

**npc**  the national postgraduate committee

*national survey of postgraduate funding and  
priorities*

*summer 2002*

*final report*

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**STUDENTS' UNION**  
UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK



# *national survey of postgraduate funding and priorities*

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## *Foreword*

In recent years, there has been a continuing decline in government funding to support students in the UK. Much of the campaigning has had undergraduate education as its focus, with the increased debt that students have upon graduation. Little research to date has been undertaken with regard to postgraduate education and this survey is one of the first major national surveys directed solely at postgraduates.

I therefore commend this survey as evidence of the threat that faces the supply of UK postgraduates. A significant decline in people continuing from undergraduate to postgraduate education is shown and a growing preference for employed graduates to study part time. Many full time postgraduate students indicate they have insufficient funding with the result that they need to work long hours in addition to their studies, which is obviously disadvantageous to the students' academic performance.

It is the hope of both myself and officers of the NPC that this report will actively support the case for better postgraduate funding in the future. This is essential if coming generations are to have access to all of the opportunities available at postgraduate level, both for their own benefit and to enhance the contribution to society that they can offer.

Prof Sir Martin Harris  
Honorary President, National Postgraduate Committee



## *Preface*

CSU, publishers of Prospects series of postgraduate magazines and books, and compiler of the official postgraduate database for Universities UK, is delighted to fund the NPC National Survey of Postgraduate Funding and Priorities.

Postgraduate study is undoubtedly booming in the UK. Fifteen years ago there were 100,000 students studying for postgraduate qualifications. This year there are over 400,000 postgraduate students, and 17,500 taught courses and research opportunities offer today's prospective postgraduate student unrivalled choice and flexibility.

A postgraduate qualification is a very useful asset in the workplace. Carl Gilleard, Chief Executive of the Association of Graduate Recruiters, says: "The modern postgraduate is viewed as being well-qualified, enthusiastic and committed." CSU found recently that more graduate recruiters specifically ask for a postgraduate qualification than ever before, and also increasingly recognise the need to provide their existing employees with the opportunity to enhance their professional development through a postgraduate course.

Funding is, of course, one of the most challenging issues facing those 400,000 postgraduates. CSU has published the Prospects Postgraduate Funding Guide, which provides UK and overseas students with essential information on postgraduate funding opportunities, for six years, and it is consistently one of the most sought after products in our portfolio.

We are pleased to be able to work with the NPC and University of Warwick Students' Union to provide this insight into postgraduate funding, and look forward to a continued role in similar research in this sector.

Mike Hill  
Chief Executive  
CSU Ltd



## Executive Summary

### Introduction

The National Postgraduate Committee (NPC) commissioned University of Warwick Students' Union to carry out a national survey of UK postgraduate students to explore the following questions:

- What factors do students consider in deciding to pursue postgraduate study?
- How are postgraduate students funded through their courses, and what are the implications of these funding mechanisms?
- How many postgraduate students undertake paid work, what sort of work do they do and why, and what impact does this have on their study (if any)?
- What are the future career plans of postgraduate students, and what factors do they take into account in making these plans? Does debt accrued as a student have any effect on these plans?

The research was carried out in May and June 2002 and consisted of a postal survey. The questionnaire was sent to 8,000 current, UK domiciled postgraduate students at 17 different UK Higher Education Institutions. A total of 982 responses were received (a 12% response rate).

### Demographic profile of the research sample

- 59% of respondents were studying full-time, and 41% part-time.
- The majority of respondents over the age of 30 were studying part-time (71%), whereas only 14% of those 30 or under were studying part-time.
- Respondents from post-1992 universities were more likely to be over 30 years old, on taught programmes, and studying part-time than those from pre-1992 universities.
- The majority of students over the age of 30 owned their own home, whereas those who were 30 or under were more likely to live in private rented accommodation, with their parents, in halls of residence or other university provided accommodation.

### Factors involved in pursuing postgraduate study

- 70% of part-time students had been in full-time employment immediately before starting their current course of study. 33% of full-time students had been in full-time employment, and 43% had come straight from undergraduate study.
- Students wanted to go into postgraduate study to improve their career prospects, and to continue studying. Part-time students were more likely to go into postgraduate study for personal development.
- Over three-quarters of full-time students cited financial reasons as the main obstacle they had to overcome to go into postgraduate study. Part-time students had to negotiate their existing commitments of time, family and work, as well as overcome financial obstacles.



- The most important priority in choosing a course of study was to find a course or area of research that students wanted. The location and reputation of the institution were also important.

## Postgraduate finances

- 65% of full-time, taught students were paying their own fees, but only 17% of full-time, research students. 56% of part-time, taught students and 65% of part-time, research students were paying their own fees.
- Tuition fees ranged from £250 to £20,000 per year. The majority of part-time students had fees of £2,000 or less. The majority of full-time students had fees between £2,000 and £4,000. Fees for taught courses were higher than fees for research degrees.
- Students studying arts or humanities subjects were more likely to be paying their own fees. Full-time research students in the sciences were the least likely to be paying their own fees.
- Just over a half of respondents had a higher income than expenditure, whereas a third had a higher expenditure than income.
- Young, full-time students on taught courses were most likely to have a higher expenditure than income.
- Just over a half of respondents described their funding as 'not sufficient'. The main factor which affected this perception was whether students paid tuition fees or not. 74% of those who paid their own tuition fees described their funding as insufficient, compared with only 28% of those who did not pay their own tuition fees.
- Debt of full-time students rose by £2,403 during their courses, from a mean £4,834 at the start of the course to an estimated £7,237 on completing. Debt of part-time students was similar at the start of the course, but did not rise during the course.

## Paid work

- 56% of full-time students and 90% of part-time students were undertaking paid work alongside their studies.
- Full-time students were more likely to be working for their institution or doing casual work elsewhere. Part-time students were more likely to be in full-time professional employment.
- Undertaking paid work had positive benefits including development of skills, career benefits, direct benefits to students' studies, and financial benefits. However, students also found it stressful and exhausting, and more than half felt it took away time needed for study.

## Future career plans

- The majority of respondents planned to go into work that was related to their subject area, either academic research or teaching, or outside higher education. 40% of research students said they planned to go into academic research or teaching in UK higher education.



- 21% of respondents indicated they had changed their career plans since commencing their current course of study. However, no particular group of students (by age, gender, subject or mode of study) seemed more likely to have changed their career plans.
- Before they started their current postgraduate studies, 66% of full-time students and 40% of part-time students expected that doing a postgraduate course would increase their earnings. Their experience of postgraduate study does not appear to have changed these expectations.
- Respondents who expected higher earnings from doing a postgraduate degree were more likely to be young, female, studying science or business, and at a post-1992 university.
- 86% of respondents felt that the money they had invested in postgraduate study would be a good investment in their future.



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Aims and Objectives

The National Postgraduate Committee (NPC) commissioned University of Warwick Students' Union to carry out a national survey of UK postgraduate students to explore the following questions:

- What factors do students consider in deciding to pursue postgraduate study?
- How are postgraduate students funded through their courses, and what are the implications of these funding mechanisms?
- How many postgraduate students undertake paid work, what sort of work do they do and why, and what impact does this have on their study (if any)?
- What are the future career plans of postgraduate students, and what factors do they take into account in making these plans? Does debt accrued as a student have any effect on these plans?

The NPC believes that there needs to be a proper public policy context for postgraduate education, and that postgraduate education is frequently considered only as an after-thought within the major policy reviews of education in the UK, if it is considered at all. In particular, reviews of student funding have failed to consider postgraduate funding, or the impact that mechanisms of funding undergraduates have on further postgraduate study. There needs to be a more holistic view of higher education, and of funding all students within higher education.

There has been very little research into postgraduate funding sources, and how funding affects the future life choices of postgraduate students, compared to similar studies of undergraduate students. This research will provide the NPC, and other groups interested in postgraduate education, with evidence to present to government calling for a more coherent system of postgraduate funding. It will also provide evidence as to how current mechanisms for funding postgraduates might have an effect on recruitment into those professions which rely on people with postgraduate qualifications, and which are important to boosting the "knowledge economy" of the country.

The research will also help CSU and Careers Advisory Services in developing the information they provide for those considering postgraduate study, and for graduating postgraduates seeking help finding careers.

## 1.2 Methodology

The research was carried out during May and June 2002. An invitation was put out through the Postgraduate Committee of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) asking for careers services to participate in the survey. Seventeen institutions agreed to participate by sending out questionnaires to a sample of current, UK domiciled postgraduate students at their institutions. Each institution was given a quota figure of full-time and part-time students to include in the survey. Apart from that, the sample was completely random in terms of age, gender, subject, year of study, and study by taught or research programme.



Questionnaires were sent by post, and included a reply-paid envelope for return to the research team at University of Warwick Students' Union. A total of 8,000 questionnaires were sent, and 982 responses were received (a 12% response rate).



## 2 Demographic profile of the research sample

### 2.1 Demographic characteristics

Table 2.1 shows the demographic characteristics of respondents to the survey: their age, gender, whether they are studying for taught or research degrees, their year of study, and whether they are studying full-time or part-time.

<b>Age</b> (970 responses)	20-25 years: <b>33%</b>	26-30 years: <b>19%</b>	31-40 years: <b>24%</b>	41-50 years: <b>14%</b>	Over 50: <b>10%</b>
<b>Gender</b> (952 responses)	Male: <b>39%</b>	Female: <b>61%</b>			
<b>Type of study</b> (954 responses)	Taught: <b>56.5%</b>	Research: <b>43.5%</b>			
<b>Year of study</b> (931 responses)	Year 1: <b>50%</b>	Year 2: <b>26%</b>	Year 3: <b>14%</b>	Year 4: <b>7%</b>	5 or over: <b>3%</b>
<b>Mode of study</b> (966 responses)	Full Time: <b>59%</b>	Part Time: <b>41%</b>			

Table 2.1 Demographic characteristics

The majority of respondents over the age of 30 were studying part-time (71%), whereas only 14% of those 30 or under were studying part-time (Figure 2.1).

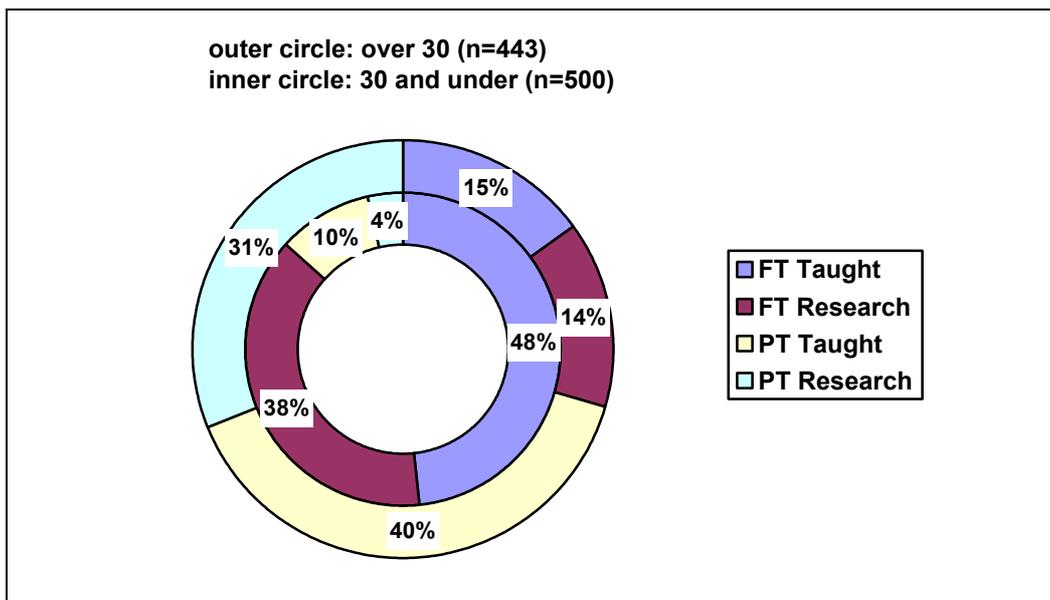


Figure 2.1 Type and mode of study by age of respondent



Female respondents tended to be younger than male respondents – 58% of female respondents were 30 or under, compared with 47% of male respondents (Figure 2.2).

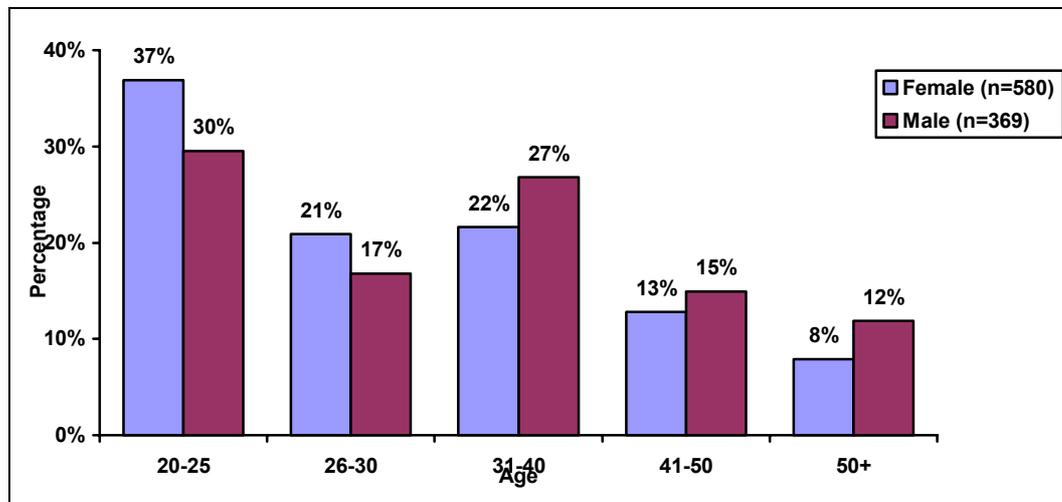


Figure 2.2 Age profile of female and male respondents

## 2.2 Institutions

Questionnaires were sent to students at 17 Higher Education Institutions (a full list can be found in Appendix A). These could be broken down as follows:

### Region

- 4 from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland (241 responses).
- 4 from the North of England (242 responses).
- 4 from the Midlands of England (208 responses).
- 5 from London and the South of England (241 responses).

### Type of institution

- 11 pre-1992 universities (653 responses).
- 4 post-1992 universities (214 responses).
- 2 smaller, specialist institutions (57 responses). One was a constituent college of a large, federal university, and the other describes itself as a “provider of Higher Education for industries, professions and communities associated with the countryside”.

Respondents from post-1992 universities were more likely to be over 30 years old, on taught programmes, and studying part-time than those from pre-1992 universities (Table 2.2).

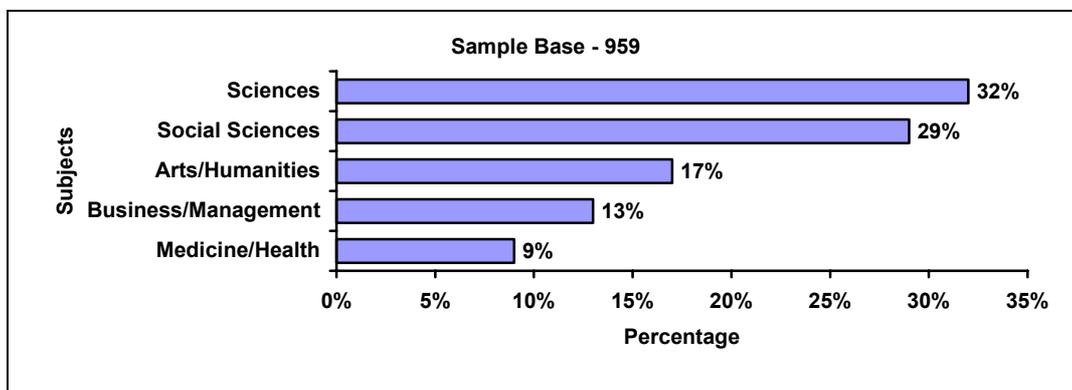


	<b>pre-1992</b>		<b>post-1992</b>	
<b>Age</b>	over 30	41%	over 30	58%
	30 or under	59%	30 or under	42%
<b>Gender</b>	female	60%	female	64%
	male	40%	male	36%
<b>Type of study</b>	taught	51%	taught	67%
	research	49%	research	33%
<b>Mode of study</b>	full-time	65%	full-time	52%
	part-time	35%	part-time	48%

**Table 2.2** Comparison between respondents from pre-1992 and post-1992 universities

### 2.3 Subjects and degrees studied

Figure 2.3 shows the range of subjects studied by respondents.



**Figure 2.3** Subject area studied

Students studying science subjects were more likely to be **30 or under** than those studying other subjects (70%, compared with an overall average of 52%), **male** (46%, compared with 39%), studying for **research** degrees (62%, compared with 44%), and studying **full-time** (76%, compared with 59%).

Students studying medicine or health-related subjects were more likely to be **over 30** (62%, compared with 48%), **female** (77%, compared with 61%), and studying **part-time** (61%, compared with 41%).

Students studying business or management-related subjects were more likely to be **male** (45%, compared with 39%), studying for **taught** degrees (90%, compared with 56%), and studying **part-time** (53%, compared with 41%).

Figure 2.4 shows the range of degree titles for which respondents were studying. "Doctorates" included PhD, DPhil, EdD, EngD and Doctor of Clinical Psychology degrees. "Masters" included MA, MSc, MRes, MMedSci and LLM degrees. "MBA" also included "MPA" degrees. "Other" degrees were mostly professional qualifications, such as a Certificate in Professional Legal Studies.

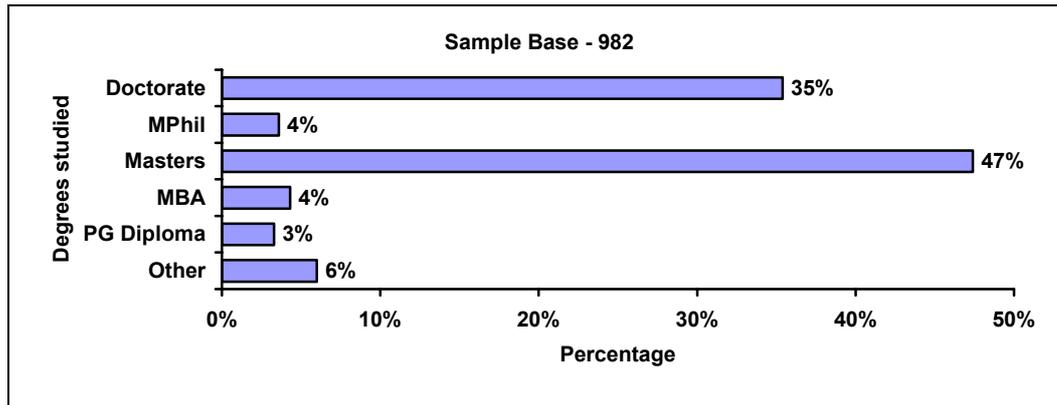


Figure 2.4 Degrees studied

Students studying for Doctorates were more likely to be studying **full-time** than those studying for other degrees (69%, compared with the overall average of 59%). Students studying for MPhils (77%), MBAs (61%) and Postgraduate Diplomas (61%) were more likely to be studying **part-time** (compared with 41%).

38% of respondents from pre-1992 universities were studying science subjects, compared with 20% from post-1992 universities. 29% of respondents from post-1992 universities were studying business and management-related subjects, compared with 8% from pre-1992 universities. 41% of students from pre-1992 universities were studying for Doctorates, compared with 23% from post-1992 universities.

## 2.4 Ethnic origin

Table 2.3 shows the ethnic origin of respondents.

Ethnic origin	Percentage of respondents
White	93.0%
Black Caribbean	0.4%
Black African	1.3%
Black Other	0.1%
Indian	1.3%
Pakistani	0.2%
Bangladeshi	0.1%
Chinese	0.9%
Asian Other	0.5%
Other	2.1%

Table 2.3 Ethnic origin of respondents

Comparisons between the sample demographics and the wider postgraduate population are difficult to make because postgraduate students are not categorised consistently across different studies. However, some comparisons with the general population are available on request.



## 2.5 Type of accommodation

Overall, 47% of respondents owned their own home and 29% lived in private rented accommodation. The accommodation that respondents lived in was associated with their age: those over 30 were more likely to own their home, whereas those who were 30 or under were more likely to live in private rented accommodation, with their parents, in halls of residence or other university provided accommodation (Figure 2.5).

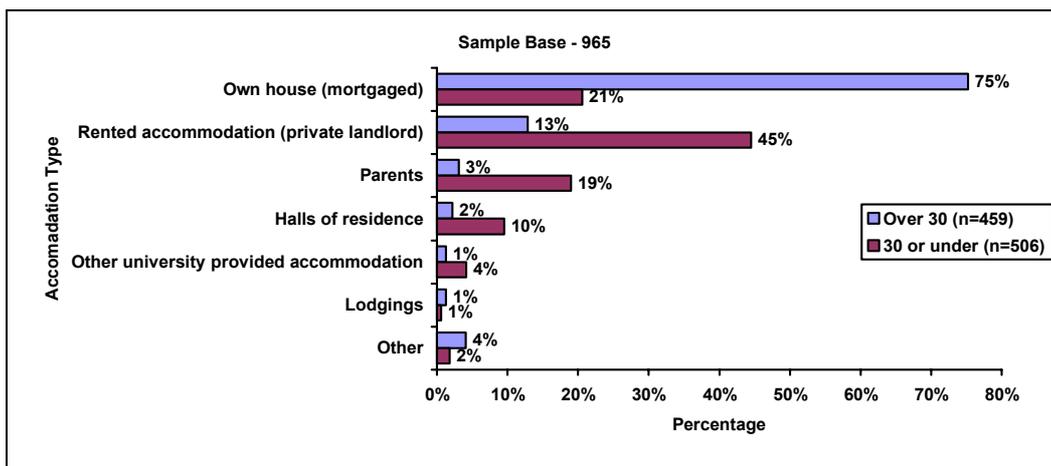
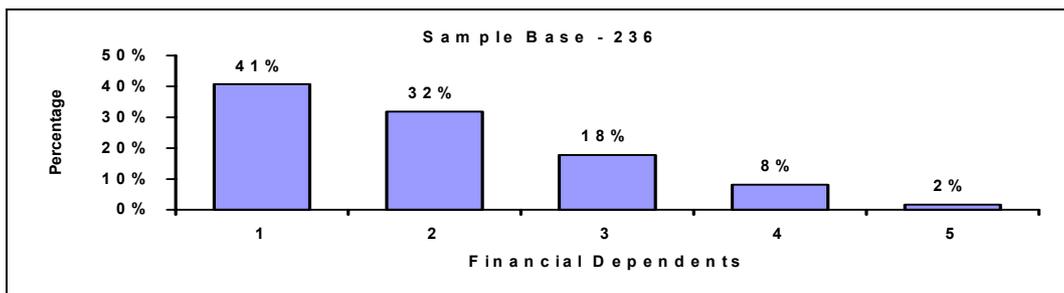


Figure 2.5 Type of accommodation

## 2.6 Family situation

24% of respondents (from a total of 758 responses) stated that they were supported financially by their spouse or partner: 17% of those who were 30 or under, and 33% of those who were over 30. 27% of women were supported by a spouse or partner, compared with 19% of men.

25% of respondents (from a total of 954 responses) stated that they had financial dependents: 5% of those who were 30 or under, and 48% of those who were over 30. 31% of men had financial dependents, compared with 21% of women. 43% of part-time students had financial dependents, compared with 13% of full-time students. Figure 2.6 shows the number of financial dependents of those respondents who stated that they had financial dependents.



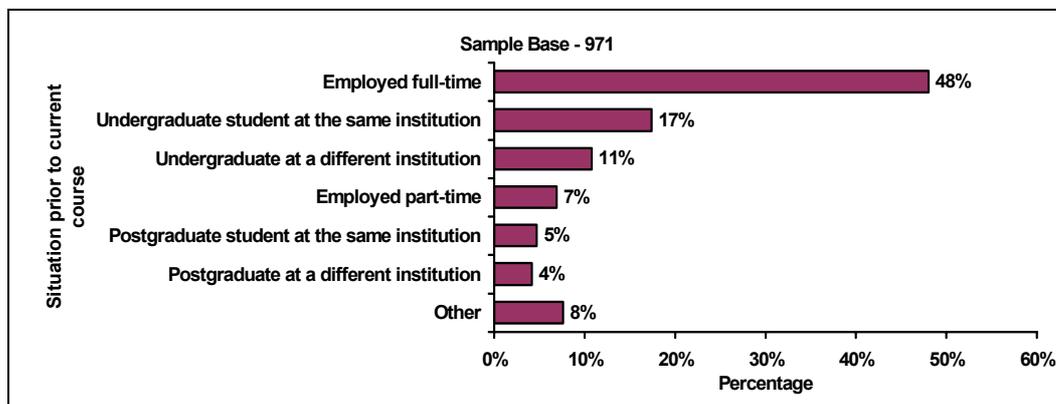


**Figure 2.6** Number of financial dependents (% of those who had financial dependents)

### 3 *Factors involved in pursuing postgraduate study*

#### 3.1 What were students doing before starting their current course?

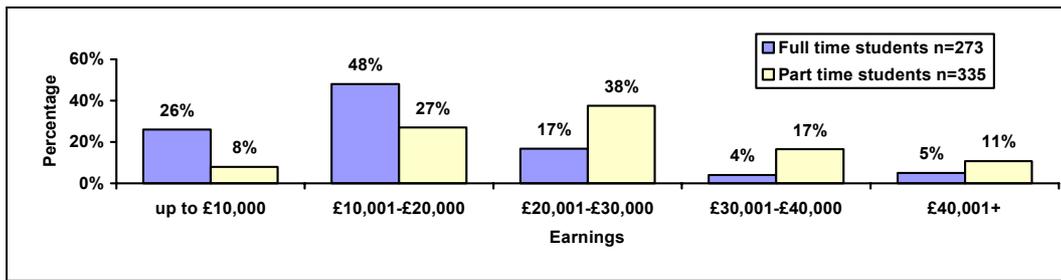
Nearly half the respondents had been in full-time employment immediately before starting their current course of study (Figure 3.1), and another 7% were in part-time employment. Just over a quarter had come straight from undergraduate study – with more remaining in the same institution than moving to a different one. About 9% had previously been on a different postgraduate course – again, slightly over half of these remained at the same institution. “Other” responses included being unemployed, retired, self-employed, travelling, housekeeping/parenting, doing voluntary work, and on a year out.



**Figure 3.1** What were you doing immediately before you started the course you are currently doing?

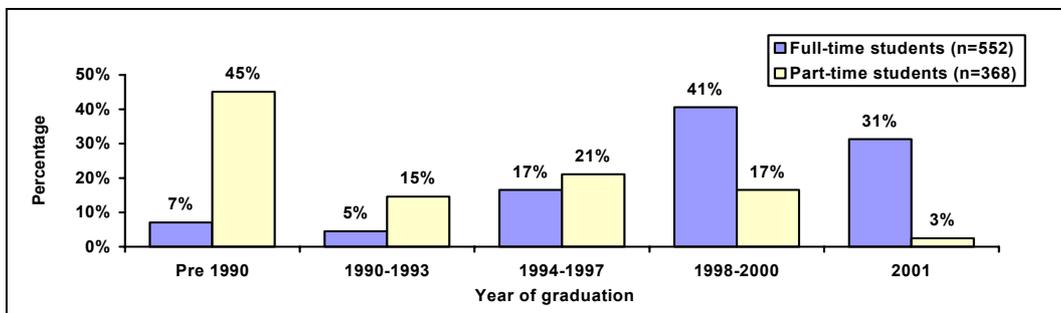
Part-time students were more likely to have been in employment prior to their current period of study. 70% of part-time students had been in full-time employment, and 7% had come straight from undergraduate study. Of the full-time students, 33% had been in full-time employment and 43% had come straight from undergraduate study.

Those students who were employed before their current postgraduate study earned a mean salary of £23,487 per year. Current full-time students had been earning a mean salary of £18,341, and current part-time students £27,674. Figure 3.2 shows the earnings of full-time and part-time students in their most recent jobs in different salary bands.



**Figure 3.2** Earnings in most recent job before starting postgraduate study

31% of full-time students had graduated from their undergraduate degree in the previous year, and 72% within the past four years. By contrast, 45% of part-time students had graduated more than 12 years ago (Figure 3.3).



**Figure 3.3** Year of graduation from undergraduate degree

## 3.2 What factors influenced decisions to pursue postgraduate study?

Respondents were asked to list the three main factors which influenced their decision to pursue postgraduate study (in priority order). The most popular responses for both full-time and part-time students were to improve career prospects and to continue studying (Figure 3.4). Other common reasons included personal development, and the fact that they had secured financial backing to study. Part-time students were more likely to cite reasons of personal development than full-time students.

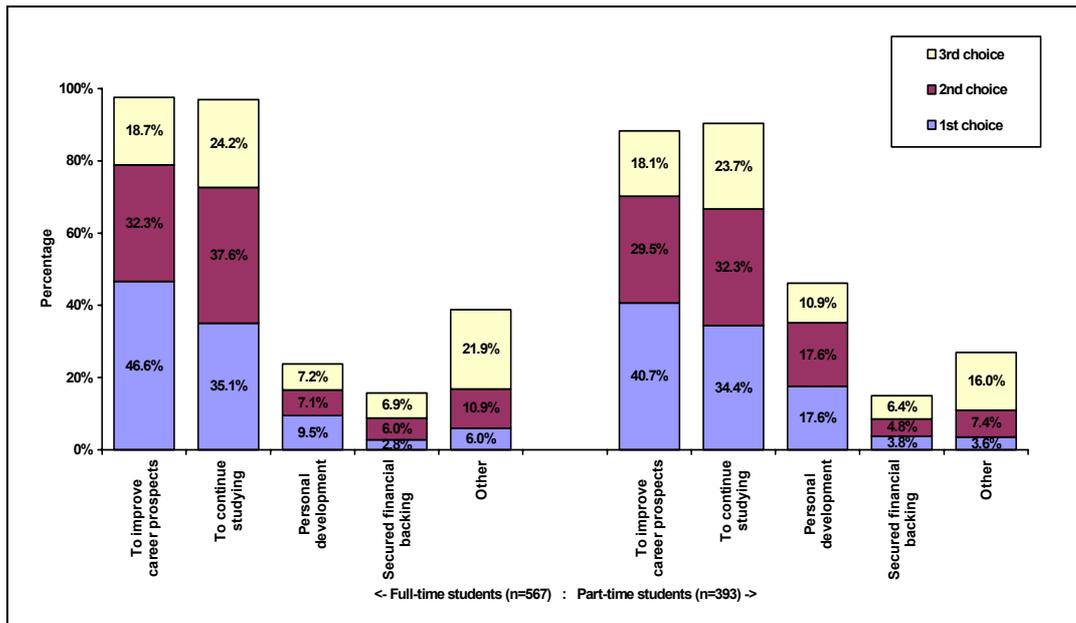


Figure 3.4 Factors that influenced the decision to pursue postgraduate study

Respondents were then asked to list the three main obstacles which they had to overcome in their decision to pursue postgraduate study (in priority order). Over three-quarters of full-time students cited financial reasons as the most important obstacle they had to overcome (Figure 3.5). For part-time students, negotiating existing commitments (of time, family and work) was the most cited obstacle, closely followed by financial reasons. Other respondents cited academic hurdles, such as having to fulfil entrance requirements or submit a research proposal, and location issues, such as the need to move and find accommodation or to travel long distances.

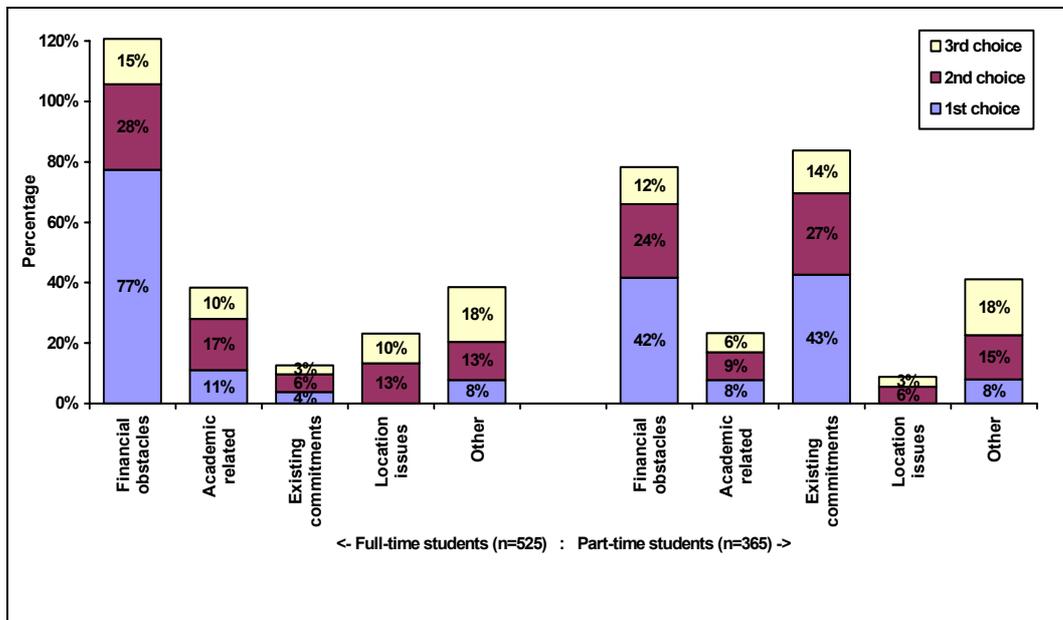


Figure 3.5 Obstacles overcome to pursue postgraduate study<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Figures can add up to more than 100% because some respondents gave two or more answers which could be categorised in the same group.



Figure 3.6 shows the relative priorities that respondents gave to each of fourteen statements, as answers to the open question “Why did you choose your current course of study?”. These results are derived from a proprietary research methodology known as ‘Priority Search’; a more detailed description of this methodology can be found in Appendix B.

The numbers at the end of each bar show the percentage of respondents who placed that item in the top third of their preferences, minus the percentage who placed it in their bottom third. Thus if 85% of respondents place an item in their top third, while 7% place it in their bottom third, the figure shown will be 78. The remaining 8% of respondents who placed it in their middle third are considered to be neutral about the item. The result is that if a bar projects to the right, the respondent group illustrated prioritises that item. If the bar projects to the left, the item is regarded as a low priority by that group.

The “least significant differences” (LSDs) quoted give the minimum figure by which any two values must differ in order for the difference to be statistically significant at the various levels of confidence shown in the inset. Values for individual bars which are smaller than the smallest LSD are not statistically significant and the associated items are midrange in the overall priority list (eg. neither a high or low priority for the group illustrated).

It is important to note that items projecting to the left are not necessarily unimportant – they are just considered less of a priority than those projecting to the right.

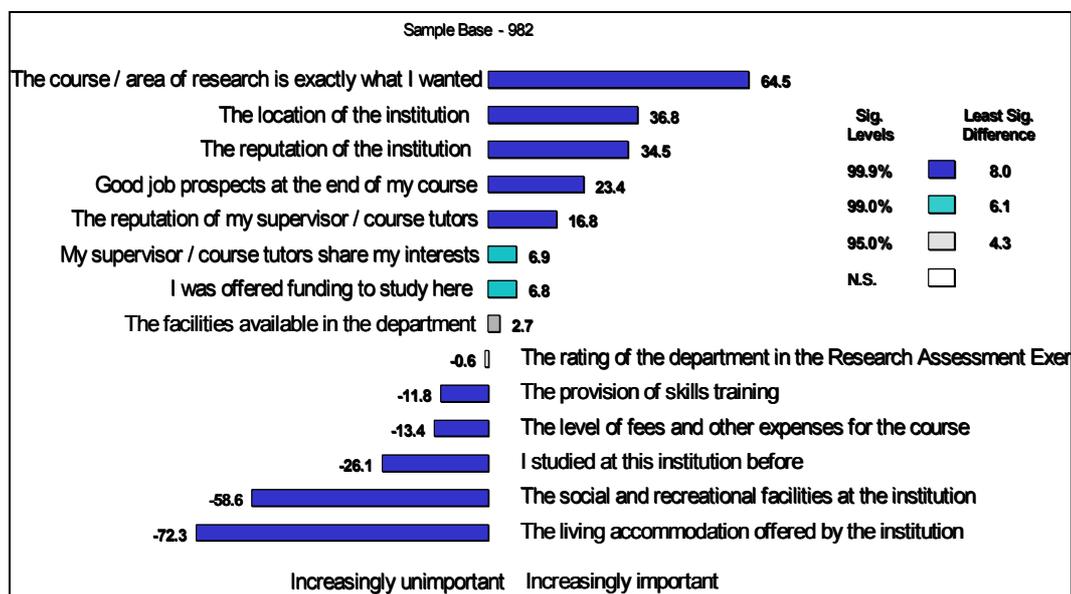


Figure 3.6 “Why did you choose your current course of study?”

Figure 3.6 shows that the statement “The course / area of research is exactly what I wanted” reflects the most important priority for respondents in choosing their course of study. “The location of the institution” and “the reputation of the institution” are the next two most important priorities. This is the case for all groups of respondents, analysed by age, gender, subject, mode of study, taught/research and whether students are paying their own fees or not. The only exception is



students studying business or management related subjects, for whom “good job prospects at the end of the course” becomes the second most important priority.

## 4 Postgraduate finances

### 4.1 Tuition fees

Tuition fees for respondents' courses ranged from £250 to £20,000 per year. The majority of part-time students (80%) had fees of £2,000 or less. The majority of full-time students (70%) had fees between £2,000 and £4,000. Fees for students on taught courses were higher than fees for research students, for both full-time and part-time students (Figure 4.1).

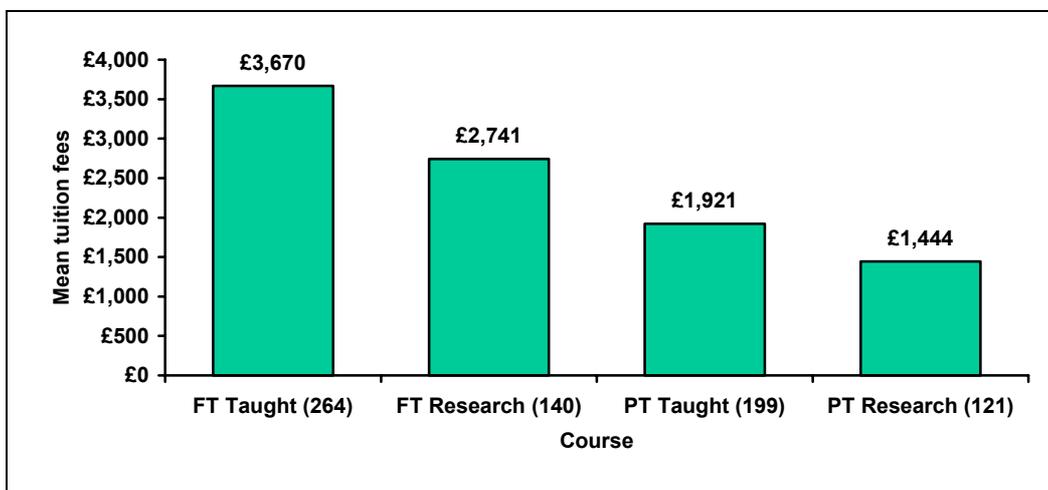
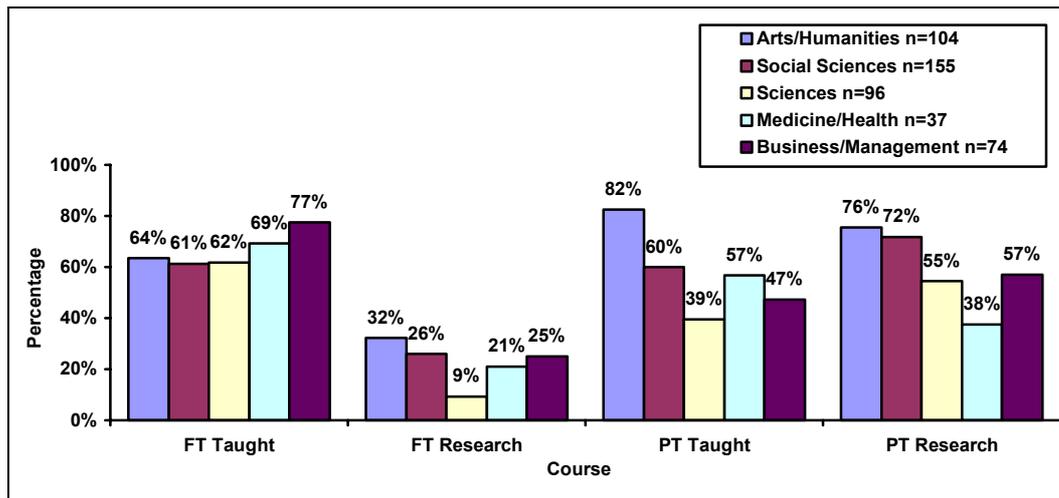


Figure 4.1 Mean tuition fees

Overall, 50% of respondents paid their own fees:

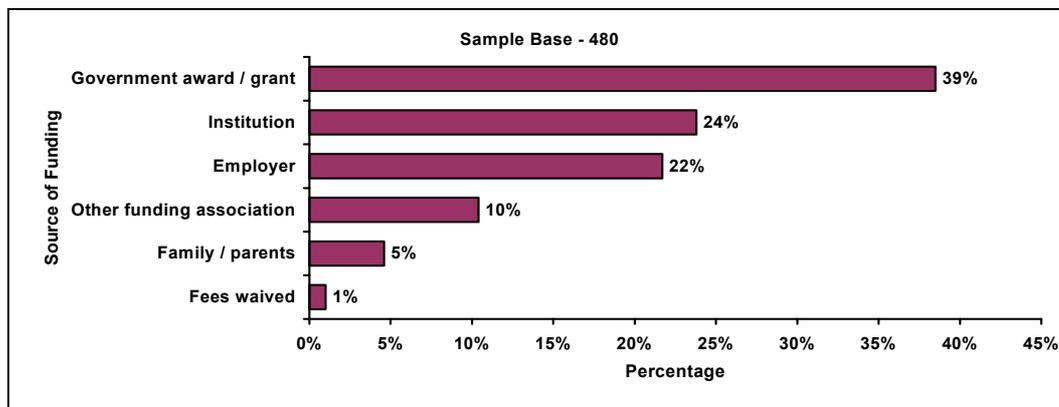
- 65% of full-time, taught students (total of 307 responses).
- 17% of full-time, research students (246 responses).
- 56% of part-time, taught students (217 responses).
- 65% of part-time, research students (153 responses).

Students studying different subjects had different probabilities of having to pay their own fees (Figure 4.2). Students studying arts and humanities on full-time research, part-time taught or part-time research courses were more likely to be paying their own fees than those studying other subjects. Full-time research students in the sciences were the least likely to be paying their own fees (only 9%).



**Figure 4.2** % of respondents who paid their own fees, for different modes of study and subject areas

The main source of funding for students who were not paying their own fees was from awards or grants made by government departments and agencies (eg. Research Councils). 39% of respondents who were not paying their own fees received such awards, a further 24% were funded by their own institution, and 22% by their employer (Figure 4.3).



**Figure 4.3** Who pays the tuition fees on your behalf? (Respondents who did not pay their own fees)

## 4.2 Income and expenditure

Just over a half of respondents reported a higher annual income than expenditure, whereas a third had a higher expenditure than income (Figure 4.4).

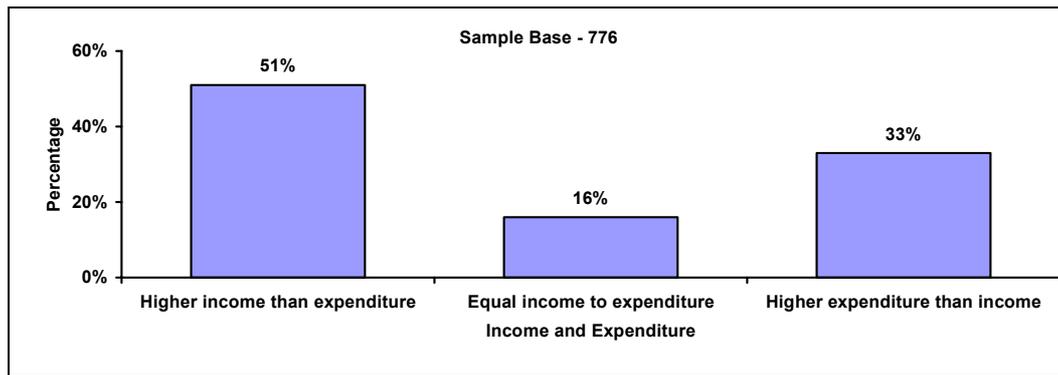


Figure 4.4 Income and expenditure

The mean income of all respondents was £14,943 and the mean expenditure £13,138, giving a mean difference between income and expenditure of £1,805. Full-time students tended to have a lower income and expenditure and just about broke even, whereas part-time students had a higher income and expenditure, and a mean difference (increase) of £5,241 (Figure 4.5).

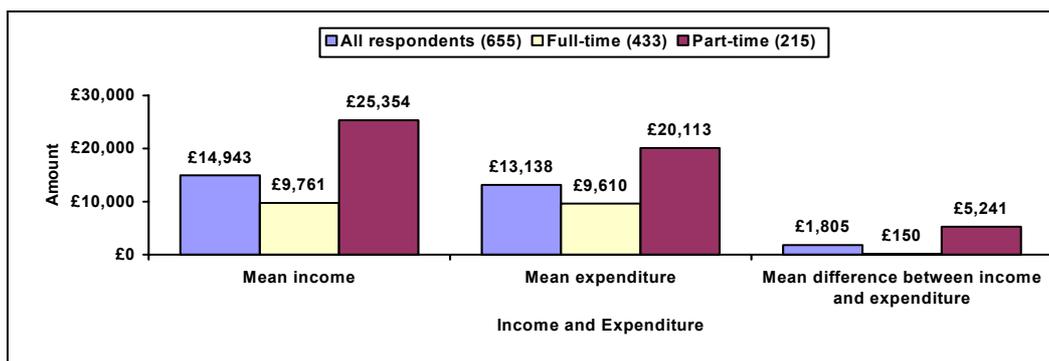


Figure 4.5 Mean levels of income and expenditure

Some groups of respondents had a greater likelihood of having a greater expenditure than income:

- 40% of full-time students, compared with 19% of part-time students.
- 41% of students on taught courses, compared with 25% of research students.
- 37% of students who were 30 or under, compared with 27% of those over 30.

Respondents were asked to state their annual income within a number of different categories. These are shown for full-time students (Figure 4.6) and part-time students (Figure 4.7). The figures in parentheses after the categories show the number of responses in that category, and the bars show the mean income of those who responded to each category.

Figure 4.6 shows that the most important source of income for full-time students was from postgraduate awards or studentships (eg. from the Research Councils). 265 full-time students (out of 544 who responded to this section of the questionnaire) indicated they received income from such awards, ranging from £500 to £32,000 per year, with a mean of £7,687. Other substantial sources of income included bank loans, career development loans, and Graduate Teaching or



Research Assistantships – though all these provided income for a relatively small number of students. More respondents received income from other paid employment (272 responses), or from parental contributions (123 responses) or savings (125 responses). Income in the ‘other source of income’ category included contributions from family or spouse, pensions and rental of property.

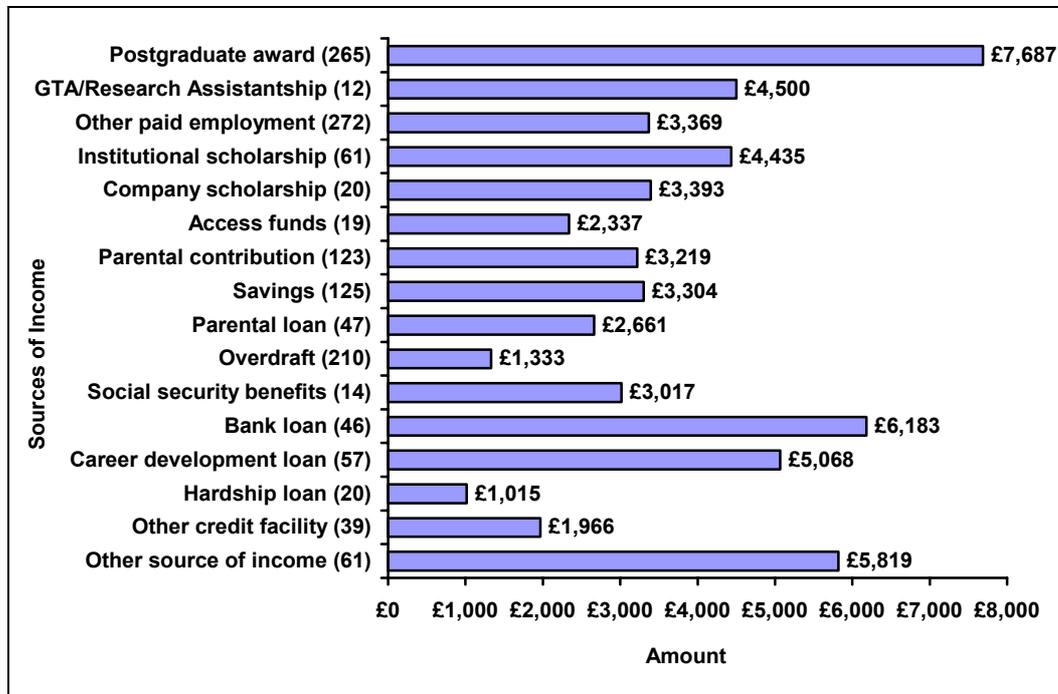


Figure 4.6 Sources and level of income (full-time students)

Full-time students who did not receive income from postgraduate awards tended to receive higher income from all other sources (Table 4.1).

	received income from postgraduate award (265)		did not receive income from postgraduate award (279)	
	% who received income	mean income	% who received income	mean income
Other paid employment	45%	£2,296	54%	£4,216
Access funds	2%	£900	5%	£2,850
Parental contribution	11%	£1,255	33%	£3,853
Savings	13%	£1,951	33%	£3,809
Parental loan	4%	£1,945	13%	£2,880
Overdraft	32%	£1,268	45%	£1,377
Bank loan	4%	£3,182	13%	£7,127
Other income	7%	£3,561	15%	£6,764

Table 4.1 Comparison of other income received by those who did / did not receive income from postgraduate awards

The main source of income for part-time students (Figure 4.7) was from paid employment. 271 part-time students (out of 317 who responded to this section of the questionnaire) indicated they received income from paid employment, ranging from £300 to £100,000 per year, with a mean of



£24,106. Relatively few received income from other sources: 42 respondents received income from savings, 42 from overdrafts, 26 from company scholarships, and only 17 from postgraduate awards. 42 respondents received income from other sources, including pensions, family or spouse, and rental of property.

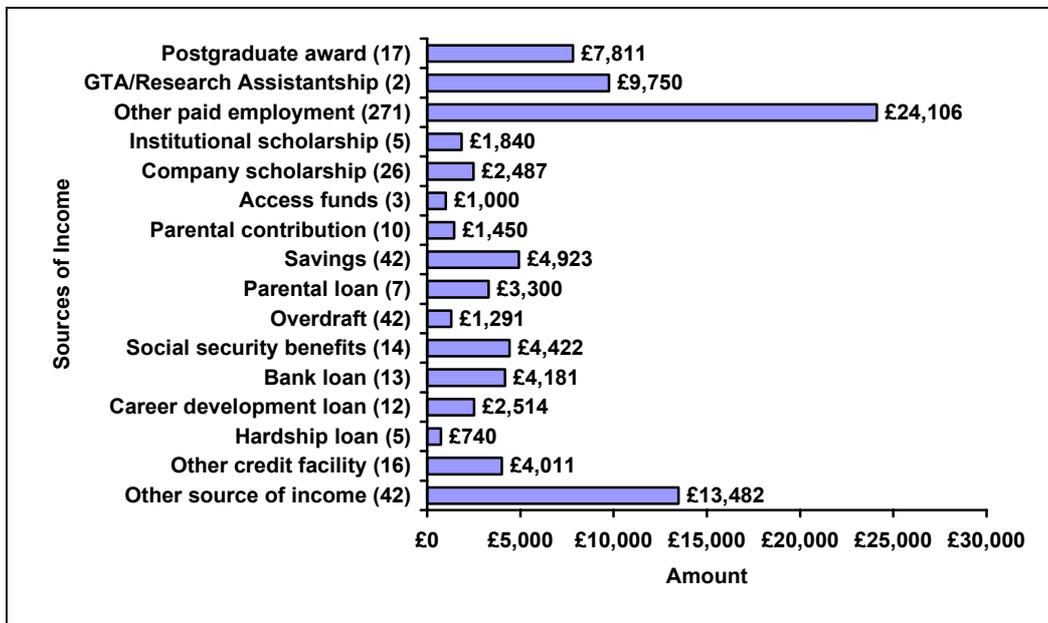


Figure 4.7 Sources and level of income (part-time students)

Respondents were asked to state their annual expenditure within a number of different categories. These are shown for full-time students (Figure 4.8) and part-time students (Figure 4.9). The figures in parentheses after the categories show the number of responses in that category, and the bars show the mean expenditure of those who responded to each category. A total of 505 full-time students and 232 part-time students responded to this section of the questionnaire. Expenditure in the 'other expenditure' category included paying off debts, paying into savings, medical expenses, and other general (unspecified) expenditure. The expenditure of part-time students was greater than that of full-time students in all categories except tuition fees.

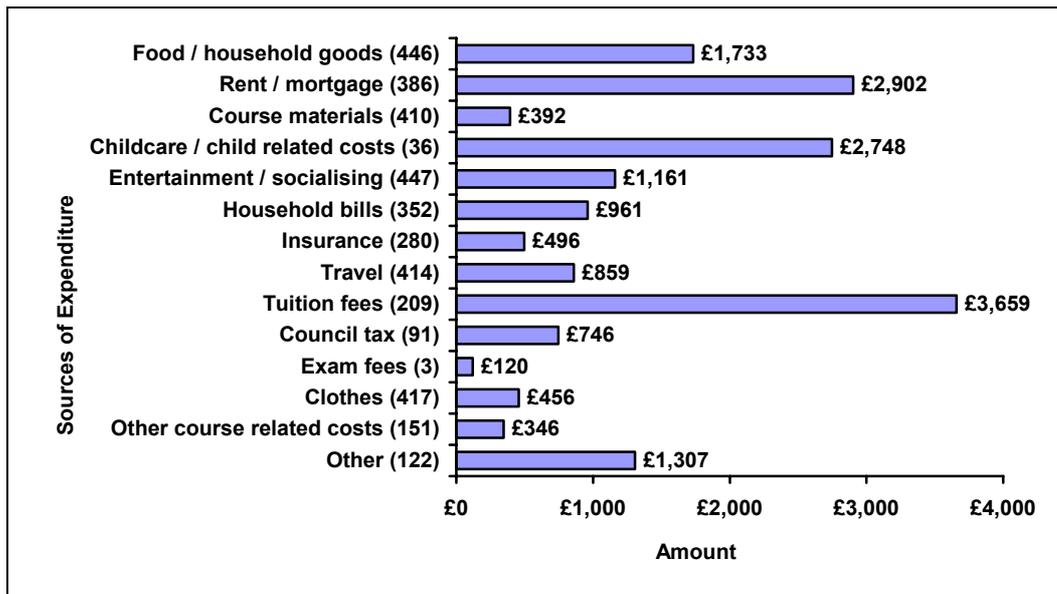


Figure 4.8 Sources and level of expenditure (full-time students)

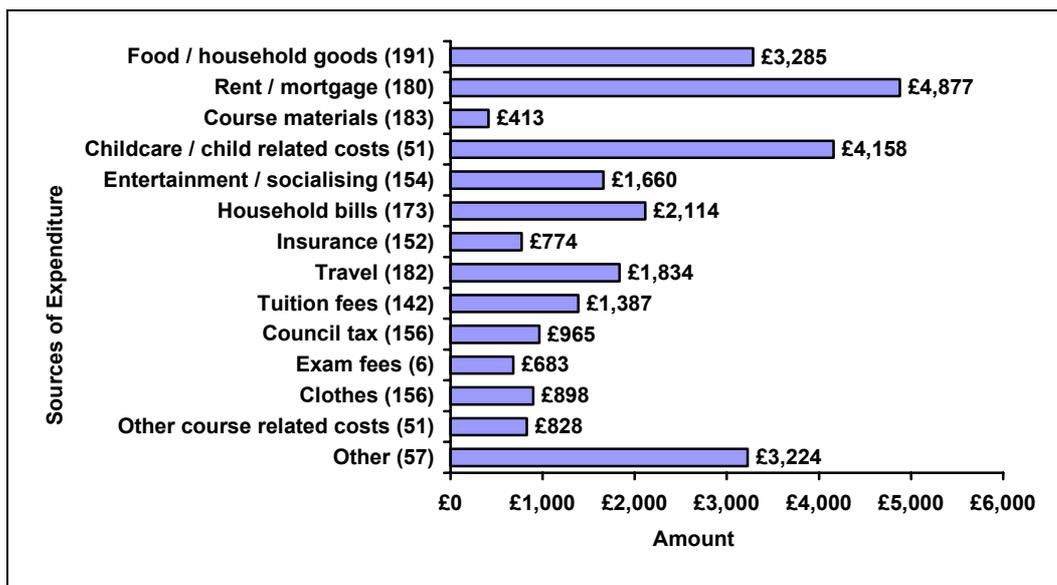
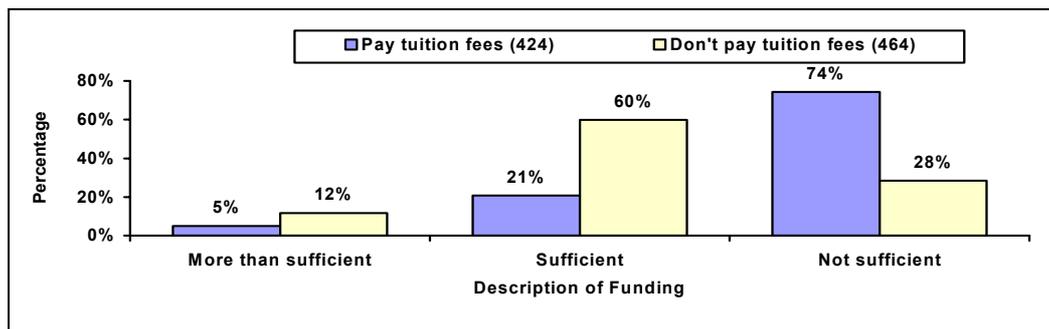


Figure 4.9 Sources and level of expenditure (part-time students)

### 4.3 Perceptions of funding

Overall, 8% of respondents described the funding they have received on their course as ‘more than sufficient’, 41% as ‘sufficient’ and 51% as ‘not sufficient’ (total of 906 responses). The main factor which affected these perceptions of funding was whether students paid tuition fees or not. 74% of those who paid their own tuition fees described their funding as insufficient, compared with only 28% of those who did not pay their own tuition fees (Figure 4.10).



**Figure 4.10** "How would you describe the funding you have received on your current course?"

Those who described their funding as "more than sufficient" stated that they received enough income from sponsorship or employment to cover the costs of their study.

(Total of 71 responses)

Those who described their funding as "sufficient" could be split into three groups:

- 35% said that their funding was sufficient only for basic living costs.
- 29% said that their funding was sufficient to live comfortably.
- 36% said that their funding was only sufficient because they were able to find other sources of income (eg. from paid work, from family, or by using savings).

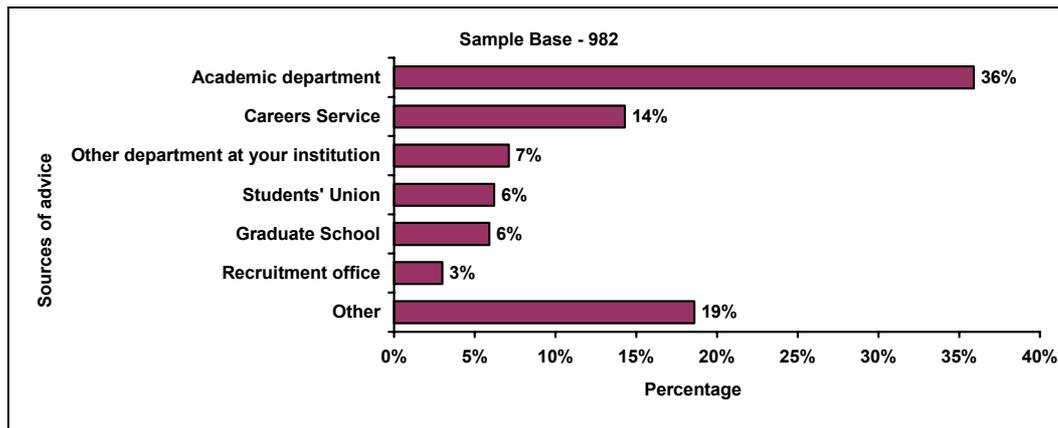
(Total of 325 responses)

Those who described their funding as "not sufficient" stated either that they received no funding and were funding themselves through the course (57%), or that their funding does not cover their living costs (43%).

(Total of 439 responses)

#### 4.4 Sources of advice and assistance

Just over half the respondents (54%) stated that they knew where they could get advice about funding (total of 934 responses). The main sources of advice about funding used were the academic departments in which students were studying, used by 36% of respondents (Figure 4.11). 14% of respondents had used their institution's Careers Service for advice about funding. 'Other' sources of advice listed included funding bodies, place of work, the internet, local authorities, banks, and family or friends.



**Figure 4.11** Sources of advice about funding

Of those respondents who were paying their own fees, 27% were aware of funding that might be available to assist them in paying fees (such as access funds, hardship loans).

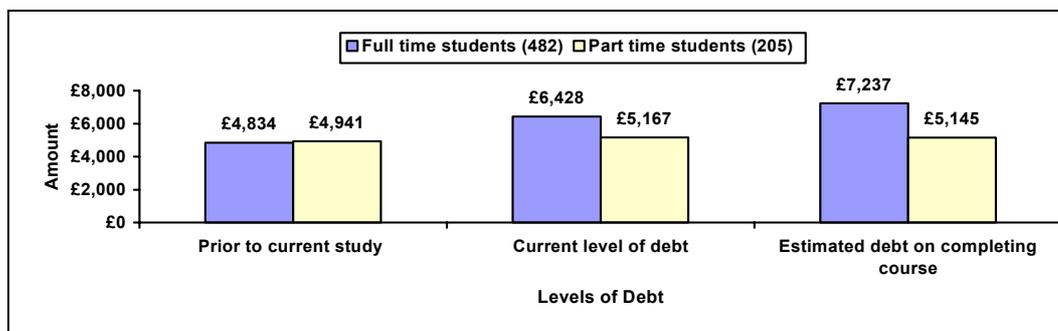
15% of respondents had tried to get access or hardship funds to help with their funding (total of 941 responses). Full-time students were more likely to seek such assistance: 19% of full-time students had tried to get access or hardship funds, compared with 9% of part-time students.

## 4.5 Debt

Respondents were asked to state the amount of debt they had prior to starting their current course of study, at the time of the survey, and their estimated debt on completing their current course of study (Figure 4.12).

Full-time students started their courses with a mean debt of £4,834. This rose to a current level of debt of £6,428, and an estimated debt at the end of the course of £7,237. Thus, the mean increase in debt for full-time students during their course is £2,403.

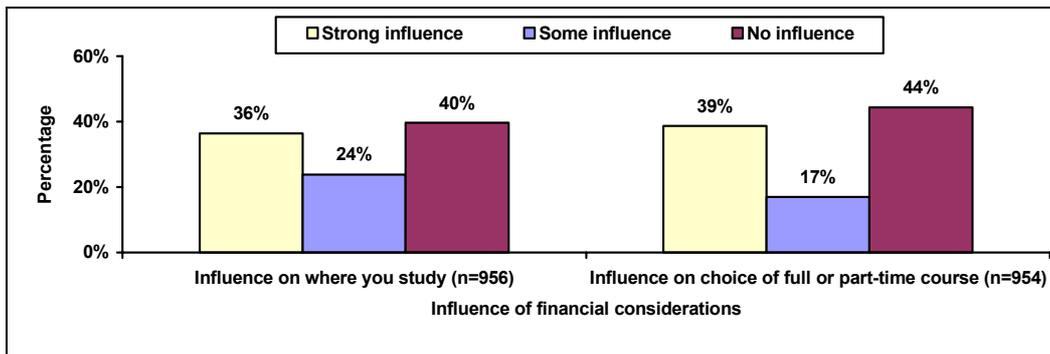
Part-time students started their courses with a similar mean debt of £4,941. However, this changed only negligibly during the course, with a current level of debt of £5,167 and estimated debt at the end of the course of £5,145.



**Figure 4.12** Level of debt

## 4.6 Influence of financial considerations

36% of respondents stated that financial considerations had a strong influence on where they studied, and 39% states that financial considerations had a strong influence on their choice of full-time or part-time study (Figure 4.13).



**Figure 4.13** Influence of financial considerations

Students in post-1992 universities were more likely to say that financial considerations had an influence on their choices. 50% said that financial considerations had a strong influence on where they studied (compared with 31% of pre-1992 university students) and 47% said that financial considerations had a strong influence on their choice of full-time or part-time study (compared with 33% of pre-1992 university students).

Full-time students were more likely to say that financial considerations had an influence on where they studied (40% of full-time students, compared with 31% of part-time students. Part-time students were much more likely to say that financial considerations had an influence on their choice of full-time or part-time study (62% of part-time students, compared with 23% of full-time students).



## 5 Paid work

### 5.1 Paid work undertaken by postgraduate students

71% of respondents were currently undertaking paid work alongside their studies – 56% of full-time students and 90% of part-time students. Most full-time students who undertook paid work worked an average of 15 hours or fewer per week. Most part-time students worked over 30 hours a week on average (Figure 5.1).

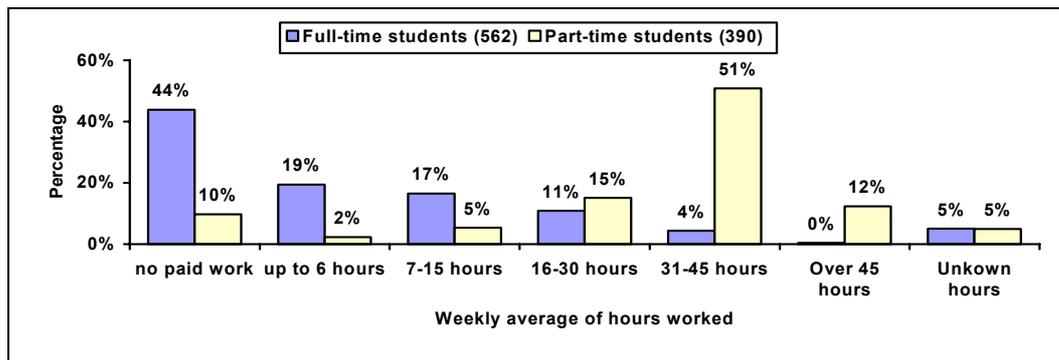


Figure 5.1 Average hours worked per week

Just over half (51%) of full-time students who were undertaking paid work were doing some sort of work for their institution: either contracted teaching work, casual teaching work, or non-teaching work. 44% were doing casual work elsewhere; about 40% of these were doing work which could be described as professional (such as consultancy, working for former employers, locum work), and the remaining 60% were doing work which did not require professional skills (such as sales assistant, bar work, call centres, temping agency work). The majority of part-time students who were undertaking paid work (69%) were engaged in full-time professional employment (Figure 5.2).

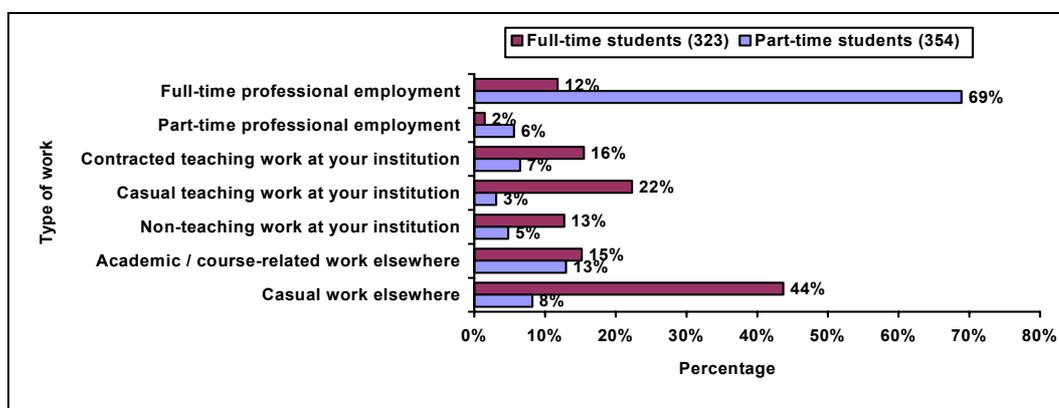


Figure 5.2 Type of work (% of students undertaking paid work)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Note: percentages add up to more than 100 as respondents could indicate more than one response.



## 5.2 Motivations to undertake paid work

The majority of both full-time and part-time students stated that one of their main motivations to undertake paid work was to provide their main, essential source of income (Figure 5.3). Part-time students were more likely than full-time students to state that their motivations for undertaking paid work included providing income (essential or disposable), to save for the future, or career development. Full-time students were more likely to include controlling or clearing debts, to provide for a social life, or to gain transferable skills, amongst their motivations.

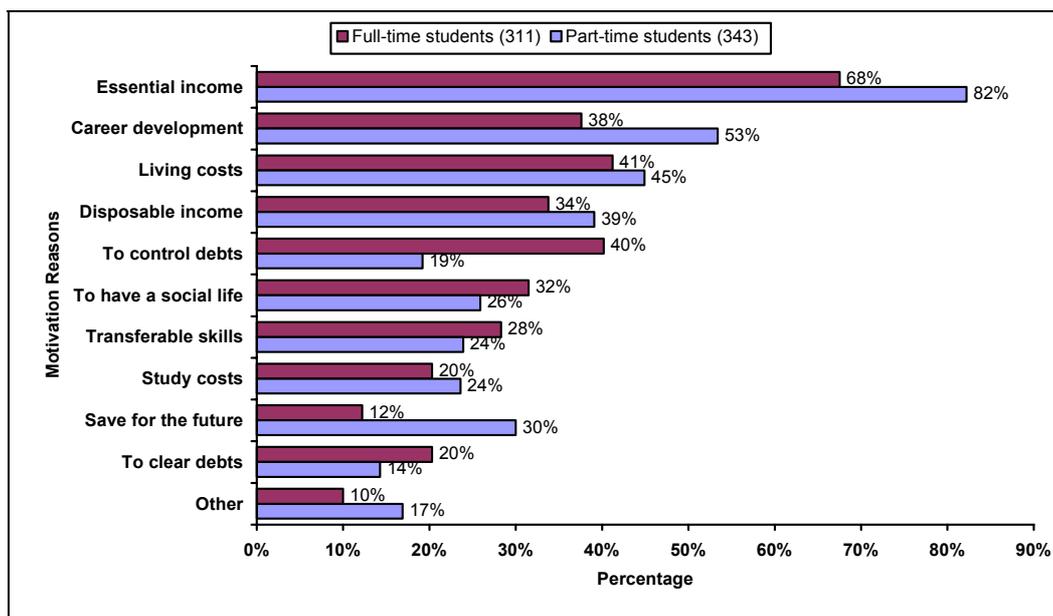


Figure 5.3 Motivations to work<sup>1</sup>

## 5.3 The impact of undertaking paid work

Respondents were asked in what ways their paid work had a positive and negative impact on themselves personally and on their studies.

Positive impacts on themselves personally included:

- Financial benefits (15% of respondents who undertook paid work): providing income, financial security, reducing or avoiding debt, paying tuition fees, funding holidays.
- Personal development (34%): learning to teach, developing communication skills, increasing confidence, diversification of interests and skills, challenge and intellectual stimulation.
- Career-specific benefits (15%): experience for future career in academia or other professions, keeping in touch with profession.

<sup>1</sup> Note: percentages add up to more than 100 as respondents could indicate more than one response.



- Social reasons (11%): mixing with new people, countering the solitary nature of study, balance of life.
- Other reasons (9%): provides variety or a break, a focus outside of academic study. (85% of respondents who undertook paid work gave a response to this question.)

Positive impacts on their studies included:

- Direct benefits to their studies (32%): development of academic knowledge and experience, direct connection between work and study, research based on work.
- Financial reasons (5%): pays for studies, books, travel.
- Development of skills (25%): develop background understanding of the subject, time management skills, practical experience in the field, increasing confidence.
- Social reasons (2%): networking, support from peers and colleagues.
- Other reasons (8%): a break from studies, workplace provides useful resources for studies. (73% of respondents who undertook paid work gave a response to this question.)

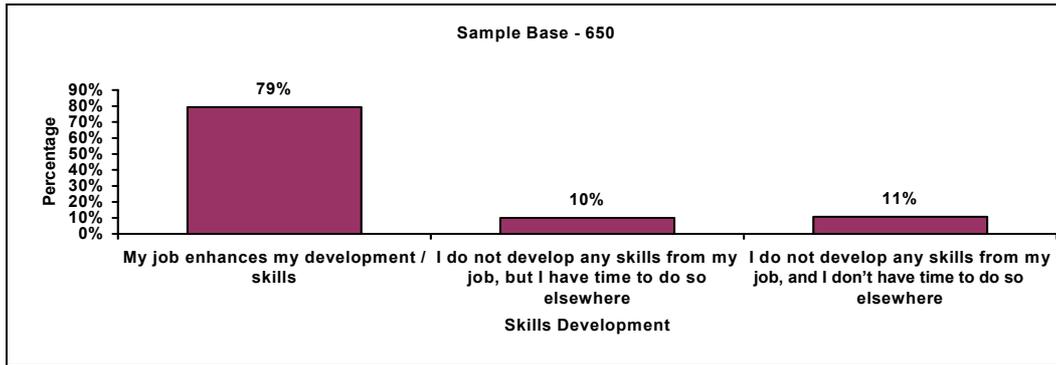
Negative impacts on themselves personally included:

- Time consuming (24%): takes up too much time, leaves little time for family or other interests, have to work late nights and/or weekends.
- Stressful and exhausting (34%): can create an imbalance between work/money and studies, become tired and overworked, emotionally draining.
- Boredom (4%): repetitive work, not challenging.
- Detrimental to the progress of their studies (4%): distracts from studies, studies become a lesser priority.
- Low financial benefit (2%): poorly paid jobs.
- Other reasons (3%): travelling, passive smoking (bar work), lack of support. (72% of respondents who undertook paid work gave a response to this question.)

Negative impacts on their studies included:

- Took away time needed for study (56%): not enough time spent on studies, difficulty meeting deadlines.
- Too stressful or exhausting to study (8%): work is mentally draining, cannot focus on studies, too tired to study.
- Adversely affected the standard of their work (13%): constant interruptions, lack of concentration, standard of work compromised because rushed, had to miss lectures, taken longer to complete work.
- Other reasons (4%): difficult to switch between work and study, no support. (80% of respondents who undertook paid work gave a response to this question.)

79% of respondents who were undertaking paid work said that their job enhanced their development or skills. Of those who said that they did not develop skills from their job, about half said they had time to do so elsewhere, and half said they did not have time to do so elsewhere (Figure 5.4).



**Figure 5.4** Do respondents develop skills from undertaking paid work?

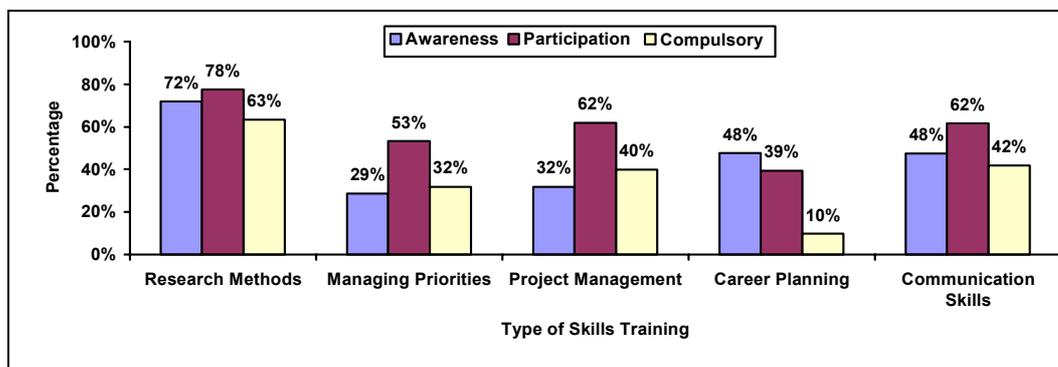
For all the types of work identified in Figure 5.2, except for casual work, at least 84% of respondents said that their job enhanced their development or skills. For those doing professional casual work, 70% said that their job enhanced their development or skills. For those doing non-professional casual work, only 41% said that their job enhanced their development or skills. In all cases, about half of those who said that they did not develop skills from their job said that they had time to do so elsewhere.



## 6 Skills training

42% of respondents stated that they were aware, prior to commencing their course, that skills training was available at their institution (total of 930 responses). Research students were more likely to be aware of skills training than students on taught courses (47% of research students; 38% of taught students). Full-time students were more likely to be aware of skills training than part-time students (46% of full-time students; 36% of part-time students).

Figure 6.1 shows the level of awareness of, and participation in, various types of skills training provided by the institution. The 'awareness' column shows the percentage of respondents who were aware of that training being provided. The 'participation' column shows the percentage of those who were aware of that training who actually participated, and the 'compulsory' column shows the percentage of those who were aware who stated that the training was compulsory.



**Figure 6.1** Awareness of, and participation in, various types of skills training provided by the institution (% of valid responses)<sup>1</sup>

Some respondents indicated they also participated in training in IT skills, teaching or tutoring skills, personal development skills, study skills, or other general skills.

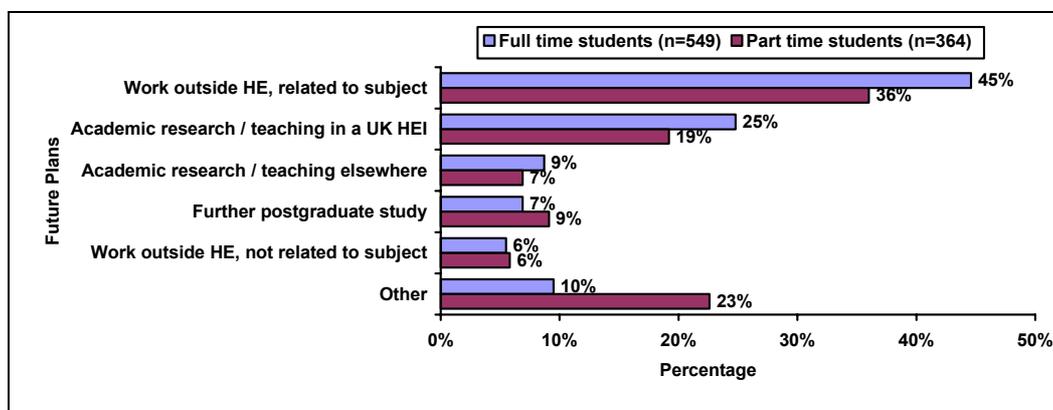
Respondents were asked, if they were now aware of skills training provided by the institution but did not take part, why this was. 45% of respondents said it was because they did not have enough time (because of other commitments, time needed to travel, etc.). 17% said they already had these skills, and so had no need for this training. 10% said they felt the training would be of no value to them, as it was either not relevant or of poor quality. 9% said they were unaware of when or where the training took place. 9% said they just had no wish to participate. A further 10% gave a variety of other responses (total of 341 responses).

<sup>1</sup> Awareness columns show the proportion of the whole sample that was aware of any training in that particular area. The participation and compulsory columns indicate the proportion of those who were aware of that training, who either participated voluntarily or compulsorily (expressed as a % of those who were aware).

## 7 Future career plans

### 7.1 What do postgraduates plan to do when they have finished their current course?

Figure 7.1 shows what respondents plan to do when they have finished their current course of study. The most popular response for both full-time students (45%) and part-time students (36%) was to work outside higher education, but in work related to their subject area.



**Figure 7.1** What do you plan to do when you have finished your current course?

Full-time students were more likely than part-time students to prefer work outside higher education, related to their subject area, and academic research or teaching work. Part-time students were more likely to respond with 'other' plans; half of these indicated that they intended to continue their current job.

40% of research students said they planned to go into academic research or teaching in UK higher education, and 12% into academic research or teaching elsewhere, compared with 9% and 5% respectively for students on taught courses. 55% of students on taught courses planned to work outside higher education, related to their subject area, compared with 23% of research students. 10% of taught students planned to do further postgraduate study, compared with 5% of research students.

Students in business and management subjects were the most likely to prefer work outside higher education, related to their subject area (59%, compared with 41% for all respondents) or work unrelated to their subject (13%, compared with 6% for all respondents). They were also the least likely to want to go into academic research or teaching in UK higher education (6%, compared with 23% for all respondents). Students in arts and humanities subjects were more likely to want to do further postgraduate study (15%, compared with 8% of all respondents).

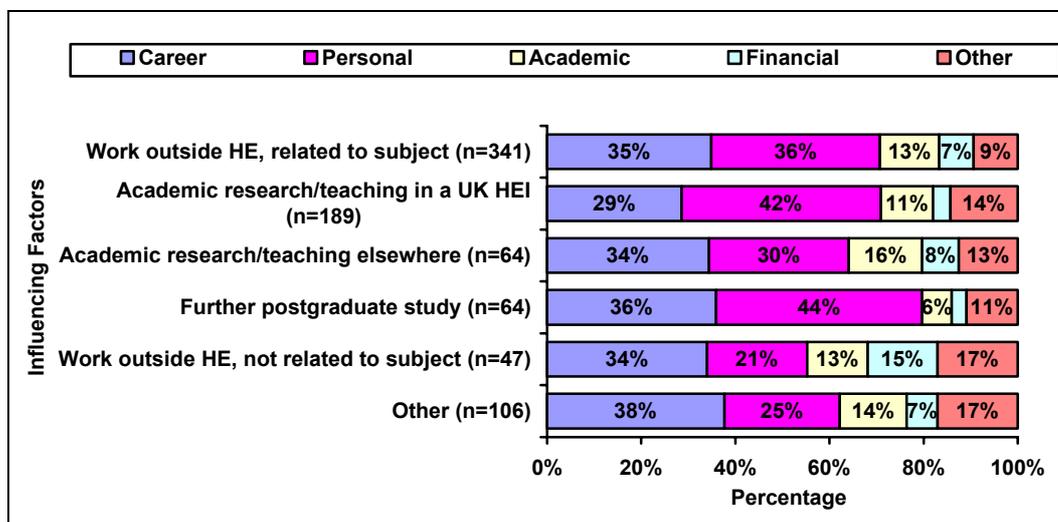


Respondents were asked to describe the main influence on their decision to take the particular career path they indicated above. Responses could be grouped into four main areas:

- **Career:** seeking to pursue goals within a chosen career.
- **Personal:** personal interest and enjoyment.
- **Academic:** wanting to use the skills and qualification gained from academic study.
- **Financial:** improving earning prospects.

Other reasons included age, health, location, family demands, spiritual reasons, lack of option or opportunity, political motivation, inertia and serendipity.

Figure 7.2 shows the responses given by those planning different careers. Respondents planning to go into academic research or teaching in UK higher education or further postgraduate study were more likely to give personal reasons. Those planning to work outside higher education, not related to their subject area, were the most likely to cite financial reasons.

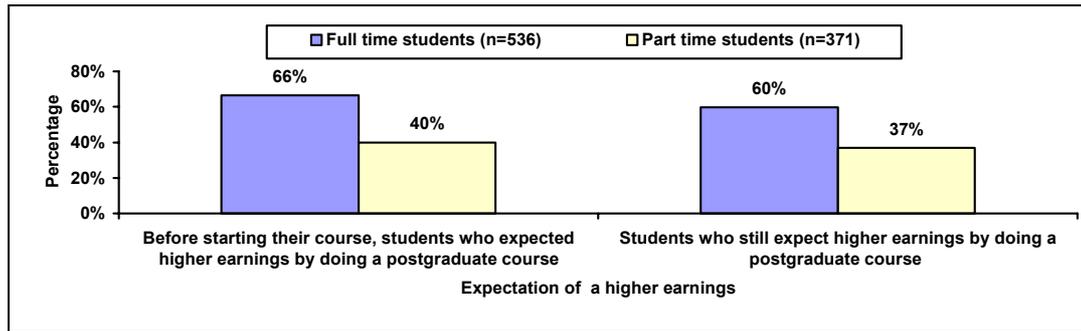


**Figure 7.2** What has been the main influence on your decision to take this particular career path?

21% of respondents indicated they had changed their career plans since commencing their current postgraduate studies (sample base = 945). No particular group of students (by age, gender, subject or mode of study) seemed more likely to have changed their career plans. However, 50% of those who planned to work outside higher education, not related to their subject area, had changed their career plans since starting their course.

## 7.2 Expectations of earnings

Before they started their current postgraduate studies, 66% of full-time students and 40% of part-time students expected that doing a postgraduate course would increase their earnings. At the time of the survey, most respondents still had the same expectations – 60% of full-time students and 37% of part-time students still believed that doing a postgraduate course would increase their earnings (Figure 7.3).

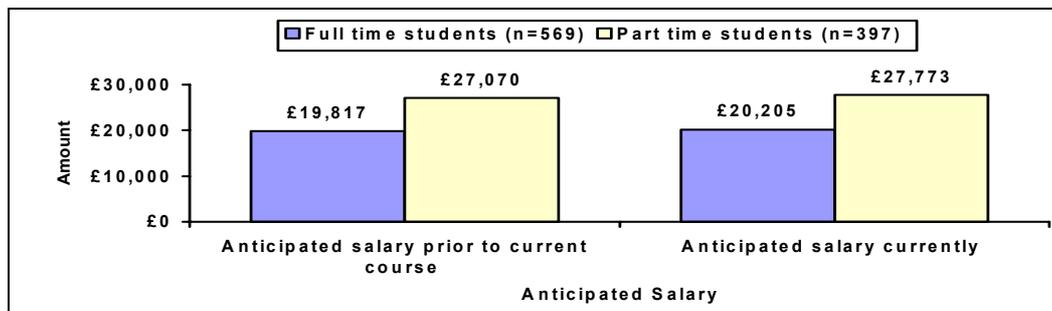


**Figure 7.3** Do students expect higher earnings as a result of postgraduate study?

Respondents who expected higher earnings from doing a postgraduate course (at the time of the survey) were more likely to be:

- **30 or under** (63%, compared with 37% of those over 30);
- **female** (54%, compared with 46% of males);
- studying **sciences** (60%) or **business/management subjects** (59%), as opposed to medicine/health subjects (49%), social sciences (46%) or arts and humanities (33%).
- studying at a **post-1992 institution** (56%, compared with 49% of those at pre-1992 institutions).

Figure 7.4 shows the mean salary that students expected to earn on completion of their postgraduate study before they started their course, and then at the time of the survey. This shows that the experience of postgraduate study has not changed students' expectations of the salary they might earn. Part-time students expect to be earning more than full-time students.



**Figure 7.4** What salary do students anticipate (mean of valid responses)

### 7.3 Is postgraduate study a good investment?

86% of respondents said they felt that the money they had invested in their current study would be a good investment in their future (total of 914 responses). Students on taught courses were more likely to say that postgraduate study was a good investment (90%, compared with 82% of research students). There was little difference between the responses of full-time and part-time students, or



between those who were paying their own fees or not. 71% of those who planned to work in an area not related to their subject said that postgraduate study was a good investment.

Of those 914 respondents who said they felt that postgraduate study was a good investment, 61% gave reasons to do with the successful development of their career, and 35% gave more general reasons of personal development (total of 698 responses).

Of those who felt that postgraduate study was not a good investment, 25% said this was because they did not expect an increase in salary, 25% said the qualification would make little difference to them, 16% said they were pursuing the course for interest, not career development, 9% said they would be paying off the debts incurred, and 9% said this was because their career prior to the course was well paid (total of 110 responses).

## 7.4 Use of Careers Services

23% of respondents indicated they had used the Careers Service at their institution during their current course, whereas 77% had not (total of 958 responses). Certain groups of students were more likely to have used their Careers Service:

- 33% of those who were **30 or under**, compared with 12% of those over 30.
- 30% of those on **business or management** courses, but only 9% of those on medicine or health related courses.
- 27% of those on **taught courses**, compared with 19% of research students.
- 33% of **full-time students**, compared with 8% of part-time students.
- 46% of those planning to work outside higher education, in an area not related to their subject, compared with 20% of those planning academic or research related careers.

Figure 7.5 shows the reasons given by those respondents who had not used their Careers Service. Students studying arts or humanities subjects were more likely to say that the Careers Service was not appropriate for them (26%, compared with 15% for all respondents).

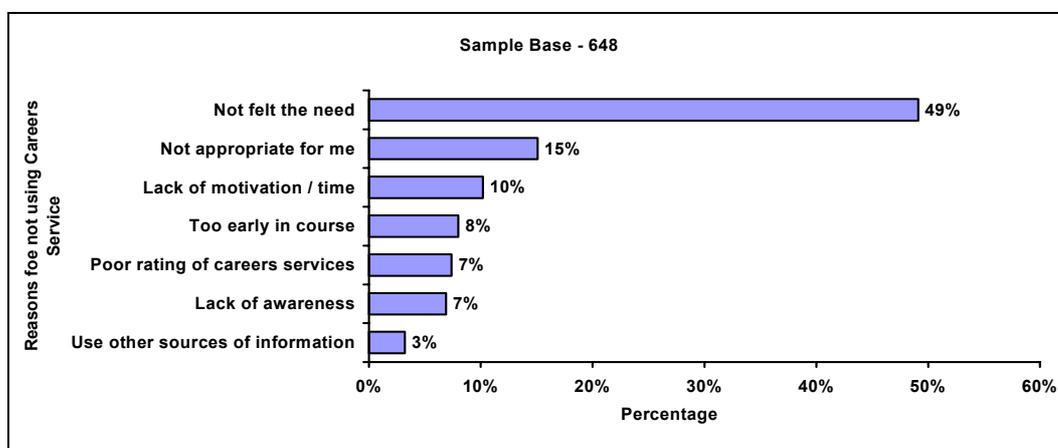


Figure 7.5 Reasons given for not using the Careers Service



Figure 7.6 shows the ratings that respondents gave for the importance of various requirements for careers services, and their satisfaction with their own institution’s careers service for meeting each requirement. The ratings for different requirements were very similar, although providing information about opportunities for further study was seen as slightly less important.

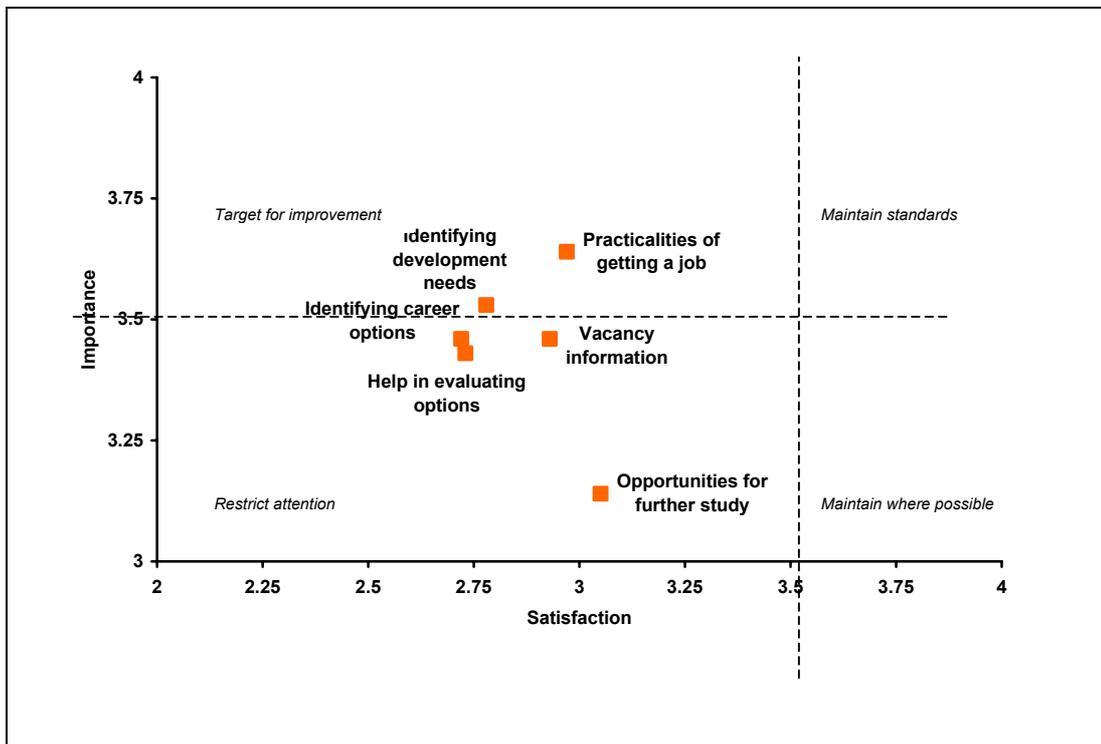


Figure 7.6 Importance of, and satisfaction with, requirements for careers services (mean ratings out of 5)

Figure 7.7 shows where else respondents sought careers advice. The most popular responses were friends (46%), tutors or supervisors (42%) and internet services (38%). ‘Other’ sources of advice included work colleagues, the press, recruitment agencies and job fairs.

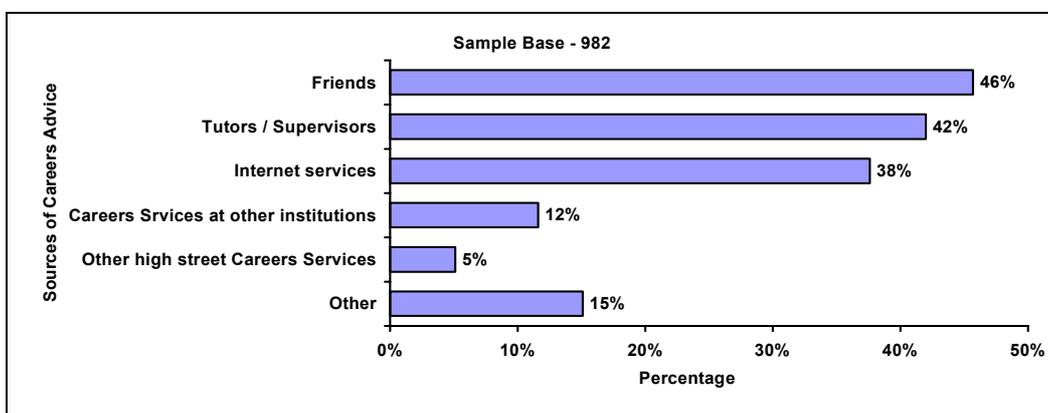


Figure 7.7 Sources of careers advice used



## 8 *Acknowledgements*

We would like to acknowledge the help of CSU and AGCAS Postgraduate Committee (particularly Gill Frigerio) in making this research project possible. We also thank staff at the seventeen participating institutions for their help in distributing the questionnaires, and members of the student research team at University of Warwick Students' Union who carried out the data entry work. University of Warwick Students' Union has a policy of training and employing undergraduate and postgraduate students where possible to assist with discharging research projects such as this.

Authors:

Jamie Darwen: Education Research and Development Advisor

Elaine Bell: Research Co-ordinator

Susan Goodlad: Research Manager



## *Appendix A - Participating institutions*

University of Dundee  
University of Durham  
University of Glamorgan  
University of Gloucestershire  
Harper Adams University College  
Imperial College, London  
University of Kent at Canterbury  
University of Liverpool  
London Guildhall University  
Loughborough University  
Queen's University, Belfast  
School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London)  
University of Sheffield  
Sheffield Hallam University  
University of Stirling  
University of Sussex  
University of Warwick



## Appendix B - Priority Search

'Priority Search' is a research methodology devised by Priority Search Ltd. It involves the application of specialised numerical methods to qualitative data.

### Focusing

In the first instance, an open question was asked: "Why did you choose your current course of study?". This question was first posed to a series of focus groups involving current postgraduate students at the University of Warwick in spring 2001. The responses obtained were organised into themes, and fourteen statements were chosen to represent the range of ideas and suggestions given.

### The Questionnaire

The Priority Search section of the questionnaire allowed respondents to establish their own prioritised agenda from the statements identified above. They were presented with a list of paired statements, where they could indicate their relative preference for two items by marking a point on the line between the two. If both items were equally important or unimportant, the person would mark the centre of the line. If one item is preferred to the other, a mark is placed closer to that item; how far depends on the strength of the preference for that item relative to its pair. Each item appears in the questionnaire three times, each time paired with a different item. In this way, all items are ranked for each individual, and the rank position of items for the whole sample population, or subgroup of it, can be identified.

Data entry and analysis was carried out using Priority Search's proprietary software.

### The Algorithm

The use of paired comparisons as an aid to prioritisation is relatively well known. However, dichotomous choice is usually used, which requires the comparison of all possible pairs.

The process used here allows respondents to compare each pair not dichotomously, but using a *visual average scale*. This tool is commonly used to measure subjective phenomena, for example pain or mood. The addition of this scale gives more information per pair, and as a result the number of pairings needed is reduced considerably.

In order to extract a rank order from the resulting partial set of all possible pairings, it is necessary to be able to relate each item to all the others. Consider a set of ten items paired as follows:



<b>A – F</b> <b>B – G</b> <b>C – H</b> <b>D – I</b> <b>E – J</b>	In this case, we know how A relates to F, B to G, etc, but we have no information about how A relates to any item other than F, or B to any item other than G, etc.
<b>A – F</b> <b>B – G</b> <b>C – H</b> <b>D – I</b> <b>E – J</b> <b>B – F</b> <b>C – G</b> <b>D – H</b> <b>E – I</b>	By creating a second set of pairings with the left hand column frame shifted, a chain results: at the top, A is compared with F, which below is compared with B; B is compared with G, which is compared with C, and so on. In this way, the position of any item relative to any other can be determined.

Such a design is known as a reduced subset cyclic design. Two sets of pairings arranged as above will allow a perfect rank order to be calculated if the input to the system comprises mathematically precise data. This process adds a third, different set of pairings; this allows more information to be extracted and is sufficient to cope with the imprecision which is inherent in subjective ratings.