

## **'NOT FOR LIPSTICK AND LAGER': STUDENTS AND PART TIME WORK**

*Newman Smith and Phil Taylor*

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is almost impossible to juggle classes, lectures and studying and work together with all the things that keep you sane - boyfriends, friends. Working 20 hours a week does not, for me, mean more money for lipstick and lager, but is essential for paying rent bills etc. I'll still leave University £6,500 in debt. This hectic timetable is draining on time and on physical and emotional energy and leaves you with no leeway and no time to cope with personal problems...my university work is suffering severely.

(21 year old female, Glasgow Caledonian University, social science student, sales assistant £3.75 an hour).

In Scotland participation rates in higher education by people aged under 21 have soared from 19% in 1986-7 to 47% in 1996-7. The total of 156,997 students on full-time higher education courses in 1997 represents an increase of 92% over the last decade (**Times Higher Education Supplement** 27 March 1998; **Scottish Abstract of Statistics** 1998). At the same time, the number of full-time students participating in the labour market has also risen dramatically. The primary reason for the increase in part-time working lies in increasing financial pressures on students.

The root cause of these pressures is to be found in the policies of successive Conservative governments. As the number of places in higher education expanded dramatically during the early 1990s a series of government measures severely reduced the sources, and quantity, of income available to

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### *Scottish Affairs*

students from public funds. Most notable were the decisions to freeze grants, to remove state benefits, including the right to sign on during holidays, to deny housing benefit and to introduce student loans. As a consequence, the financial pressures imposed on hundreds of thousands of students increased, compelling even larger numbers to seek work in the labour markets close to their colleges, universities and homes. Since the part-time jobs that most students secured were generally in the low paid areas of the service sector, many had no choice but to work long hours in order to forestall incurring even larger levels of debt. Ironically, the debate surrounding the Dearing and Garrick Reports, and New Labour's 'new arrangements for student support', has served to draw public attention to the plight of students burdened with spiralling debts. The introduction of student payment of tuition fees prompted one newspaper to comment, 'Goodbye to all that: our free universities are history' (**The Independent** 24 July 1997).

The comments of the student quoted above capture the essential experience of the student worker. They describe the acute frustrations of attempting to operate in the dual worlds of work and study, balancing the competing demands generated in each. The student worker is a new phenomenon, a product of political decisions of the 1990s, which transferred the costs of financing higher education from the state to students and their families.

Hopes that the election of a Labour Government would herald a new era of positive reform of higher education were quickly dashed. Opposition to New Labour's introduction of student payment of tuition fees and the abolition of the maintenance grant has been widespread. Indeed, the Scottish National Union of Students (NUS) is so concerned about growing levels of student hardship and debt that it is to campaign separately from its UK counterpart by lobbying both the government and the new Scottish Parliament for the reintroduction of the maintenance grant.

The election of a hung Scottish parliament in May dispelled any faint hopes harboured by New Labour that the tuition fees debacles would quietly fade away. Despite the Liberal Democrats' U-turn on the immediate abolition of fees, the setting-up of a committee of inquiry to investigate the whole system of student finance ensures that the issue will remain at the centre of political debate in Scotland for the foreseeable future, a view confirmed by a recent ICM poll which showed that 65% of Scots were in favour of abolition of tuition fees (**The Scotsman** 8 June 1999).

Over the last twenty years the experience of students in higher education has been transformed. One defining point of contrast is that large numbers of

### *Students and Part-Time Work*

students now have to work whilst in full-time education. Income from paid part-time employment is no longer a supplementary source, but indispensable, as many students could not complete their studies without it. Despite the wages earned, students are still faced with burdensome debts and pressures which force them to drop out of higher education. Moreover, the traditional view that students work only for 'lipstick and lager' is now seriously outdated.

### **METHODS**

In this article, we examine the new phenomenon of the student worker by drawing on evidence from surveys conducted by the authors at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) and the University of Glasgow (GU). The questionnaires were circulated in February/March 1997 at Glasgow Caledonian University and in May 1998 at University of Glasgow. Following a pilot study at GCU, refinements were made to question formulation and survey design. At the two institutions, questionnaires were posted to the term-time addresses of all full-time third-year students: 2,606 at GCU and 3,326 at GU, with returns of 628 (GCU) and 741 (GU) representing response rates of 24% and 22%. Third-year students were targeted, mainly because the experiences of student employment in the year of the survey and the previous two academic years permitted longitudinal analysis across a three-year period.

These sample sizes compare favourably with other institutional-level studies. A survey at Manchester Metropolitan University drew on data from 345 working students (Lucas 1997) and earlier surveys at Manchester (Lucas and Ralston 1997) and Oxford Brookes University (Paton-Saltzberg and Lindsay 1995) worked with similar sized samples. To the best of our knowledge, this Glasgow research is based on the most comprehensive UK-based, institutional-level surveys of student employment patterns. There are inevitable limitations with the survey method adopted. In the first place, the questionnaires do not enable us to arrive at a percentage figure for the number of students working as a whole. We can not extrapolate from the figure of 79% of respondents who were working at GCU, or the 52% at GU, to conclude that these are the percentages of the whole student population who are in part-time employment. Despite efforts to ensure a good return from non-working students, it is inevitable that those students with jobs are more likely to return a questionnaire specifically aimed at gathering knowledge of part-time employment patterns. Nevertheless, the total of 882 questionnaires completed by students who do work is far greater than for any

### *Scottish Affairs*

other UK survey on the subject. Careful analysis makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the experiences of working students.

The quantitative data is complemented by rich qualitative information, primarily in the form of written comments. Lest it be thought that this source might yield only limited data, we would point out that we received insightful comments from a majority of respondents. No fewer than 61% of respondents at GU and 63% at GCU made invaluable and, for the most part, lengthy submissions, which were collated for use as source data. At GCU, focus groups of students working in particular industries were organised in order to provide additional insight. The data sets combine to provide unique insights into the experience of the student worker as he or she participates in the 'flexible' labour markets of Glasgow and the West of Scotland. Prior to a discussion of the Glasgow experience it is necessary to contextualise the growth in student employment.

### **THE GROWTH IN STUDENT PART-TIME WORK**

The dramatic growth in student employment in the last decade or so is undeniable. According to one study, the percentage of all students under 25 combining work and study has increased from 23% in 1984 to 38% in 1998 (IDS 1999, p.10). The most vivid picture of this burgeoning student labour market can be seen in the retail sector, particularly in supermarkets, and in fast-food outlets.

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**Table 1**  
**Student Employment in Supermarkets and Fast-food Chains**

<i>Company</i>	Total Number of Employees	Number of Student Employees	% of Workforce
Pizza Hut	11,000	6,600	60
Kwik Save	20,500	8,330	41
Waitrose	20,000	7,000	35
Sainsbury	123,000	30,000	24
Safeway	68,000	14,268	20
Tesco	155,000	16,000	10
Asda	78,757	3,919	5

*Source: Incomes Data Services 1999*

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### *Students and Part-Time Work*

The Employment Policy Institute (1997) has provided a more detailed breakdown of the distribution of students in the labour market based on age and gender. Nine out of ten students aged 16-19 who work are concentrated in just three sectors of the labour market which they define as sales, personal services and other occupations. The heaviest concentration is in sales (42.6%) where the proportion of women students working outweighs that of men. Interestingly, there is a higher percentage of men (5.3%) working in clerical and secretarial occupations than women (4.4%). The EPI consider separately the occupations of those in the 20-24 age range but the pattern is broadly similar.

How do we explain this growth in student part-time work? The two main structural reasons most frequently cited are, firstly, the expansion of the further and higher education systems, and, secondly, the growth of the flexible labour market. The 400,000 students in UK higher education in 1965-66 had increased to 1,700,000 by 1996-97. As we have noted, the expansion of higher education in Scotland followed a similar pattern. Predicting continued growth, the Office for National Statistics estimates that, in the UK by 2006, nearly 70% of under 20s and 23% of 20-24 years olds will be students (**Times Higher Education Supplement** 26 September 1997; TUC 1997, p.3).

The growth in student part-time work cannot be accounted for wholly by the increase in student numbers resulting from the expansion of the higher education system. Since 1984, the number of full-time students aged between 16-24 has risen by 72%, while the numbers of full-time students who are also in employment has risen by 180% (IDS 1999, p.10). The higher incidence of part-time working amongst students has been facilitated by the growth in the flexible, deregulated labour market. Although reports of the death of the traditional full-time job have been greatly exaggerated, there has been a steady growth in the numbers of part-time workers, who now account for approximately 25% of the labour force. It is within this sector of the flexible labour market that the accelerated growth in student part-time work is located. As an Employment Policy Institute report reveals,

In the four years between winter 1992/93 and winter 1996/97, 45% of the increase in part-time employment amongst women was accounted for by students, and amongst men students accounted for fully half the increase in part-time employment. Over two-thirds of this increase was a result of the higher incidence of part-time working amongst students and the balance due to an overall expansion in student numbers.  
(EPI 1997, p.26)

### *Scottish Affairs*

Changes in the labour market and the expansion of higher education over the last 20 years are sound enough structural explanations for the increase in student part-time employment, but they do not explain why increasing numbers of students are seeking work. The higher incidence of part-time working is the consequence of the interaction of supply and demand factors in the flexible labour market. Employers' requirements for part-time labour coincide with students' needs to seek and obtain that employment.

### **THE REASONS WHY STUDENTS WORK**

In the introduction, we suggested that the traditional perceptions of student employment no longer correspond to a changed reality. In particular, outdated views ignore the harsh financial realities facing increasing numbers of students. In the Glasgow universities' surveys, students were asked to assess their reasons for working on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being 'very unimportant' and 5 'very important'. Table 2 presents the average scores for all students, for each of the given reasons in a 'league table' of importance.

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**Table 2**  
**Reasons For Seeking or Obtaining Part-Time Employment**

<i>Reason</i>	GCU Score	GU Score
Financial necessity/hardship (n= 500, GCU; n=435, GU;)	4.54	4.55
Extra cash for fun, clothes, going out (n= 499, GCU; n=425, GU)	3.57	3.90
Experience of working (n=496, GCU; n=418, GU)	2.83	3.33
Good for putting on CV (n=498, GCU; n=421, GU)	2.83	3.30
Obtain transferable skills (n=420, GU)	*	3.16
Meet people/social life through work (n=495, GCU; n=420, GU)	2.41	3.00
The job is relevant to my future career (n=418, GU)	*	2.12

\* *Not included in GCU survey*

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### *Students and Part-Time Work*

Students report 'financial necessity/hardship' as the most important reason for working. The comment below is typical and could be multiplied many times over:

Part-time employment has allowed me to earn so that I can pay the rent etc. Without part-time work I could not live without getting in debt.  
(20 year old female, GU pathology student, sales assistant in newsagent, £3.20 an hour, 18 hours a week)

At the time of the Glasgow University survey (May 1998) the students surveyed were carrying average debts of £3,378, while 19% had debts of £6,000 or more. These third year students expected, on average, debts of £5,292 on leaving university in June 1999, while 39% expected debts of £6,000 or above. Given that these students are amongst the last to receive a maintenance grant and not to have to pay tuition fees themselves, the expectation is that levels of indebtedness can only increase for future generations. Even those students from low-income families who will not have to pay tuition fees will now have their maintenance grants removed and replaced by a loan of an equivalent amount. At Glasgow Caledonian, 80% of the 1998-99 intake will not have to pay any tuition fees. In other words, the bulk of the first year intake is from families whose joint income is £16,500 or less. Clearly it will be very difficult for these low-income families to financially support their children through four years of university. The choice is stark for these students: sink into deep debt or attempt to alleviate the problem by working part-time. The prospects for these and other students from low-income families are particularly bleak for the coming years.

A recent survey by Natwest bank calculated that the weekly cost of studying in Scotland for students, not resident at their parental home, was £133.73 (**Herald** 22 September 1998). Although reliable figures for weekly student incomes are difficult to obtain, clearly this represents, for many, a large 'income gap' that can be bridged neither by parental assistance nor by resort to student loans, bank loans and overdrafts. The only other way that students can meet the costs of living and studying is through part-time employment. The Natwest calculation helps to explain, in part, why students are compelled to earn relatively large sums from part-time employment.

Some commentators have highlighted non-financial reasons as important motivational factors. Lucas and Ralston, for example, argue that 'although it seems that the overwhelming orientation to work is financially motivated or instrumental, we also know that some students actually go to work to socialise or because they enjoy working ... [O]nce at work, students may

### *Scottish Affairs*

derive other satisfactions such that the motivation for staying there is related to other considerations' (1997, p.61). Bill Rammell, the Labour MP for Harlow, is less equivocal than Lucas and Ralston when he asserts that 'working while you study can actually be good fun' (**Guardian** 2 June 1998). There is no question that students do attach importance to non-financial reasons for working. Table 2 shows, for example, that 'experience of working' and 'good for putting on CV' are cited as important by a significant number of students. Nevertheless, while it is true that student workers, like any other group of workers, do derive satisfaction from the social aspects of employment, it is important to understand the scale of importance. Table 2 indicates that the two sets of financial reasons, particularly 'financial necessity/hardship', are clearly perceived to be most important by respondents at both universities. It is not wrong to say that for some students 'work is fun or work is a change of scene' (Lucas and Ralston 1997, p.61), but it is important to maintain a sense of perspective. Our evidence would indicate that social reasons are of secondary importance.

The evidence of the overwhelming importance of financial compulsion in both surveys is inescapable. Moreover, as the Caledonian survey further revealed, it was also the most important motivating factor amongst students, who did not have jobs, but were actively seeking to obtain them. In addition, there is evidence in the Caledonian survey that financial pressures are forcing increasing numbers of students without a job to look for one. In 1994-5 almost a quarter of students (24.3%) at the Caledonian with no job had actively sought employment. By 1996-7 this proportion had risen to 39.6%.

### **SECTOR, PAY AND HOURS OF WORK**

Nature of employment is degrading. Long hours without breaks and little pay - feel exploited and annoyed.  
(20 year old female, GU medical student, waitress, £2.80 an hour, 10 hours a week)

While Glasgow students are to be found working in a diverse range of industries and locations, from cinemas to safari parks, from fast food outlets to football clubs, from call centres to coffee shops, a number of sectors have particularly high concentrations of student workers. In the GU survey the retail and hospitality sectors were the most prominent. Almost four in ten student jobs (38%) are in retail, with supermarkets the single most important sub-sector with 13% of all jobs. Bar and pub work is also significant, accounting for 14% of all student jobs at GU. The distribution pattern is

### *Students and Part-Time Work*

similar at the Caledonian, with 42% employed in the retail sector in 1996-97, with supermarkets accounting for 12.4% of all jobs. Surprisingly, bar and pub work accounted for only 6.9% of all jobs at this city centre university. So although a significant number of students in Glasgow do work in bars and pubs, the typical student worker is more likely to be employed checking out shopping at Safeway, assisting in a clothes shop like GAP, or serving fast food at Pizza Hut or McDonald's. Again, the traditional stereotype of students working in bars and pubs does not at all correspond to the occupational profile.

Since the part-time jobs that students secure are generally located in the lower paid areas of the service sector, the dominant experience is, as table 3 illustrates, one of poor wages.

Averages can conceal wide discrepancies. Table 4 displays the distribution of students' hourly income by pay bands for all jobs. Self evidently, many students are earning, by any standard, extremely low levels of pay, with 71.5% at GCU and 60.4% at GU earning less than £4 an hour.

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**Table 3**  
**Average Hourly Pay Rates Of Student Jobs<sup>1</sup>**

	Mean	Median
GCU (March 1997, n=552)	£3.71	£3.52
GU (May 1998, n=609)	£3.78	£3.70

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**Table 4**  
**Distribution of Hourly Pay Rates Of Student Jobs**

<i>Hourly Rate of Pay</i>	% of GCU students (n=609)	% of GU students (n=552)
Less than £3.00	6.4	5.1
Less than £3.50	40.2	33.0

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<sup>1</sup> The sample size for GU and GCU in Tables 3 (552 plus 609) exceeds the total of 882 working students surveyed. This is because table 3 (and table 4) is based on the number of student jobs. That is to say all the jobs taken since the start of the respective academic years are included in the calculations.

### *Scottish Affairs*

Less than £4.00

71.5

60.5

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Given both these low hourly pay rates and the average costs of living, which the Natwest study highlighted, it is no surprise to discover that students work long hours. At GCU students worked on average 15 hours and 23 minutes each week during term-time compared to 13 hours and 14 minutes at GU. The average hours worked conceal an even more disturbing picture. At GU, 15% of students were working over 20 hours a week and almost 2% were employed for more than 30 hours a week. At GCU, more than a quarter of students were working for more than 20 hours a week and one in twenty were working more than 30 hours a week. Clearly many students are working hours which approximate to those worked in a full-time job.

It is only by working such long hours that the relatively large sums that students require to bridge the 'income gap' can be obtained. In 1997 the average weekly earnings of GCU student workers was £54.69 while 36% were earning as much as £60 or more. No less than 15% were earning a minimum of £80 a week. The average GU student in 1998 was earning £50.47 a week with 32% earning £60 or more. The obvious conclusion from these figures is that, for many students, the amounts earned from part-time jobs are the main single source of income.

### **WORKING IN TWO WORLDS: THE IMPACT OF PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT**

It is difficult to balance working, even part-time, with studying. It can create a lot of stress and frustration because when you are working, especially during the week in term time, you feel guilty that you are studying or you miss a class. If you do not work you worry that you are going to run out of money.

(22 year old female, GU history student, Burger King, £3.39 an hour, 16 hours a week)

Frustration, stress and guilt are the most common complaints as students attempt to cope with the competing demands generated by the worlds of work and study. When one considers how long students have to spend in the workplace, it is not difficult to comprehend the extent of the pressures they face. The evidence from both surveys makes it abundantly clear that part-

*Students and Part-Time Work*

time working has severe consequences for students' academic performance. Table 5 reveals the extent of forced absenteeism.

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**Table 5**  
**Percentage of students missing lectures etc. because of hours worked (n=486, GCU; n=433, GU)**

	GCU %	GU %
Lectures	63	55
Classes/tutorials	56	33
Examinations	1	2
Supervisions	15	5
Labs	27	17
Presentations	11	9

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As might be expected, there is a clear relationship between the extent of absenteeism and the number of hours worked. For example, at GCU the percentages of students missing lectures etc. rises dramatically for those working 20 hours or more: 78% miss lectures, 69% classes, 3.3% examinations, 31% supervisions, 49% labs and 19% presentations<sup>2</sup>.

Not surprisingly, then, 68% of students at GU, and 79% at GCU, stated that part-time working had adversely affected their academic performance. At Glasgow University, students were asked to respond to four statements concerning the ways in which the experience of work had affected their academic performance. Table 6 presents further evidence of students' perceptions of some of the effects of working. For example, less than one-third of working students disagreed with the statement that working would not affect their class of degree.

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**Table 6**  
**How has the experience of work affected academic performance?**

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
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<sup>2</sup> The percentages for some of these categories are clearly underestimates since, for example, labs or presentations will not be a course requirement for all students.

*Scottish Affairs*

	Strongly/ Agree %	%	Strongly/ Disagree %
Exam marks would have been better if I hadn't been working (n=423)	56	22	22
Because of the hours I work it's difficult to find time to study (n=427)	65	14	21
I don't think working will affect the class of degree I will get (n=421)	33	26	41
Working during term-time has enriched my educational experience (n=424)	21	26	53

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However, it is not just the number of hours worked that has such a negative impact on academic performance, but, crucially, the pattern of hours worked. The pattern of hours worked across the day and throughout the week was found to be almost identical at both GU and GCU<sup>3</sup>

In both direct and indirect ways the hours worked impact upon the demands of university study. Directly, the pattern of hours worked intruded on the formal teaching timetable, and indirectly the disruption to preparation and study time can be inferred. Of no less importance, the work pattern constantly interferes with regular rest and sleep patterns, not to mention the social lives of students. Unsurprisingly, it is at the weekend that the greatest numbers of hours are worked by students. However, the numbers of hours between Monday and Friday are far from negligible, with Friday seeing a noticeable rise. From Monday to Friday the periods from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., and from 8 p.m. to midnight, are the two busiest for student workers. Although weekend working does not interrupt the teaching timetable, it severely disrupts, for most students, the only non-time-tabled study period in the week.

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<sup>3</sup> In the questionnaire we presented a grid of the working week divided into boxes representing 4 hour periods and asked students to enter into the box the hours worked in that period. By aggregating the hours worked in each four-hour period we are able to track the peaks and troughs of student employment across the day and throughout the week.

### *Students and Part-Time Work*

A lot of the weekend is taken up, which is a vital study time. After working I am nearly always too tired to study. Worry about the time to fit things in.

(19 year old, female, GU psychology student, customer services assistant in cinema, £3.72 an hour, 14 hours a week)

Also there are particular stresses induced by the most common pattern of weekday working which occurs between 4 p.m. and midnight.

Working in a bar means I get home quite late at night/early morning.

Most days I have 9am starts at university. I feel myself getting extremely tired through these days and sometimes have to sleep during the day.

This means more time not spent studying ... Many times I have not had time to prepare for Labs.

(21 year old, female, GU anatomy student, bar person, £3.10 an hour, 16 hours a week)

This weekday evening pattern, once almost exclusively associated with bar/restaurant work, now increasingly extends to much of the service sector, operating in, for example, supermarkets, city centre stores and call centres. The stresses experienced through extended evening work are more acute for those students who work throughout the night as shelf-stackers, petrol station attendants, security guards and cleaners.

The fashionable notion of flexibility at work assumes that the process is a two-way affair, with employer and employees accommodating the needs of each other. Closer scrutiny of the GU evidence challenges this optimistic interpretation of flexibility. One in five (20%) of working students said that their employer would not allow them time off for an examination, while 10% were not even allowed to swap shifts to sit an examination. Even the most seemingly student friendly of employers can, it seems, be extremely inflexible.

Asda refused me study leave for my honours exams despite the company frequently stating they would help students.

(20 year old, female, GU history student, check-out operator, £4.11 an hour, 15 hours a week)

Working students are constantly trying to juggle and merge their academic and work timetables. A simple change in a shift pattern or teaching schedule can throw into confusion the delicate balance between the two timetables. This constant juggling leaves many students tired and stressed, as the GU

### *Scottish Affairs*

survey makes explicit. More than half (52%) said they were 'always' or 'often' stressed because of the pressures of balancing work and studying. 44% said they were 'always' or 'often' too tired to concentrate on their studies because of the hours that they worked. The comments of just one student serve to illustrate the reality behind these statistics:

It interferes with study when you go out to work and no one understands the pressure you are under. It is tiring - since working and studying from 1996 I have been ill with IBS and shingles, both stress related and connected to fatigue. I never experienced these before starting university. You can't socialise at the weekends because you have to get up early therefore it isn't easy to really let off steam. Unfortunately work is a financial necessity.

(21 year old, female, GU management studies student, cashier in corner shop, £3.00 an hour, 21 hours a week)

### **CONCLUSION**

What we are witnessing in Scotland are changes of great significance. Firstly, the expansion of participation rates in higher education over the past decade is without precedent. Secondly, and equally unparalleled, is the extent of the reduction in state financial support for students in higher education. Thirdly, as a consequence, there has been the large-scale entry of students into the Scottish labour market. The significance of this development has yet to be fully acknowledged and should be seen as one of the most important labour market developments since the Second World War. Employers' demands for part-time employees, in the context of extended and flexible working hours in the service sector, have corresponded with the financial pressures compelling students to seek part-time employment.

That many thousands of students work long hours at low hourly pay rates has been clearly demonstrated by our survey data. We have also presented evidence that many students perceive that working has negative consequences. As students wrestle with the competing demands of work and study, the majority report a negative impact on academic performance. That almost two-thirds of working students surveyed at the University of Glasgow stated that they found it difficult to find time to study because of the hours they were working is a cause for concern. Evidence such as this suggests that the educational experience of many working students is being devalued.

### *Students and Part-Time Work*

It must be remembered that the students surveyed are among the last of the generation not to have to personally pay tuition fees. From the start of academic year 1999-2000, with the final abolition of the maintenance grant, financial pressures will surely drive increasing numbers of students to seek part-time employment. As levels of indebtedness increase, the necessity to work longer hours will inflict even greater damage on students' ability to study.

The current situation can be challenged in several ways. First, the committee of inquiry into student finance provides a golden opportunity for all those parties, inside and outside the Scottish parliament, to demonstrate their support for the NUS campaign for the re-introduction of the maintenance grant and the abolition of tuition fees. Indeed, the importance of the re-introduction of the maintenance grant cannot be over-stated. This is the primary mechanism for alleviating the financial pressures which force students to undertake damaging part-time employment while at university. Unless this grant is restored, it seems clear that an even larger component of the Scottish labour market will be made up of student workers.

Until recently, universities have underestimated the extent of student employment and the impact that working has had upon academic performance. It is clear that acknowledgement of the difficulties facing student workers has to be followed by a range of sensitive responses, which alleviate the pressures they face. While recognising that academic standards need to be maintained, many lecturers take into consideration the effects on students of working. For example, tutorial times frequently require re-arrangement to accommodate students' employment timetables. However, these responses are ad hoc and partial and fall short of considered and formalised policies and practices which universities should implement following close consultation with student organisations.

Furthermore, as long as students are faced with the necessity of combining work with study, the rights, wages and conditions of student workers need to be protected. Recently the NUS (UK) has launched a 'Student Rights Charter' as part of its campaign against tuition fees and student hardship and debt. One of the eleven rights is for 'a decent wage for safe part-time work'. If students are to receive decent wages then the new Scottish Parliament should support the Scottish Low Pay Unit's demand that

all workers, including students, should be entitled to the full National Minimum Wage ... Furthermore, it is recommended that the NMW is increased from £3.60 an hour to around £4.60 an hour, or half male

### *Scottish Affairs*

median earnings, at the time of the uprating.  
(Kelly 1998, p.77)

We have calculated, on the basis of the University of Glasgow evidence, that, at the levels, and with the exemptions, currently proposed by the government, the National Minimum Wage would benefit only 13% of students. However, if the NMW were set at £4.60, 86% of working students would benefit. Clearly if the Scottish Low Pay Unit's second recommendation was acted upon by the Scottish Parliament, then working students would receive a respectable, if not a decent, wage.

In terms of protection of students' rights and interests at work one obstacle is the low level of student participation in trade unions. In part this reflects the fluid and transitory nature of some part-time working in general, and of young part-time workers in particular, but there is a more fundamental problem:

The central problem remains, that most students work in non-recognised workplaces and in sectors and jobs which have low levels of union membership and organisation.  
(TUC 1997, p.12)

Where union organisation exists, workers tend to join the appropriate union, hence the high levels of union density in particular sectors of the economy. However, even an experienced trade unionist entering a non-unionised workplace would be daunted by the prospect of engaging in union activity. For young, inexperienced student workers the difficulties are obvious. The GU survey showed that a mere 4.3% of working students were members of a trade union, a figure which corresponds to the TUC figure for the UK of 'about 7%'. However, the 'central problem' identified by the TUC is evident in the GU survey, with only 22% employed in workplaces with a trade union presence and 69% stating there was no trade union at all in their workplace.

Despite the difficulties, we would argue that student workers constitute a particular constituency, who have yet to be directly targeted by the majority of unions. Indeed, with 60% of students in the GU survey saying that they felt their interests at work were 'Not represented at all' or 'Only slightly represented' there are clear opportunities for trade unions to recruit and represent a new layer of student workers. For example, the president of Glasgow Caledonian University student union, Kenny Hannah, is due to launch a joint recruitment drive with GMB Scotland which is backed by the NUS and the STUC. Students are to be persuaded to join the GMB for a

### *Students and Part-Time Work*

special rate of 10 pence a week. The student worker is a reality, the organised student worker a real possibility.

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