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Working Paper

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ESRI Working Paper, No. 185

Provided in Cooperation with:

The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), Dublin

Suggested Citation: Darmody, Merike; Smyth, Emer (2007) : Managing term-time employment and study in Ireland, ESRI Working Paper, No. 185, The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), Dublin

This Version is available at:

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Managing Term-Time Employment and Study in Ireland

Merike Darmody^{*} and Emer Smyth

Abstract: An increasing amount of research now relates to full-time higher education students who work part-time during their study. However, little is known about this issue in the Irish context, despite the fact that the latter provides an interesting case-study due to its unprecedented economic growth in recent years and subsequent changes in the labour market. This paper attempts to address this gap in research and reports on a postal survey carried out among 3,900 higher education students. It aims to establish the profile of full-time higher education students engaged in part-time work during term-time. It also explores the motivation for engaging in paid work and possible implications of work-load on levels of life satisfaction. It is argued in this paper that inadequate policy attention to the changing profile of higher education students, their work-load and needs risks reinforcing inequalities among students.

Key words: higher education, part-time employment, survey, Ireland, logistic regression

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Managing Term-Time Employment and Study in Ireland

Introduction

A number of international studies have indicated a growing trend in recent years towards combining study with part-time work among secondary and higher education students in developed countries (McInnis 2004; Naylor 1999; Curtis and Williams 2002; Moreau and Leathwood 2006). These trends can be seen as reflecting four main factors. Firstly, increasing student employment must be viewed in the context of overall employment growth in many national contexts with more students working on a part-time basis as growing numbers of jobs become available (see Naylor 1999; van der Meer and Mielers 2001). However, it should be noted that, despite this general trend, the proportion of students engaged in employment varies somewhat across countries (see Eurostudent 2005). Secondly, employment growth has tended to take place in particular employment sectors, mainly less skilled service jobs; employers in these sectors require the kind of flexibility which may suit the needs of students seeking employment (see Canny 2002, on the UK situation). Research evidence indicates that the jobs taken up by students are generally not relevant to their current field of study or their longer-term career plans. A study of full-time higher education students in Britain shows that students are likely to be engaged in 'stop-gap' jobs, generally located in the hotel, catering, leisure and retailing sectors, sectors that have little relevance to the course they are undertaking (see Lucas 1997). In their study, Barke and co-authors (2000) report that only 9 per cent of the students relate their current part-time work to their future career objectives. Similarly, Carney (2000) found that part-time work was not seen as relevant for future employment, with students mainly working in the retail food and drink industry as well as call centres. Thirdly, the profile of students attending higher education courses has changed dramatically in recent years. Many higher education entrants now return to education later in life (OECD 2004) and the increased presence of both mature students and those from working-class backgrounds means that a growing number of students may 'need' to combine study with work (McInnis 2004; Bienefeld & Almqvist 2004; Ford et al. 1995). Lastly, increased numbers of students engaged in paid work also reflect

the growing cost of higher education and changes in higher education funding in some national contexts (Moreau & Leathwood 2006; Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance 2001). All of these factors can be seen at play in the Republic of Ireland. The country is a particularly interesting case considering its unprecedented economic growth from the mid-1990s onwards (Bergin et al. 2003) with falling unemployment rates and a rapid growth in part-time service employment (O'Connell 2000). Furthermore, these trends have taken place at the same time as a growth in the absolute numbers of working-class and older people entering higher education (Fitzpatrick Associates & O'Connell 2005). Unlike in some other countries, there is no government sponsored loan system in place in Ireland, but means-tested maintenance grants are available for eligible students attending full-time higher education courses (HEA 2003). While the 'Free Fees Initiative' in place in higher education institutions covers undergraduate tuition fees¹, many higher education students supplement their income by paid employment (Darmody et al. 2005).

Other Western countries have experienced all these trends to varying degrees, resulting in differing levels of part-time employment among students in secondary and higher education. Analyses of the Eurostudent survey indicate that the proportion of higher education students working during term-time varies cross-nationally with the lowest levels in Southern Europe (especially Portugal and Italy) and the highest in the Netherlands and Ireland (HIS 2005). Potential reasons for this variation lie in the nature of the labour market and availability of jobs suitable for students. For example, in Greece Dimitrios and Karaliopoulou (2005) report that the majority of students do not engage in paid employment due to schedule conflicts and lack of job opportunities. On the other hand, in the United States, part-time work has become the norm, even among high school students (Gordon 1985; Bureau of Labour Statistics 2005). In the same vein, in the Irish context, labour force participation among students aged 15 to 24 increased significantly in the 1990s (CSO 2004), from 7 per cent in

¹ Students who are exempt from tuition fees are: first-time undergraduates; hold E.U. nationality or Official Refugee status; have been resident in an EU member state for a determined period of time (HEA, 2003: 64). There are also other student support initiatives including a top-up grant targeted at disadvantaged grant holders; a Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage; the Student Assistance Access Fund, the Fund for student with Disabilities and tax relief that is available for tuition fees paid (HEA 2003: 64).

1991 to 40 per cent in 1999 (McCoy et al. 2000). Moreover, a recent study revealed that over 60 per cent of students at upper secondary school level now have a regular part-time job (McCoy & Smyth 2004). While it is evident that engaging in part-time work has almost become a norm among higher education students, motivation for doing so seems to differ across different groups of students. In particular, it is not clear to what extent students' motivations for working part-time are seen as due to financial necessity or the desire to fund discretionary expenditure.

Full-time students: Motivations for part-time employment

Several international studies have indicated that many students are obliged to take up employment for financial reasons (Ford et al. 1995; Curtis & Shani 2002; Carney 2000; Bewick et al. 2004). A recent British study (MORI/UNITE 2004) found that an increasing proportion of full-time students are working just to survive while seven in ten report needing employment income for basic essentials. Similarly, exploring student life in a number of European countries, Bienfeld and Almqvist (2004) report that working during term-time is especially prevalent in those countries where students' grants and loans are means-tested on the basis of parental income. As well as being responsive to the availability of financial support from the State, student employment levels are sensitive to the level of parental support, with a higher proportion working where they do not receive financial support from their parents (Metcalf 2001). Elsewhere, however, research shows that term-time work is often undertaken to finance students' 'lifestyle', that is, expenditure on entertainment (see Bewick et al. 2004). Overall, both sets of factors may be apparent among different groups of students; in their study of British undergraduates, Barke and co-authors (2000) found that 61 per cent of the students were working 'to achieve a desired standard of living', 49 per cent did so as an alternative to borrowing and 43 per cent were working 'simply to remain at the university'. Research in the Irish context would appear to indicate that lifestyle preferences are a stronger motivation for working than financial necessity, at least among the majority of secondary school students (McCoy & Smyth, 2004).

The impact of part-time employment

There does not seem to be a consensus among researchers in relation to the effects of term-time employment on student outcomes. On the positive side, benefits in terms of financial rewards, the development of skills, a greater understanding of the world of business and increased self-confidence were reported by more than half of the students participating in a study carried out by Curtis and Shani (2002). In the same vein, Carney (2000) found that term-time work was seen to enhance students' commercial and organisational skills as well as their social development. Working part-time may also enhance access to full-time employment on leaving university (McInnis & Hartley 2002, Dimitrios & Karaliopoulou 2005). In contrast, a number of studies have highlighted the negative effects of part-time work for students. Curtis and Shani (2002) indicate that students who work are more likely to miss lectures and tend to achieve lower grades than they would have had they not been engaged in employment. In the Irish context, higher drop-out rates were found among students who worked part-time and experienced financial difficulties (Healy et al. 1999). In another Irish study, staff in higher education institutions considered part-time work levels among their students to be excessive in many instances and to have a very negative effect on attendance and study (Eivers et al. 2002).

A number of studies have suggested that the effects of term-time employment vary across different groups of students and/or different types of work. In Britain, Metcalf (2001) suggests that term-time working reinforces existing socio-economic inequalities in student outcomes, given the higher rates of employment found among those from less affluent and less educated families (see also Barke et al. 2000). Moreover, other researchers suggest that the negative effects of part-time work accrue only to those students who work long and/or antisocial hours (see Ford et al. 1995; Metcalf 2001). In general, the numbers of full-time undergraduate students who work long hours are seen to be relatively low (Barke et al. 2000; Metcalf 2001), implying that any negative effects may be evident only for a small number of students.

While such studies have explored the potential effects of part-time employment among students, they have tended to focus on academic outcomes. In contrast, the extent to which the demands of employment and study affect students' satisfaction

with workload has received little attention. Yet, dissatisfaction with workload may have serious implications for student retention, performance and their future life-chances. This article attempts to address this gap in research by profiling the full-time students engaged in paid work as well as focusing on the relationship between term-time employment, workload and levels of satisfaction among students in higher education in the Republic of Ireland. The issues discussed in this article are of interest internationally as, similarly to Ireland, the combination of term-time work and study has become almost a norm among higher education students in a number of countries. The following section discusses the data used in the study. This is followed by a discussion of the prevalence, extent and nature of employment among full-time higher education students in Ireland, placing this within the context of their overall workload (the extent of employment and study). The article then moves on to explore income and expenditure patterns among students. Finally, the link between workload and life satisfaction is discussed.

Data and methodology

The higher education sector in the Republic of Ireland encompasses a range of different types of institution, including seven universities, fourteen institutes of technology, colleges of education and a small number of privately funded colleges. All of these institutions provide degree-level courses alongside other programmes. Entry to undergraduate courses is, for the most part, based on performance in the nationally standardised examination (the Leaving Certificate) taken at the end of upper secondary education. A *numerus clausus* principle ensures that entry to a given higher education course is granted to the highest-performing students who have applied for that programme. In recent years, alternative entry pathways have been developed for older students and for those who attended 'disadvantaged' secondary schools. Participation in higher education in Ireland has increased steadily from the early 1980s onwards, faster than the growth in many other countries. In fact, the proportion of Irish school leavers progressing to full-time higher education has risen from an estimated 20 per cent in 1980 to 55 per cent in 2004 (O'Connell, Clancy, McCoy 2006). European Union nationals are exempt from paying course fees on approved full-time undergraduate courses, although fees are payable for those attending postgraduate and part-time courses. State financial support is available to

students attending full-time courses; eligibility for such support is determined on the basis of parental income for school-leavers and on the basis of own household income for older students. An additional 'top-up' payment is made to students from welfare-dependent families.

Policy context and funding of higher education in Ireland

The State's recognition of the importance of higher education is reflected in the increased level of expenditure on this sector in Ireland (McCoy & Smyth 2003; O'Connell et al. 2006). Policy documents in the area deal mostly with inequity of access and participation in higher education (HEA 2005). In particular, 'tackling social exclusion through education, achieving equity of educational opportunity, establishing lifelong learning routes and encouraging access to and successful participation in higher education' have been listed as policy priorities since the mid-1990s (HEA 2004). However, similarly to other national contexts (see, for example Moreau and Leathwood 2006), there has been a limited recognition of the changing profile of higher education students and the issue of term-time employment has been largely ignored within Irish higher education policy. The White Paper on Adult Education *Learning for Life* (2000) makes only a brief reference to full-time students engaging in part-time work in the context of charging fees (p. 77). Lack of available data on student term-time employment has resulted in speculation as to whether it is driven by financial necessity or paying for a 'lifestyle' as well as a limited understanding of the changing profile of higher education students in contemporary Irish society.

This paper draws on data collected through the Eurostudent 2003/2004 survey conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute on behalf of the Higher Education Authority in Ireland. The study draws on 3,900 responses to a postal survey of students in Irish higher education institutions. Because of data protection issues, the participating higher education institutions were instructed to randomly select a specified sample of students across courses and to distribute the questionnaire. The study includes universities, institutes of technology, colleges of education and other higher education institutions but does not include private colleges. Weighting was used to ensure that the responses were representative of the total student population in

terms of full-time/part-time and undergraduate/postgraduate status as well as institution and gender. The questionnaire included, among other areas, questions about access to higher education, students' financial and living situation, employment experience, student mobility and background. Due to the scope of the paper, the discussion is limited to full-time students. The authors acknowledge, however, that the situation of 'studying workers', that is, part-time students, merits further research as little is known about their experiences in the higher education sector.

The prevalence and nature of employment among full-time higher education students in Ireland

In accordance with international trends, the majority of Irish full-time higher education students surveyed work, at least to some extent, during term-time. A relatively large proportion (43%) have a regular job during term-time with almost a fifth (18%) engaged in occasional employment. Compared to an earlier Irish study conducted by Ryan and O'Kelly in recent years (2001), the proportion of full-time students in employment has increased somewhat (from 54% in 2000 to 61% in 2004). These relatively high levels of employment, must be seen in the context of recent economic growth, with rapid employment growth in the services sector (Sexton 2002).

While significant changes have taken place in student employment in Ireland in recent years, little has been known about the profile of full-time students combining study with work and the impact of their workload on their satisfaction with student life. Analysis of the data shows that female students participating in higher education are more likely to report being in regular paid employment than their male counterparts (47% compared with 39%), consistent with the findings of Callender and Kemp (2000) and Metcalf (2001) in the British context. Contrary to the pattern found among Irish secondary students (McCoy and Smyth 2004), and findings in the British context (see Barke et al. 2000), employment rates in Ireland did not vary significantly by parental social class for full-time higher education students. However, students whose parents themselves have higher education qualifications are less likely to work, and if they do, to do so on an occasional basis only, than those whose parents had lower educational levels (in keeping with the findings of Metcalf 2001, in the British

context). There is some variation across field of study in the proportion of students in term-time employment, with regular employment rates for full-time students highest among those on social science and business courses.

Hours of Work and Nature of Employment

Several international studies have highlighted the adverse effect of working long hours on students (Ford et al. 1995; Metcalf 2001). In order to explore the issue in the Irish context, students were asked to report the number of hours they worked per week. The responses show that the largest single group of full-time students in employment work six to ten hours per week with just seven per cent working more than twenty hours per week. The average number of hours in employment per week is fourteen, similar to comparable estimates in the British context (see Barke et al. 2000). Among full-time students, half of those in employment work weekends only, 15 per cent work weekdays only (either daytime or evening) while just over a third work both weekdays and weekends. It follows that only a small proportion of Irish full-time students work long hours during term-time.

The analysis showed that full-time students in Ireland tend to be concentrated in routine service work, for example, working in shops, restaurants and bars, in line with studies elsewhere (see Carney 2000; Canny 2002). For the majority of students, their employment is not related to their field of study, a pattern which is consistent with their concentration in service employment as noted above. Field of study and term-time occupation were most closely related for those students taking courses in the areas of health/welfare (67%) and agriculture/veterinary (55%) and least likely in science and humanities/arts.

Student Workload

Most Irish full-time students spend between 10 and 30 hours per week on lectures, tutorials and practicals. Levels of employment are higher among students with less class contact time, reflecting the fact that they potentially have more time available for engaging in paid work. Over and above the time spent in lectures, courses involve a certain amount of personal study time. The analysis showed that the majority of

full-time students spend less than ten hours a week on personal study with students in regular employment spending considerably less time per week on personal study than those not working. Students in occasional employment spend less time on personal study than non-workers but more time than those in regular employment. These patterns may be of concern since time spent on study is likely to be associated with academic performance and level of final awards. The impact of workload on students' life satisfaction will be explored in greater detail later in the paper.

Income and expenditure patterns

In order to gain a more comprehensive picture of the reasons for participating in employment and explore whether students do so for financial necessity, this section presents information about the income and expenditure patterns found among Irish higher education students.

The sources of income of students attending Irish higher education institutions include their family, State grants (including student grants and social welfare payments), bank loans, student assistance funds and other sources. Most students draw on multiple sources of income, for example, engaging in paid employment and receiving money from their family. Regarding the main sources of income, the majority of full-time students receive income from employment. Over half of full-time students also receive some income from their family while 40 per cent receive some support from the State (in the form of grants, social welfare payments or State scholarships). In addition to direct payments, over half (54%) of the students reported getting indirect support in the form of a subsidy towards accommodation or other expenses from their family; this is mostly the case for younger students on full-time courses.

With regard to expenditure, the rising cost of living in the Irish context is likely to have had an impact on quality of life among students. Students were asked to indicate how much they spend on average each month on various items. The figures relate to direct expenditure and exclude, for example, parental contributions towards accommodation costs. The analysis showed that expenditure is highest on accommodation and food, in line with a study carried out in the United Kingdom

(MORI/UNITE 2004). Further analysis of student expenditure patterns showed that in Ireland, the overall expenditure levels among full-time students do not vary significantly by gender, contrary to findings in the British context (Callender and Wilkinson 2003).

Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, overall expenditure levels do not vary by employment status among students. However, the nature of such expenditure does differ (see Figure 1). Interestingly, students not working spend more on accommodation compared to those engaged in regular or occasional employment, reflecting higher employment rates among students living with their families. Those engaged in paid employment during term-time spend on average more on clothing/toiletries, alcohol, tobacco and entertainment/recreation. Higher levels of expenditure on 'lifestyle' items is evident among those in regular employment, whether they live with their parents or not. This pattern would appear to indicate that the motivation for working is primarily lifestyle/consumption-related, as is the case with secondary students in Ireland (McCoy and Smyth 2004). However, students in regular employment also spend more on loan repayments than other students, which may indicate the impact of financial necessity for some groups of students.

Who works?

In an attempt to identify the profile of students most likely to engage in paid employment, a logistic regression model was used in order to assess the characteristics associated with working part-time in a regular job while in college (see Table 1). Four sets of factors were examined: demographic and background characteristics, time constraints on potential participation, access to other income sources and location. A positive coefficient indicates increased chances of working in a regular job compared to the base category while a negative coefficient indicates reduced chances.

The likelihood of working part-time is found to vary significantly across different groups of students. Older students (that is, those aged over 23 years) are found to be less likely to engage in term-time working. This reflects lower employment rates

among post-graduate students as well as among those who entered higher education at an older age. It may be that mature students only return to full-time education when they can ensure sufficient funds to cover their expenses without working. Although overall female employment rates are somewhat higher than those for males, these gender differences are no longer significant when other background factors are taken into account. Social class background is not significantly associated with term-time employment (see above) so is not included in the model. However, students whose parents have higher education qualifications are less likely to engage in regular employment than those whose parents have lower levels of education. Thus, parents who themselves have had experience of higher education may have better knowledge of the required workload and advise their children not to engage in paid employment. International students, that is, those from outside Ireland, are less likely to engage in paid employment than Irish-born students. As with mature students, this is likely to reflect the reluctance of international students to embark on full-time education without the necessary resources. Students attending universities are found to be less likely to work part-time than those in institutes of technology or other colleges. This is difficult to explain given that other background differences (such as parental education) are controlled for in the model. The pattern is likely to be related to greater selectivity into the university sector, for example, on the basis of prior academic performance.

Table 1: Factors predicting regular employment during term-time among full-time students (logistic regression model)

Factor	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	0.966***	1.118***
<i>Demographic characteristics:</i>		
Older student (>23 years of age)	-0.497***	-0.511***
Female	-0.297	-0.259
Third-level qualification among parent(s)	-0.344***	-0.309**
International student	-0.491***	-0.472*
<i>Time constraints:</i>		
Attends university	-0.425***	-0.410***
No. of hours lectures:		
15-20	0.028	0.059
21-25	-0.074	-0.029
26-30	-0.341*	-0.273
>30 hours	-0.388*	-0.364*
Final year of course	-0.379**	-0.346***
Married or living as a couple	0.248	0.205
One or more children	-0.965***	-1.024***
<i>Access to income sources:</i>		
Receives income from State (grant, social welfare)	-0.617***	
Amount received:		-0.687**
1-100		-0.605**
101-200		-0.777***
>200		
(Base: None)		
Family support:		
Not living with parents- financial contribution	-0.927***	
Living with parents-no contribution	0.598***	
Living with parents-financial contribution	-0.592***	
(Base: not living with parents-no contribution)		-0.689***
Amount received:		-0.849***
1-100		-1.349***
101-200		-1.451***
201-300		-1.533***
301-400		
>400		0.260*
(Base: None)		
Living with parents		
Location:		
Dublin	0.150	0.167
Limerick	-0.005	-0.002
Cork	0.160	0.135

Note: *** p<.001, ** p<.01, *p<.05.

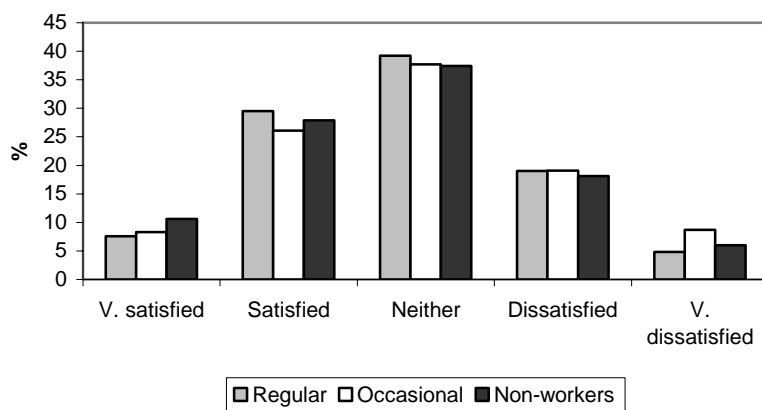
Potential time constraints also have a significant relationship with employment participation. Students with a heavier workload in terms of hours of lectures, practicals and tutorials are less likely to engage in regular employment, although the effect is evident only for those with more than 25 hours of class contact time in an average week. Employment propensity also seems to be responsive to study workload since students in the final year of a degree course are less likely to work part-time than those in other year groups. Similarly, family commitments appear to be associated with the likelihood of working part-time; students with one or more children are less likely to work part-time, although marital status per se has no significant effect.

Term-time employment levels are lower among those with alternative (non-employment) sources of income. However, the data used mean that the direction of causality cannot be fully determined. Those who receive State financial support (in the form of a grant or social welfare payment) are significantly less likely to work than other students. Model 2 indicates the effects vary by the amount of State support with the lowest employment rates found among those receiving more than 200 euro per week. In terms of family support, employment rates are highest among students who live with their parents but do not receive any direct income from them. It is not intended to imply that this is a causal relationship, however, since the amount of money given by parents to their children may be reduced when students have a separate income from paid employment. Students who receive an income from their family are less likely to work than other students; this is particularly evident among those not living with their parents. The likelihood of working is also related to the amount of income received from family with the lowest employment rates found among those receiving higher weekly payments from their parents. Location is not found to be significantly associated with participation in paid employment; students in the two larger cities, Dublin and Cork, are slightly more likely to work on a regular basis than those in other areas but the difference is not statistically significant. In sum, the analyses indicate that the prevalence of part-time employment among full-time students appears to be responsive to the availability of other sources of financial support and to study demands within higher education as well as reflecting background factors.

Financial situation of higher education students

Previous sections concluded that in Ireland, term-time employment is largely driven by the need to finance one's lifestyle. In order to gain a better understanding about the reasons for working, this section explores students' satisfaction with their financial situation. Data from the survey indicate that twenty-four per cent of full-time students describe their financial situation as good while nineteen per cent reported being dissatisfied with the situation, which is in line with earlier findings by Ryan and O'Kelly (2001). Students' satisfaction with their financial situation is clearly linked with their income. In general, those full-time students with higher satisfaction levels tend to have significantly higher incomes. In spite of the higher average incomes evident among those in regular employment, employment status per se is not significantly related to financial well-being among full-time students (see Figure 2). This may reflect higher expectations regarding their social life and discretionary expenses among those in term-time employment.

Figure 1. Satisfaction with financial well-being by employment status: full-time students



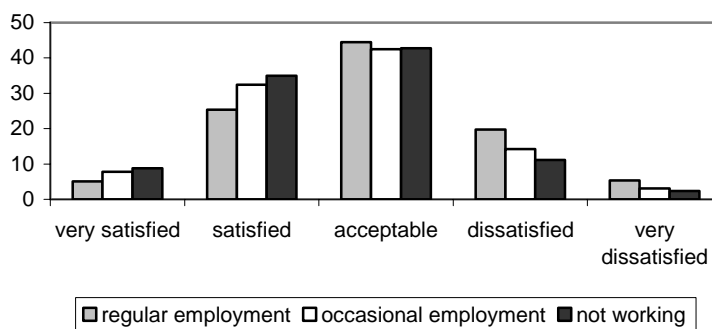
As well as being asked about their perceived financial well-being, students were also asked about the number of days in the past week they had gone without a main meal. Going without a main meal could be taken as a potential indicator of financial strain as well as time pressure. A considerable proportion of full-time students went without regular meals compared to part-time students (51% and 36% respectively). Students who went four or more days without a main meal were least satisfied with their

material/financial well-being indicating significant financial strain among this group. Among full-time students, those in employment were significantly more likely to have gone without at least one meal in the previous week. In sum, term-time employment does not appear to enhance financial well-being among full-time students and this group of students were more likely to have gone without a main meal in the past week, reflecting financial and/or time constraints.

Workload and Life Satisfaction

While many international studies point to the adverse effects of term-time work on students' academic performance and well-being, a significant proportion of students believe that working has no negative effect on their studies (see MORI/UNITE 2004). It could be argued that it is the extent to which students engage in paid employment during term-time that affects their studies and their quality of life. In Ireland full-time students were generally reporting being 'satisfied' with their workload, with male students more likely to be satisfied with their workload than their female counterparts (41% and 35% respectively). The less time was taken up by attending lectures and study, the more likely the students were to report that they were satisfied with their workload.

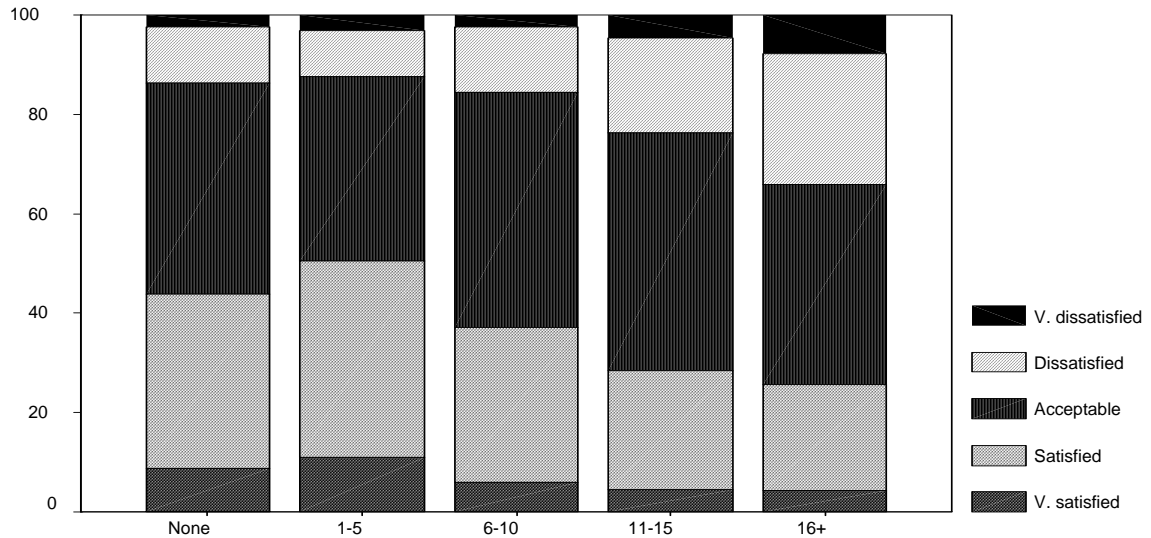
Figure 2. Satisfaction with workload by working during term-time: full-time students



In general, students working during term-time tend to be less satisfied with their workload than those not engaged in paid employment (see Figure 3). As could be expected, dissatisfaction levels are related to the number of hours worked per week

and to the number of hours spent in lectures and tutorials. Figure 4 shows that levels of dissatisfaction rise when the extent of term-time work exceeds 16 hours per week, which is consistent with the earlier Irish report by Ryan and O’Kelly (2001) as well as international research (see, for example, Ford et al. 1995).

Figure 3. Satisfaction with work-load (job and study) by hours worked per week: full-time students



A logistic regression model was used to further assess the impact of different dimensions of workload on dissatisfaction with workload. In keeping with the previous analysis, full-time students with more class contact time are found to be more dissatisfied with their workload. Dissatisfaction also reflects potential study pressures since those who are in the final year of their course are more likely to be dissatisfied with their workload. Furthermore, those who work more than ten hours per week are more dissatisfied than those not in paid employment. Dissatisfaction levels are also higher among those with family commitments (one or more children) and those who spend longer travelling to and from college (see Table 2). In sum, term-time employment operates as a potential strain for full-time students, particularly for those who are working and studying longer hours and commuting longer distances.

Table 2: Logistic regression model of dissatisfaction with workload: full-time students

Factor	Coefficient
Constant	-2.424***
No. of hours lectures:	
15-20	0.134
21-25	0.109
26-30	0.668***
>30 hours	0.708***
(Base: <15 hours)	
No. of hours paid employment:	
1-5	-0.053
6-10	0.201
11-15	0.766***
16+	1.281***
(Base: None)	
One or more children	0.647**
Last year of course	0.518***
Travel time to college (hours per week)	0.020*

Note: *** p<.001, ** p<.01, *p<.05.

Conclusions

The boundaries of full-time and part-time study are becoming blurred in many Western countries as an increasing number of people combine study and work at different stages in their lives. Ireland represents an interesting case-study in this regard as rapid economic growth, particularly in the services sector, has facilitated the increased entry of students into paid employment. The majority of full-time students in higher education in Ireland engage in some form of employment during term-time. The likelihood of working part-time among this group is found to vary by age, parental education, study and family commitments, nationality and access to alternative sources of income. Ireland is thus facing a growing trend of higher education students combining education with term-time employment which has little relevance for their course of study. These changes have significant implications for higher education institutions in terms of facilitating student attendance and assisting learning. We argue in this article that long hours spent in employment or inflexibility of working arrangements may translate into less time for lectures and study, thus potentially having an adverse impact on academic attainment and later life-chances.

While these trends are a matter of potential concern, it is worth noting that only a small percentage of Irish full-time students work very long hours. However, this may reinforce inequalities among students as those forced to work long hours are further disadvantaged.

While financial strain was a motivation for working during term-time for some Irish students, there is evidence that working part-time is primarily motivated by ‘lifestyle’ factors since full-time students in regular employment tend to spend more on ‘discretionary’ items, such as clothing, toiletries, alcohol, tobacco and entertainment, than students not in paid employment. On the other hand, however, working part-time does not seem to significantly enhance students’ perceptions of their financial well-being and student workers are more likely to miss a main meal, a potential indicator of financial strain and time pressure.

Overall, the findings indicate that the majority of Irish full-time students find their work-load (combination of work and study) acceptable. However, students who did not work during term-time were more satisfied with their work-load. Students working long hours, while a small group, experience particularly high levels of dissatisfaction with their workload and may become at risk of dropping out. In order to address this issue, the reasons behind long hours spent in paid employment merit further research. In Ireland, as elsewhere, it appears that students engaged in term-time employment are set to remain a feature of the labour force in years to come. In policy terms, the challenge is for higher education institutions as well as employers to find ways of enabling sufficient flexibility for students in balancing the demands of employment and study in order to enhance their quality of life.

Acknowledgements: We gratefully acknowledge the co-authors, James Williams, Bernadette Ryan and Philip O’Connell, of the report on which this article draws. The study was funded by the Higher Education Authority. The analyses and interpretations are the responsibility of the authors.

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