confirmed the importance of working hard and being well organised. The interviews revealed how some students approach their study in the light of paid work commitments.

> **Karen** works all day on Tuesday and on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons so, she says, she virtually has to write these days off as far as university work is concerned. She has to be very sure she is organised on Monday night to cope with the week. She believes she is well organised—she has to be to survive. On the other hand, she says, going to work forces her to be organised. She feels that perhaps if she wasn't working, she would be less organised.

Respondents managed by juggling and adjusting the number of hours they worked, especially when a number of assignments are due in or at exam

times. The importance of having an employer who is prepared to be flexible is very apparent in these circumstances. While some of those interviewed did have some flexibility in their workplaces, others did not and had to risk losing their job if they changed their hours.

Some workplaces employing a substantial number of tertiary students tend to be 'student-friendly' and reasonably flexible; others are not. When students have worked in the same job over a number of years, employers tend to value their skills and experience and be amenable to being flexible about work arrangements. The downside for some respondents is that the same sense of responsibility that gained them flexibility also leads them to be reluctant to use it too often.

Students who receive Youth Allowance or Austudy appear to find themselves trying to maintain a fine balance between working or not, the number of hours they work, the amount they earn and the amount of the allowance they lose as a consequence. What they decide to do may well vary throughout the year, according to their workload and other circumstances in their life.

> **Richard** is in the third year of a five year degree. He did not work for the first five months of the year and found it extremely difficult to survive on Youth Allowance, so he took on a 25 hours per week job and as a consequence has dropped back to three subjects for the second semester. He would far prefer to be working 10–15 hours per week but it is difficult to find a job with the right hours that fits around his course.

> Earlier in the year, **Michael** was working 25 hours per week, including some weeknights until midnight and one day in the weekend. Since then, he and his wife have had a baby and his wife gave up work. As a consequence, Michael has gone on to Austudy and cut his work back to about 12 hours per week so that he can see something of his wife and child.

Of course, there is one option that is, by definition, not included in this study. We spoke with a student who decided it was better for him to live extremely frugally on Austudy rather than keep up the very poorly paid job he was doing and risk failing, or push up his hours to an unrealistic level and lose some of his allowance.

Making extensive use of online course materials is an important way in which some students manage study commitments when they are employed.

> **Bruce** is a mature age student working to support himself. He has a job for between 16–20 hours per week but study comes first and he manages to get good results. He gets by by being well organised,

keeping track of everything he has to do and ticking things off as he does them, working late when he has to, and having virtually no social life outside of work. His university life is 'non-existent' and he's not sure what he actually gets from university. This year he did a course completely from the internet. Tutes were optional so he never met the lecturer. Before the exam, he worked through all the tute topics together with friends who had attended. He doesn't feel that he was at all disadvantaged by this. He also says it's great to be able to access material when you want it–at all times of the day or night. He said 'If they offered everything on line, I probably wouldn't go in to uni'.

**Lucy** did two subjects online during the year and prefers this to going to tutorials. She feels more comfortable with the online discussion group than with tutorials and is less embarrassed about asking 'stupid questions'. However, she feels that the success of online subjects depends on both the style of the learner and the suitability of the subject matter.

While relying heavily on internet resources works for some students and some courses, it is not possible for everyone, nor does it suit all students. Some lectures are not online; others are not made available until some time after the lecture. Further, it cannot be assumed that all students have access to the required technology and feel comfortable using it, despite the wide range of moves initiated by universities to provide students with the skills and the resources to make use of internet material. There are also important issues of equity to be addressed. Some universities have initiated loan schemes for students to buy computers.

## 5.1.1   Managing practicums and field placements

Courses that require full-time practicums or placements provide difficulties for students with heavy employment commitments and often upset delicately balanced study and work arrangements. Respondents who were interviewed managed during these times by changing their hours of work, by giving up work for a period and borrowing money to tide them over, or by working doubly hard.

**Jane** is a final year social work student. Study has become much more of a priority for her than in previous years. Her course required a full-time four-week practical placement earlier in the year. She had to cut back on her employment hours during the week and just managed to get by financially by doing one Sunday shift. She sees herself as luckier than some friends because she gets Independent

Austudy. She has friends who had to cut back on work or give it up all together. If you are not on Austudy, she says, practical placements are very difficult times. Some friends took out loans; others were working three or more shifts at night as well as doing a full-time placement.

**Michael** was due to go on a four-week practical teaching stint soon after he was interviewed. He is on Austudy but has a wife and child to support. He will be teaching during the day, going to work after school and getting home about midnight, then will have to prepare lesson plans for the next day.

A somewhat different perspective on practicums is provided by the example of Architecture students who, in one of the survey universities, do a full year practicum after their third year and are then required to do a final year of study. Staff expressed concern that some students find the year of employment so satisfying and get on so well with an employer that they return to full-time study without substantially dropping any paid work hours.

## 5.1.2    Switching between full-time and part-time enrolment

In a majority of the university consultations, staff talked about an increasing tendency for students to try to maintain full-time enrolment to get through their course as quickly as possible, to 'get in, get their qualification quickly and get out again'. Students on Youth Allowance or Austudy have an additional motivation to maintain full-time study. They lose their allowance if they drop below the required enrolment load. Some students try to balance study and work commitments by switching between full-time and part-time enrolment during their course as their economic circumstances change.

Counsellors reported that while students often attempt to maintain full-time enrolment for as long as they can, if the stresses became too great, the only realistic alternative is to drop back to part-time. However, in some professional courses such as Engineering, part-time options are more difficult.

Some students enrol full-time for Austudy purposes but do not put a full effort into all their subjects, anticipating a failure. It was also suggested that some overseas full-fee paying students working to provide for their living expenses are registered as full-time students according to their visa but are in reality working at only two or three subjects, accepting that they will record the others as failures. There is concern that recent changes to student progression arrangements for overseas students will make it much more difficult for such students to maintain their student visas.

### 5.1.3　Intensive courses

Students seek out intensive courses or vacation courses for various reasons, only some of which are related to the demands of part-time work, financial considerations and getting through as quickly as possible. Some choose vacation study to pick up a unit they have had to drop or have failed because of part-time work commitments. Institutions both respond to student demands for such courses, and contribute to the growing impetus to get through in the minimum time by providing summer school and intensive courses that telescope study into a short period of time. While there is a demand for such courses, some academic staff expressed concern that they did not always provide good learning situations as there was little for reflection. There were also concerns about the extra expectations and increased burdens on staff associated with intensive courses.

### 5.1.4　Other strategies

In addition to the strategies already discussed, academic and student support staff said students managed aspects of study and work by:

- making use of the '80 per cent rule', whereby, instead of attending all tutorials, they build in the flexibility allowed to miss a percentage of tutorials;
- choosing units that fit around hours of employment. We found that 24 per cent of students said they generally chose classes that fitted around their job (Table 4.1) and 11 per cent *disagreed* that they scheduled their job so it fits around their classes and other academic commitments, which may suggest that job commitments took precedence;
- attending lectures early in the course in order to get the handouts, then reducing attendance;
- missing lectures for the day or the week before an assignment is due in, in order to get the work done;
- getting a medical certificate for deferment of some exams in order to stagger exams; and
- doing the bare minimum required, rather than doing as well as they can—surface learning as opposed to deep learning.

None of these strategies is new of course, but the message from the consultations is that these patterns of adaptation have increased markedly in the last few years.

## 5.2   Perceptions of a threshold

We asked respondents: 'What is the maximum number of hours of paid work per week you feel you could cope with during the university year before it started to seriously affect your academic performance?' The mean for all respondents was 17.3 hours. We note again the minimum number of 14.7 hours that respondents say they need to get by. Males had a significantly higher threshold number of hours (18.1) than females (16.7). Respondents are actually working an average of 14.7 hours per week (Chapter 3). On average, then, it would seem that they are working around two to three hours less than the critical number of hours beyond which they believe their academic work will be seriously affected.

However, Table 5.1 shows that respondents' assessments vary from less than 10 to more than 25 hours. This is quite a large range. It is perhaps surprising that towards half of the male respondents (46 per cent) believe that their academic work would not be seriously affected until they hit 20–25 hours per week and 21 per cent believe that it would not be affected until they were working 25 hours or more. The corresponding figures for females are much less (24 per cent and 15 per cent). The difference between males and females raises interesting questions about the basis of female and male perceptions of the impact of employment—questions that unfortunately cannot be answered by this study. Importantly, it suggests that many students, especially males, have a rather inflated and perhaps unrealistic perception of their capacity for balancing paid work and study.

Table 5.1      Maximum number of hours of paid work before academic performance is affected (% of respondents) n = 1563

|  | Females | Males | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Less than 10 hours | 13 | 12 | 12 |
| 10 hours to less than 15 hours | 23 | 20 | 22 |
| 15 hours to less than 20 hours | 25 | 22 | 24 |
| 20 hours to less than 25 hours | 24 | 25 | 25 |
| 25 hours or more | 15 | 21 | 17 |

As might be expected, there was a significant relationship between course contact hours and respondents' assessment of threshold hours beyond which their academic performance was likely to be affected. As contact hours increased, the threshold number of hours decreased. This is also reflected in assessments of threshold hours by respondents in different fields of study. Business studies respondents had the highest average assessment (19.2 hours). It will be remembered that they had the lowest average course contact hours per week. This was almost five hours more than that of respondents studying in the Health area (15.4 hours), who had the highest average course contact

hours. Arts/Humanities, Science, and Agriculture/Architecture/Engineering students were clustered around the average of 17.3 hours.

There is an issue here that invites further exploration. Actual hours of paid employment are obviously constrained in a very real way by course requirements—the number of hours and the way they are spread throughout the week, as well as the amount of outside class hours work required. However, it may also be the case that students become accustomed to working longer hours and juggling what they have to do, so believe that they could in fact work more hours without it interfering with their academic work.

However, factors other than course contact hours are operating. Traditional entry and delayed entry respondents' average threshold number of hours was some two hours more than that of mature age respondents, a statistically significant difference. This could well be because mature age students are more likely to have a range of domestic, family and other responsibilities in their lives as well as their study and paid work.

# 6 Responding to new realities

University responses to full-time study and work form part of a much larger picture of institutions catering for a more diverse undergraduate student body in the context of significant developments in tertiary education over the past decade or so—especially the introduction of HECS, demands for greater university accountability and quality assurance, more instrumental and entrepreneurial approaches to education, and developments in information technology.

The observations in this chapter draw on individual and group consultations with staff from the survey universities. They included teaching staff, staff from a range of student support services, administrative staff and staff concerned with student facilities and planning. We asked them what trends they were observing, issues raised for them, and what strategies they and others were using in response to the observed trends and issues. While we are confident we have identified many of the main trends, issues, and responses, our consultations were constrained by time and other resources available for the investigation. A comprehensive investigation of how universities are responding would require a broader investigation across a larger number of universities.

## 6.1 Flexible course delivery

Universities have developed flexible course delivery policies in response to a number of factors, including developments in information technology and pressures to market courses to a wider audience, as well as for pedagogical reasons and to meet student demand, some of which is related to students spending less time on campus because of employment commitments.

Examples of flexible organisation and delivery of courses provided by the universities are many and varied.

Online lectures and other course material, online assessment, online tutorial discussion groups and email contact with lecturers all help to make it easier for students to have access to course material and to study when they want to and when they have the time.

- Classes are increasingly timetabled in recognition of the fact that students no longer spend five days a week on campus and are likely to be absent on one or two days in paid employment. This appears to be especially the

case with some courses, such as the final year of some business courses that accommodate students seeking full-time employment in their final year.

- In some universities, courses are constructed across campuses so students spend part of their time on one campus and the remainder on another. There are advantages for students in such arrangements; they have access to a wider range of courses and opportunities. It can however make things more difficult for employed students who have an additional time factor to juggle, especially when the campuses are a long way apart. It is also likely that in some cases it reduces possibilities for students to make connections with each other and to feel part of either campus. In a sense, this is the antithesis of flexibility.

- Universities are seeking ways of encouraging students to let staff know as early as possible if there are having problems with the aim of better advising them when they do get into trouble. A faculty adviser said: 'I try to save their skin but often they come too late. It's such a waste.'

- There is increasing pressure for courses to incorporate work-based learning and there are more partnerships with employers in courses in addition to the traditional areas of nursing and teaching education.

- There are more intensive block courses, such as summer schools, winter schools etc, with delayed assessment and different packaging of hours required for a course.

Greater flexibility in times and subject offerings has meant that juggling course requirements and employment commitments is easier for some students, although both students and staff say it is easier in courses with fewer contact hours and more difficult in those with more contact hours, or where practicums or placements are built into the course. Requirements for professional registration limit the flexibility that can be built into some courses.

The teaching staff we interviewed have mixed feelings about increased flexibility. Some welcome it and see it as a challenge to provide high quality learning experiences for students. Many staff are sympathetic to the paid work and family demands on their students. They are extending themselves to cope with increased numbers of students asking for extensions, extended marking times, and dealing with withheld results. They are nevertheless concerned about the increasing work and time pressures that result. In addition, they warn that there are limits to flexibility, both in terms of meeting all student demands and the value of the resulting learning experiences.

Other academic staff are finding that, on top of factors such as financial cutbacks to faculty budgets, reduced teaching resources, administrative restructuring and large classes, student requests for what some describe as 'individual timetables' only add to their work pressure. Some are demoralised or fighting hard not to be.

There are many challenges for academic staff in the flexible delivery of courses. Less student time spent on campus has impacts on all aspects of the teaching and learning environment, including assessment, as the following comment from a lecturer illustrates:

*Assessment is a real problem when students are spending less time on campus. I am constantly thinking of ways of compensating for this. I use more optional assessments—this cuts down on one large single assessment.*

The potential negative impact of flexibility for students and for staff is also apparent, as the following comment shows:

*Flexibility has its downside. It becomes more difficult to respond to the student population as they are a transient group. We need to think carefully about what is appropriate to provide for students.*

Widespread access to academic staff via email is partially a response to demands for more flexible arrangements. Most student are positive about being able to contact staff by email. They can use their on-campus time for classes and other essential tasks and post messages to staff whenever they like. Many find it less threatening than a face to face contact. However, dealing with student email puts increasing pressure on staff time, not just in terms of the total number of hours but also the sense of obligation to be especially responsive to individual queries.

Staff at most institutions talked about the tendency for students to want to get a qualification quickly and get through their courses in the minimum time. On the other hand, several institutions noted a trend for graduation times to be extended. A business school that used to graduate most students in March with a 'mop up' graduation in October now has large numbers graduating in October. This was attributed in part to full-time students being in paid employment and either dropping or failing subjects along the way that had to be picked up later, extending the time they took to finish the course.

Lecturers also reported sometimes having to set a series of deferred exams for students who were unable to sit at the regular time because of personal and other stresses, some of which are related to paid work commitments of full-time students.

It was not uncommon for respondents who were interviewed to comment on the fact that they often had a number of assignments in different subjects due within a relatively short time. One institution has responded to this problem by mapping out an assessment grid for first year students in order to coordinate the requirements and dates on which assessment tasks are due.

## 6.2 Flexible student support and administrative services

Changed patterns of student attendance on campus may mean less of some services but they are likely to lead to more help being required in other areas. As students' lives become more complicated and the pressures on them increase, they are likely to need more assistance to handle both the ongoing problems and the times of crisis. They are increasingly looking for and expecting assistance outside of normal office hours.

### 6.2.1 Careers and employment services

Most of those consulted reported that current directions in careers services result from changes in the budgeting of universities, their capacity to afford services and staffing issues, as well as the constant and increasing demands of students for jobs. In some, the proportion of time spent on individual career counselling has dropped as services shift to online information and job search facilities. Students are encouraged to take a greater degree of responsibility for themselves and to determine their own starting points. An increasing proportion of contact with students is via email. Overall, services are trying to maximise their resources. Some are working more closely with departments on professional career development issues for students through work-based assignments and practicums.

Preparing undergraduates for the ongoing changes they are likely to experience in their careers is an important part of careers services. The focus used to be on getting a first job; now, there is more emphasis on the skills necessary to 'manage a career', such as self-reliance, a life long learning orientation, self-awareness and networking.

Employers are insisting on graduates having evidence of generic transferable skills and students are having to articulate their casual work in terms of such skills. Some employers are increasingly looking to evidence of graduate participation in outside employment activities such as taking on organising roles, committee membership, participation in social and career programs and conference attendance.

There are some initiatives from careers and employment services that come under the broad rubric of Student Development Programs—programs which aim to develop a range of generic skills. Structured programs of volunteer work and programs in which leadership skills have been developed in some instances as part of the curriculum and students gain credits for doing them.

It was reported that many students would prefer to work in areas related to their course during their undergraduate years; however such work is often difficult to find. It is sometimes easier in areas such as computing; however, students who take on consultancy work have to have good time management and organisational skills as work can easily get out of hand, leaving little room for study. Some make the pragmatic decision not to strive for more than a pass so that their paid work does not suffer.

In regard to casual employment during the undergraduate course, some university employment service officers reported that they were seeing greater competition for part-time jobs in areas such as retailing and employers are expecting highly professional applications from potential employees even for casual work.

## 6.2.2   Counselling and financial services

Counselling and financial services staff report an increasing number of students presenting at their services with more extreme problems, often related to financial problems and the difficulties of juggling study and work. Financial services report seeing an increasing number of students seeking loans for basic living expenses. Many students are conscious of their future HECS debt and are reluctant to take on further loans but are often forced to do so. Alternatively, they decide to take time off from university and seek full-time work.

Trends in counselling services reported in the consultations included:

- more email contact with students and attempts to work through some of the confidentiality issues raised by this;
- more self-help resources on line and in the form of handouts
  e.g. information about depression, transition issues, available resources, common personal problems;
- web pages linked to self-help information and resources;
- some 'out of hours' consultations, e.g. 8 am and 5–6 pm appointments;
- some piloting of telephone consultations; and
- development of programs such as time management, study management; juggling work and study, but acknowledgement that more such courses are needed.

Specifically in relation to the issues of managing study and work:

- more assistance for students to prioritise and be realistic in their decisions about study and work, and
- more crisis management and advocacy for students around exam time.

Among issues reported as yet to be satisfactorily addressed are:

- equity questions resulting from students having very different levels of financial resources and computers to access online resources; and
- how to provide good levels of services across multiple campuses.

### 6.2.3   Housing services

Housing officers report seeing more urgent and dramatic cases. Mature age people on Austudy with no rent assistance are especially at risk of getting into financial difficulties. When they begin study, some have a substantial drop in income and after a period, find that they have to drop back to part-time enrolment. Students are often living in an unsuitable study environment that adds to their difficulties in coping with study demands. While not restricted to overseas students and students from rural areas, these groups were reported to have issues of study and work exacerbated by inappropriate and/or costly housing.

### 6.2.4   Libraries

All university libraries offer a range of flexible online services including, for example, information and subject databases, training for use of the web, electronic rather than hard copy reserve facilities, a 24-hour service for computer help, and integration of services with online courses. Students are increasingly using online training facilities. However, some librarians caution that we are still in the early days of development of an online environment. There is the need for more training and some students lack confidence to use the resources available. And of course, as they spend more time in paid work they have less time to spend developing the skills necessary to access the resources and to use them effectively.

Developments reported in libraries include:

- extended library opening hours all year round to support students studying in flexible modes, e.g. Summer and Winter schools;
- increased use of library study support and loans services during evenings and on weekends;
- increased demands for information skills classes in the evenings and to some extent on the weekends;
- increased remote use of electronic services at all times of the day and night;
- increased demand for full-text journals online;
- difficulties for library staff in contacting and providing information for students and to part-time and casual lecturers who do not spend much time on campus;

- demand for and uptake of inter-campus document delivery services; and

- development and extension of services to support new modes of teaching and studying.

### 6.2.5   Information services

Changes reported in student information and administration services relevant to issues of combining full-time study and employment include:

- more student information is available online;

- course, university and other information is made available to students in a variety of ways including start up CDs;

- extended opening times for information services; and

- the presence on campus of services such as Centrelink representatives to advise students.

Overall, students are presenting with a broader range of issues. Counter staff are increasingly required to be sensitive to a range of personal issues and how they affect student enrolments. They are also required to be aware of when it is appropriate to refer students to other services. The need for staff training to deal with these issues was noted.

## 6.3   Student facilities

In the light of changed patterns of student attendance on campus, most institutions have undertaken reviews of services available to students and surveys of what students need. University trading facilities such as bars, food outlets, computer shops, entertainment centres, photocopying services, sports facilities, etc. are attempting to respond to a more diverse range of students, including, in the words of one manager, the needs of a more 'fickle' student body. The manager went on to say: 'There is a culture of coming and going amongst students and we are trying to provide appropriate services to meet their needs'.

Responses are likely to vary across institutions as Student Union managers and university planners determine what services are needed by their particular student body and as they look for different ways of providing such services. For example, some campuses have a high percentage of older students, many of whom do not have much disposable income. Others have a substantial population of international students, who tend to be frequent users of services such as study areas which become key meeting places. Their needs are often different from those of non-overseas students, in that many seek a sense of community by studying together and spending time together on campus.

Student Unions have developed user-friendly web sites; they are changing the ways in which they communicate with students because they are no longer assuming that all full-time students will be around on campus for extended periods; they are looking to respond to particular and changing needs of their student body.

The nature of food outlets is changing. A representative from a large company with catering contracts in a number of Australian universities commented that over recent years, there had been a minor drop in demand in the institutions they serviced, but the major change was a move to smaller outlets and quicker service. "The days of the big refectory are numbered', according to the representative.

However, universities are conscious of their varied student populations and the diversity of student needs. A review of services in one institution compared the needs of working students with increased disposable income for up-market food services and quick service compared with 'students without such income, increasingly being driven by the higher prices of campus catering to bring their own food or seek non-commercial lounges and self-catering venues with microwave ovens, etc.'

Some universities are focusing more on a community or communities beyond the institution, arguing that students need appropriate services wherever they are in the broader community. This is leading some to new partnerships with other groups and institutions, including local government bodies and city councils. Such an approach is, it is argued, contributing to blurring the boundaries between the university and the community. There are also moves to foster student connections with the university they attend through marketing and 'branding' of the institution. In some regional areas, universities and their facilities are very much part of the local community.

## 6.4  Liaison across the university

The current environment presents both challenges and opportunities for closer liaison between various parts of the university—academic staff, student support services staff, student administration staff, student union bodies and planning and facilities staff.

While both academic staff and student support staff have their necessary and particular areas of expertise, there is increasing awareness of overlap at the edges and a far greater and more urgent need to work together. One institution is trying to blur the functional areas between support services, to promote more overlap and more jointly coordinated approaches. They have

set up a committee with representatives from across the seven faculties on the campus. This helps faculties to identify issues with student support services staff and promote links between academic and student support services.

Student services staff report that they look for closer connections between academic and student support services, for 'hotspots' in courses where problems and issues might arise and they develop approaches to deal with them. In this respect, there is joint involvement in some curriculum issues, e.g. if team-work is an important aspect of a course and a required generic skill, the counselling service becomes involved in providing support for the development of such skills.

Some teaching staff reported reduced opportunities for them to exercise a pastoral role, principally as a result of increased work pressures, and less administrative support. The widespread use of sessional staff who do not have the time or the resources to offer high levels of support to students who are having problems also makes a pastoral dimension less likely in the teaching and learning environment.

# 7    Conclusions

*I have a full-time job. Could you possibly let me know of any resources that I should consult before the class next week? I may not be able to attend lectures... except when things are not busy at work. Will all the information I need be in the lecture notes and in the prescribed text book? Do the lectures describe anything that I cannot read up on in either of these resources? (email to a lecturer from a full-time student enrolled in a laboratory-based course)*

Responding to student requests for consideration of one kind or another because of paid work is an everyday reality confronting an increasing number of academics, even those who teach and manage subjects with high contact hours and close supervision. In our fieldwork we certainly touched a nerve when we raised the growing phenomenon of student paid work and the demands it places on academics and administrators. Staff find themselves in the uncomfortable position of making compromises in timetabling, assessment, and their expectations and standards; perhaps to be fair to students who say they have no choice but to work, or to accommodate students who say they need to work to secure employment on completion of their degree. In some cases, they feel powerless to ignore the pleas of students. We noted that the hours of work are not a significant factor directly influencing average grades, and that course contact hours of 21 or more have a small effect compared with the other variables we examined, i.e. ENTER score, study motivation and management, and levels of academic commitment and involvement. While grades may not be affected directly by hours of paid work for most students, there is little question that the quality of their educational experience is seriously diminished when their work takes priority over their university activities.

We are not suggesting that students should not work at all. There is clear evidence from our earlier studies that students who do not do any paid work are no better off academically than those who do work. They are also increasingly at a disadvantage when it comes to their transition into the world of work after university, since they do not have evidence of even basic workplace skills to support their job applications, let alone the kinds of generic skills that employers say they value. The issue is one of balance, and we suggest that it is a management issue for institutions as well as for individual students.

## 7.1   The work imperative

A view was expressed in the consultations that in the past, the 'student identity' allowed more freedom for sometimes playful exploration, and time for reflection, whereas experimentation is now occurring in more structured ways and much more frequently within employment parameters. Employers expect graduates to have a reasonably consistent record of employment experience. University career advisers and employment officers promote it; and undergraduate students are under pressure to demonstrate their capacity to meet these expectations. In addition, more students are opting for vocational and professional courses and subjects, and traditional arts and sciences courses increasingly promote and actively foster the development of a variety of generic skills.

Paid work orientation among university students is strong. Whether they are working primarily to provide for the basic necessities, for 'extras', or to gain financial independence, most full-time students recognise that their employment experience as well as their results, is going to count when they leave university. Further, they are being told that they will change careers several times during their working lifetime and many realise that they are likely to continue to either switch between or combine work and study throughout their lives. Given the multiple motivations for combining study and work, the trend to do so is unlikely to change. The following comment was made by a survey respondent: "In these times, it's hard for students not to work. It's a given and to be expected at our age. Even if you are living at home, you still have to work because employers expect it."

Indeed, graduates who do not have a history of employment, or alternatively, evidence of substantial structured volunteer work or community involvement, are likely to be at a disadvantage in the job market. As one careers officer said: 'The ones being left behind are those who don't have any work experience.' It was suggested that in some areas, perhaps especially in rural and regional areas where part-time work opportunities are limited, a divide is being created between undergraduate students who can readily find part-time and casual jobs and those who find it increasingly hard to get such employment because they lack options and contacts and do not have prior work experience.

As we have seen, responses to a number of items suggest that women's and men's experiences of managing full-time study and work is different in quite substantial ways. Women are more likely than men to say that overall they are enjoying their course, and that they have a strong desire to do well in all their subjects. On the other hand, they are more likely to say they feel overwhelmed by all they have to do, even though on average they work

about the same number of hours as do males. This is likely to relate partly to women having more unpaid work, domestic and other responsibilities, assuming more responsibilities and/or feeling more stressed about their responsibilities.

Men think they can manage more hours of paid work than do women before their academic study is affected. Again, this is likely to be related to women either having more domestic and other responsibilities or feeling more responsible about what they do. Women are also more likely to say that stress from their work conditions makes it difficult to cope with academic study, and are more likely to be worried about their HECS burden in the future.

There is also evidence of an increasingly instrumental view of education, reflecting a wider cultural attitude and also based on students' realistic assessments of the difficulties many of them will face in getting the sort of job they want when they graduate. University is seen by students principally as a step towards a career, not as a time for reflection or having fun, because the end point—future employment outcomes—is a primary goal. It is also a source of considerable stress and anxiety. When study and work get out of balance the consequences can be quite serious in terms of academic performance but also with respect to personal well-being. At each of the universities visited, student counsellors reported seeing more students with more extreme problems in recent years. One commented that: 'Increased difficulties in securing and maintaining Austudy has led to desperate financial situations with no food, no rent money, no electricity money and an inability to focus on study.'

Tiredness and feeling rundown is obviously a problem for students who work long hours. It is easy to get behind. If students are heavily committed and get sick, there are interactive effects that potentially lead to a downward spiral. Getting a doctor's certificate is often necessary in order to keep a job and this can mean additional time and expense. Students are not always in a position to make use of university health services in these crisis situations. It was reported that the downward spiral begins if students feel they cannot take sufficient time off work to get better, so they tend to go back to work sooner than they should. Because of work, study and financial pressures some don't take the time to eat healthily, rest enough and look after themselves. Sometimes, prescriptions do not get filled because they are too expensive. University Health Services reported that they try to find cheap ways of doing things such as giving students free samples from medical companies and referring them to doctors who bulk bill.

What is easily overlooked is the loss of leisure time and recreational activity that supports a balanced lifestyle for students. We were not able to investigate

the extent to which this reduction in recreational activity is occuring, or the impact it might have on student achievement and involvement in university life.

## 7.2   A student life?

Multiple undergraduate student identities on campus are the norm, not only because there are more older students on campuses, more people training or retraining for new careers and more students who are the first in their family to undertake higher education, but also as a result of the economic and social shifts discussed in Chapter 1 that now shape the lives of young adults. However, the traditional notion of a student identity that directed policy and practice is undergoing rapid transformation. It was once the case that the great majority of men and a much smaller proportion of women forged their adult identities in a work environment directly they left school. A small minority went on to higher education and thus had this process postponed. As mass secondary education and then post-secondary education became the norm, so too were young people more likely to be distanced from the world of work and their entry into it postponed. In many respects, we have now moved to a context where a large proportion of young adults, as well as older adults, are attempting to manage study and work in their lives although there is often very little if any synergy between the two activities. The shift to a knowledge based society and recognition of the need for policies that promote and enhance lifelong learning make the integration of work and study highly desirable to maximise the impact. However, the institutions—universities and workplaces—through which undergraduate students engage with study and work are not always organised to facilitate this integration, at least not when the study is 'full-time'. Full-time undergraduate courses are not built around the demands of work.

It would be over-stating the case to say that the 'new realities' facing universities are primarily and directly the result of full-time undergraduate students taking on significant hours of paid employment. They are the result of a range of factors specific to the higher education sector, but also because of some major shifts in the way young people see their university experience in relation to their lives, now and in the future. However, students combining study and work and therefore spending less time on campus is a substantial contributing factor. There is a strong sense in universities that campus life is a relatively small part of the lives of the majority of students and our findings tend to confirm this. An academic commented: 'Many students don't want to spend time on campus. They want a timetable where they can spend the least amount of time on campus, and this is partly dictated by employment commitments'. However, the same person went on to say: 'But that's not the whole story. There are groups of students, such as international students and

rural students, who are looking for a sense of community'. Research with commencing students at one of the survey universities also suggests strongly what they most want when they arrive are opportunities to make connections with other students.

In general, clubs and societies are seeing lower levels of participation and involvement and much of this is attributed to students spending less of their non-class time on campus. Campus time is limited; it has to be spent productively, either in class, working in the library or on group assignments. Of course, older students are much more likely to have more of their life 'outside' the university and more calls on their time because of family and other responsibilities.

Nevertheless, this does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest in university-based activities. The researchers heard examples of relatively high club and activities interest at the beginning of the year and especially amongst commencing students. The reality, however, kicks in as the year goes by and it becomes harder to schedule events because people are too busy and cannot fit activities in with other commitments, including employment. Sporting clubs and activities seem to continue to draw participants and are an area of expansion in some universities. One student also observed that clubs where students performed well and brought prestige to the university, such as sports and debating clubs, tended to attract students and then to get more university financial support, but the overall effect was to create further interest.

Some student union positions that were once voluntary and unpaid are now paid. This reflects both financial considerations for students and an acknowledgement that the skills gained are an important component of employment experience and should be formally recognised by being paid. Students now have less time for voluntary involvement in university activities. Events that were previously very well attended have difficulties in getting big crowds as fewer students can spare the time to attend, or take part, or help out. Having said this, we were given many examples of full-time students who are employed, or engaged in unpaid political and community activities of one sort or another, and who also find the time to be mentors for younger students, student guides in orientation activities and volunteers in student union offices. Incentives (free photocopying, free tickets to cinemas etc.) are often part of participation in such activities.

There are also differences between institutions and campuses, partly as a result of different student populations but also because of their history, their physical design and their facilities. Some campuses clearly have more of a 'heart' in both the physical and psychological senses of the word than others. The lack of a central Student Union building in some circumstances makes it difficult for them to promote a sense of community and campus life. While

there was always an active few and a large apathetic majority amongst the student body, those who engage in a formal way with the extra-mural life of the university are now actively rewarded and recognised. At a broader level, there is a view that an increasingly diverse undergraduate student population and polarisation of the student body (between those who have 'free' time and spend it on campus and those who do not) leads to a less coherent student body to advocate for those most in need. A more fragmented campus life with sporadic and less consistent student interaction reduces opportunities for the formation of on-campus political groups.

We have some indication that our surveys and interviews did not reveal the full story for some groups of students. Our consultations suggested that there is a strong financial imperative for some full fee-paying overseas students to work their allowed 20 hours and sometimes more. While some can call on substantial financial support from other sources, others are in dire straits financially. Their families can support them through paying fees, however, they are unable to provide living costs and therefore a proportion of overseas students have to work long hours to provide for accommodation and living expenses. Given the limits placed on the number of hours these students can work we suspect that we did not reach many international students in this position or that, despite our reassurances, they did not feel free to divulge the full extent of their paid work. It should be said however, that on the whole these students were clear that their major priority was to do well in their studies.

## 7.3 The blurring distinction between full-time and part-time students

The distinction between full-time and part-time students is becoming increasingly blurred as students in both categories combine study and work, and as students change from full-time enrolment to part-time and back again, according to the circumstances of their lives and as financial and paid work demands on them shift. This has major implications at an institutional level. While the patterns of full-time and part-time enrolments vary across institutions, a member of staff at one survey university reported substantial changes in the proportion of full-time and part-time enrolled students over a ten-year period. He suggested that the institution has three groups of students rather than two — the predominantly full-time, the predominantly part-time and those who shift between full-time and part-time (Spalding, personal communication 2001). A systematic collection of data suggested that large numbers of students changing their enrolment (e.g. by shifting from three to two subjects) either during the year or from year to year, shifts the overall

pattern of enrolments quite dramatically while the students and the courses they are enrolled in remain the same. Demands on university services are far less predictable as a consequence.

It was reported that university systems are often not flexible enough to cope with such changes. Room allocations and class times tend to be organised around assumptions that some classes are for full-time students and others for part-timers. However, with students working a range of day and night-time shifts, it can no longer be assumed that full-time students will attend a day class; nor do part-time students necessarily attend evening and late afternoon classes. Another institution reported resource allocation issues when students enrolled full-time but dropped subjects by the census date, leaving departments not meeting their quotas.

There are changed expectations about it is to be a full-time student. Study is only one area of life, an area that has to be juggled along with other important areas such as paid work, relationships and leisure activities if there is any time left over for them. Getting a degree represents a very large investment of money and time and the majority of students are faced with substantial HECS debts when they graduate. Doing a degree therefore has to pay off. However, there is an inherent contradiction between this predominantly instrumental view of university education, the 'get in, get out, get your degree quickly' imperative which motivates many students, and the increasingly important focus on generic skills, graduate attributes, and a lifelong learning orientation.

## 7.4   Responding to the challenges

We examined the ways in which universities were modifying or reviewing their service provision and facilities in response to the changing patterns of student attendance. There is a strong view that the quality of advice on the level of commitment expected in courses from recruitment and academic staff provided to students early in their contact with universities is crucial. This needs to be reinforced by academics in their curriculum design and assessment practices. Students need a clear understanding of the effort and standards required. They also need to be alerted to the importance of the social experience of learning in the educational process as well as the benefits of developing appropriate and relevant generic skills that come from such an experience. Likewise the accessibility, timeliness and effectiveness of intervention for students lacking commitment and at risk of failing is a priority for the universities we surveyed.

Some universities are pursuing the idea of developing special relationships with student-friendly employers and some are also more actively creating opportunities for students to do paid work on campus. It is worth noting the discussion concerning full-time students' employment in the United States that includes differences between on-campus and off-campus employment, since there has been a long-standing culture of such campus-based work in the US. Some studies show benefits associated with on-campus work because it is less disruptive of students' time and class schedules and tends to encourage integration of students into the university culture and community. However, there are also conflicting findings that suggest difficulties for these students in making clear divides between their commitments.

The rapid developments in flexible course delivery to enrich the learning experience of students has enormous benefits for students if managed carefully. The academics and administrators we interviewed were alert to the problem of creating a context that makes it easier for students to work even more hours in paid work and to further disengage from the university experience. There was considerable ambivalence amongst the academic staff we interviewed. As we noted, some welcome flexible learning modes and see them as a challenge to provide high quality learning experiences. Others are concerned that it creates a more transient student population with even less involvement and commitment to learning beyond what is needed to pass. In our view students are now in a powerful position to shape the undergraduate experience to suit their own timetables, including work and lifestyle priorities (McInnis 2001). If universities are overly responsive to student work priorities and preferences they run the risk of exacerbating the growing problem of more general disengagement.

This investigation raises questions at system and institutional levels. The findings support the need to consider the impact of paid work on questions of access and student progress, the cost-effectiveness of investment in infrastructure, and 'the structure of incentives for overcoming impediments to organisational flexibility and responsiveness' (Gallagher 2001 p. 9). What we do not have from this study is a strong picture of the changing patterns of use of campus facilities and services, although there is some indication from the case studies. An increasing number of services are being offered out of business hours, such as counselling and financial services. We listed a range of responses from libraries and information services that involve major shifts in infrastructure commitments.

The sheer diversity inherent in the patterns of paid work amongst students makes this an issue of considerable complexity for universities. This calls for a more comprehensive analysis at the institutional level of student populations, and the changing patterns of student engagement. Institutional responses need

to address, in the context of changing student expectations and realities, the question of how the educational experiences of students can be structured to enhance the learning outcomes that universities value.

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# Appendix A

## Methodology

The target group was undergraduate full-time enrolled students, in other than their first year of university study, who were also in paid employment. Data were gathered by surveys at seven universities and the same survey mailed to two additional universities. The nine institutions were located in four states and included universities which are diverse in their time of establishment, the composition of their student body and the range and focus of their courses. We have called them: City Tech, Regional, Gumtree, New Multi-campus, Sandstone, Innovator, International Tech, Established, International Multi-campus.

### The survey

The aim was to collect between 125–150 completed surveys at each of the seven institutions and at all but one university, where a high proportion of the students approached proved to be in their first year, this was not difficult. Survey instruments were distributed and collected by members of the research team and by locally recruited assistants who were thoroughly briefed about the research. The main strategy was to approach students in café areas, outside and inside libraries, and in other areas where students gathered or could sit. In addition, some lecturers provided an opportunity for a researcher to briefly explain the research to students prior to a lecture and to return with surveys when the lecture was finished. Visits were made in the first three days of the week when the majority of classes are scheduled and when most full-time students are likely to be on campus. At most institutions, the survey was conducted on one day only.

The disadvantage of the survey approach is that it is difficult to ensure a representative sample of students is approached and completes the survey. Attempts were made to visit different areas of a campus and some ongoing monitoring of gender balance and students from different discipline areas was carried out. Clearly, students not on campus on the days of the researchers' visit could not be included and we can assume that some of these would be absent because of their employment and therefore in scope. It is also possible that younger rather than older students are likely to gather in and around cafés and eating areas, where respondents tended to be recruited.

## Mailed survey

To increase the likelihood of getting an overall representative sample, the survey was mailed to a sample of 1 500 students from two metropolitan universities. Samples were randomly selected from all current undergraduate, other than first year students who had a second semester load ≥ .375 (i.e. who were enrolled full-time). A random sample of the target group was taken in proportion to the number of students in each major field of study. The samples generated were then compared for equivalence with total target group figures for gender and course year level and minor adjustments made if required.

Table A1    The total sample (on-site and mailed surveys)

|  | Number of respondents |
| --- | --- |
| City Tech University | 170 |
| Regional University | 155 |
| Gumtree University | 155 |
| New Multi-campus University | 122 |
| Sandstone University | 131 |
| Innovator University | 77 |
| International Tech University | 142 |
| Established | 281 |
| International Multi-campus | 323 |
| (missing) | 7 |
| Total | 1 563 |

### Weighting of males in the sample

Males in the sample are weighted. DETYA figures show that females are 56.2 per cent of non-commencing, (i.e. other than first-year) full-time undergraduate students (figures supplied by DETYA Statistics Unit). Female full-time undergraduate students are more likely than their male counterparts to be in paid employment (76 per cent compared with 69 per cent) (Long & Hayden 2001). We might expect, then, that the proportion of female survey respondents would be around 59 per cent (76 per cent of 56.2 per cent), whereas it was actually 64 per cent. We therefore weighted the males by a factor of 1.26 so that the proportion of females to males is the expected 58.6: 41.4.

### Multiple regression analysis

All multiple regression analyses were conducted using only cases identified as working part-time during the semester or working part-time during both semester and holiday periods (96 per cent of the whole sample). The multiple regression on cases falling into these two categories was performed between

average mark for first semester as the dependent variable and ENTER score, female, delayed entry, mature age entry, 1–10 hours paid work per week, 21 and over hours paid work per week, 1–10 course contact hours per week, 21 and over course contact hours per week, and the 11 scales as the independent variables. The null hypothesis that the correlations between the dependent variable and the independent variables and regression coefficients was zero was tested using analysis of variance. The null hypothesis was rejected with all coefficients being significantly different from zero $F(19, 811)=11.14$, $p<.001$. The adjusted $R^2$ for the regression was 0.19.

Similar multiple regressions were also performed on traditional entry respondents only and delayed/mature age entry respondents only. The delayed entry and mature age entry independent variables were removed from these analyses. All coefficients were significantly different from zero on the regressions using only the traditional entry respondents $F(17, 670)=10.80$, $p<.001$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.19$) and using only the delayed and mature respondents $F(17, 125)=3.48$, $p<.001$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.23$).

The independent variables used in the multiple regressions had different scaled units. The regression coefficients were thus transformed to be more closely comparable. The ENTER score independent variable was multiplied by 25 and the mutually exclusive (or "dummy") independent variables (female; delayed entry; mature entry; 1 to 10 hours paid work per week; 21 and over hours paid work per week; 0 to 10 contact hours per week; and 21 and over contact hours per week) were divided by 4. These transformations made the coefficients more closely comparable with coefficients for the 11 scales.

Statistical tests on continuous variables

Independent *t*-tests were performed on comparisons between continuous variables. Levene Tests were used in conjunction with *t*-tests to evaluate the assumption of homogeneity of variance. When the null hypothesis of equality of variance was rejected, a non-parametric alternative to the *t*-test, the Mann-Whitney test, was used.

# Appendix B

## Selected characteristics of survey respondents and national target group

Table B1    Year of course and broad field of study: 2001 survey respondents and full-time, other than commencing undergraduate students in Australian universities in 2000 (% of the total in a category)

|  | Survey respondents % | +Australia, 2000 % |
|---|---|---|
| *Year of course/study | | |
| 2 | 42.1 | 38.9 |
| 3 | 19.0 | 43.6 |
| 4 or later | 32.0 | 24.0 |
| **Broad field of study | | |
| Agriculture, Animal Husbandry | 0.9 | 0.9 |
| Architecture, Building | 27.1 | 17.1 |
| Arts, Humanities, Social Science | 7.5 | 9.2 |
| Commerce, Business, Admin. | 6.2 | 8.4 |
| Education | 21.8 | 0.1 |
| Engineering, Surveying | 1.4 | 2.7 |
| Health | 26.6 | 22.7 |
| Law | 10.8 | 10.4 |
| Science | 13.1 | 6.2 |
| Veterinary Science | 18.2 | 0.5 |

+    Data supplied by Statistics Unit, DETYA.
*    For the national data, year of study is calculated from commencement date, e.g. a student commencing a course between April 1998 and March 1999, will be in 2nd year etc. It does not necessarily correspond to year of course.
**  Combined courses are coded into two fields of study.