



CAREERS SERVICE BRIEFING

Student Employment Matters – PGT student experience

Inspiring futures

What question were we trying to answer?

Following research into the working habits of our undergraduate students, we decided to turn our attention to the experience of postgraduate taught students. We wanted to better understand the impact of working while studying during a masters course to inform our advice to PGT students about the recommended maximum number of hours of work they should commit to alongside their studies.

Existing published research focuses on the experience of undergraduate students in balancing work and studies, so this report adds to the body of evidence relating to the experience of PGT students.

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How did we approach this?

The research was conducted over the summer by an undergraduate intern, as part of the [Employ.ed on Campus](#) programme. Desk research and a focus group were conducted, followed by a survey with responses from 214 students.

What did we find out?

- PGT students' experiences of working while studying vary substantially according to their financial circumstances and the number of contact hours for their courses.
- **Motivations** for working while studying mirrored those of the UG population with financial necessity topping the list. Other motivations were mainly employability-related, such as gaining relevant experience, developing skills and social benefits.
- **Benefits**, in addition to financial gain, the development of soft skills, particularly time management, increased social and cultural awareness and extension of networks were highlighted
- **Impact on academic study** 35% of all survey respondents who undertook paid work while studying felt that their employment status resulted in fluctuations in their ability to deal with demands of their course. An increase in the number of hours employed corresponded with a decrease in the number of hours of independent study undertaken by students and a perceived impact on the quality of their academic work as a result.
- **Other impacts** reported were dissatisfaction with the amount of time spent on extra-curricular activities (47%) and the availability of personal leisure time (41%).

Why does this matter?

The advice for PGT students in employment has been brought in line with the maximum of 15 hours per week recommended to undergraduate students, which also corresponds to the Russell Group average. This recommendation is for full-time, on campus students and should be considered as a guideline only with the proviso that 15 hours per week may not be appropriate for every PGT course. Students should clarify their position with their School if they have concerns. There is also an onus on staff to consider what is appropriate for their students, bearing in mind any visa restrictions on their right to work, and to communicate this clearly.

The research highlighted that some students actively seek support in balancing work and study, particularly those who reported difficulty in dealing with their course demands. Interestingly, they tend to seek this support from their personal networks or employers, rather than from the University. When this was explored, respondents said they did not know where to look for help or thought that the support available was inadequate or not well suited to their circumstances.

Some recommendations for enhancing the support available from the University included:

- Tailored advice from course leaders about appropriateness and impact of 15 hour recommendation for their course context.
- Proactive interest from personal tutors in students' outside work commitments and how they are balancing this with study.
- Signposting to appropriate sources of help, including any alternative funding sources.

A few headline stats

- The majority of respondents (73%) who undertake paid work while studying commit to 6 or more hours per week. Just under a quarter work 16-20 hours each week.
- Most PGT students are employed in jobs unrelated to their course of study with the top 3 sectors being Hospitality, Tourism & Sport; Teaching & Education and Retail & Sales.
- The vast majority of respondents (93%) think that employment will have a positive impact on their career prospects.
- Around one third of respondents undertake **unpaid** work experience during their course. Of those who do, the majority of them (73%) undertake work which is related to their course of study.

Interested in finding out more?

Please email employ.ed@ed.ac.uk to ask for a full copy of the report and find out who would be the best person to discuss your area of particular interest.