

Learning & Teaching Enhancement Programme

Case study

As a way of capturing the detail and impact of your Learning & Teaching Enhancement Project, please complete the questions below, which align with the QAA Scotland reporting template. *Please answer all questions in 200 words or fewer.* Case studies may be published on the University's website and elements may be used in reports for QAA Scotland. Project teams may be asked to contribute a Blog or Podcast to help to share project activities and outcomes. Any questions, please contact cad@abdn.ac.uk.

Exploring the impact of part-time work on student success to inform guidance and enhance support.

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Context

This section should provide brief details about the context of the project/activity, highlighting any specific challenges and/or strategies it intended to address.

Text in this section should not exceed **200 words**.

This project developed our understanding of the impact of part-time work on University of Aberdeen students' academic performance, wellbeing, and overall student experience. The research builds on previous research by University of Aberdeen scholars (Dennis et al., 2018) who explored both perceived and actual relationships between term-time employment and academic attainment.

Significant socio-economic changes (including Brexit, a shifting student demographic, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis) have transformed the context in which students study and seek employment. Regional labour market challenges and wider economic pressures such as the rise in NI and minimum wage increases have impacted the availability and nature of part-time work. Coupled with rising living costs, access to flexible, well-paid part-time roles is increasingly challenging for students to secure. A 'Student Working Lives' report by HEPI highlights that 68% of students engage in paid work, averaging 13.1 hours per week, with many exceeding this due to financial pressures. The report underscores that part-time work is increasingly a necessity rather than a choice (Wright et al., 2025).

Project findings will be used to develop evidence-based recommendations for key stakeholders, to produce actionable guidance for students, enhance support services and inform institutional policy on balancing work with studies.

Description of activity

In this section, you should provide brief descriptive details of the activity. Please include information on student engagement in the design and delivery of the activity here.

Text in this section should not exceed **200 words**.

The research builds an understanding of how part-time work currently affects students' studies and their university experience via a student survey. A combination of open and closed questions was used to enable qualitative insights and an overall picture to be formed.

Questions were designed to:

- Map current employment patterns by collecting data on working hours, job types, motivations, and lived experiences of students undertaking part-time work.
- Assess perceived academic impact. With appropriate permissions the survey responses were matched to attainment data to evaluate correlations between employment and academic performance.
- Identify key challenges and opportunities relating to student work, exploring barriers faced by different student groups (e.g., international students, those from widening participation background) in accessing suitable employment, and exploring challenges and benefits associated with students who were working.

The student survey was tested by student ambassadors, and student ambassadors were utilised to raise awareness and increase survey engagement by running a number of promotional stands at the Old Aberdeen and Foresterhill campus.

Over 200 survey responses were received.

Results are currently being analysed by the research team. Initial results were shared at a conference workshop, and a full report will be published online by end 2026.

Evaluation and impact

This section should provide an analysis of evaluation and impact of the project.

To support evaluative activity, institutions are encouraged to use the [resources](#) developed by Professor Stella Jones-Devitt and Dr Liz Austen, particularly the Enhancement Themes Theory of Change model and the Universal Evaluation Framework (UEF).

Text in this section should not exceed **200 words**

Initial research findings were shared at an interactive workshop delivered at the Graduate Futures Institute Annual Conference in July 2026. Participants reflected on the findings and shared their own perspectives exploring the challenges, opportunities and institutional implications of students undertaking part-time work alongside their studies. Contributions from participants largely mirrored our initial research findings, with three main themes emerging from a Padlet exercise:

1. Timetabling is the biggest structural barrier to students combining study and part-

time work.

2. Part-time work is widely viewed as valuable for skills development, but students often do not recognise or articulate those skills.
3. Many contributors believe universities should formally recognise, embed and potentially credit part-time work within the curriculum.

A fourth cross-cutting theme was that financial pressures make part-time work a necessity rather than a choice for many students.

Emerging recommendations from the research will focus on the support that careers services currently provide or could offer, and the systemic changes that institutions might implement to better enable and celebrate students' part-time employment.

An action plan responding to the full published report (expected by end of 2026) will incorporate appropriate evaluation methods to track longer term impact of the project.

Lessons learned and next steps

In this section, you should reflect on the key learning points drawn from this activity for the institution. You might also consider what learning other universities or the tertiary education sector could take from this activity. If there is any planned follow-on activity, please provide brief details here.

Text in this section should not exceed **200 words**.

Findings show that most students work alongside their studies, or want to work alongside their studies.

Over 70% of the students who weren't in employment would have liked to work. The primary barrier (over 50%) to finding work is labour market and the level of competition for jobs. International students face additional structural barriers including visa limits and perceived bias related to race, international visa status and age (perceived preference for young people).

Initial findings from students who were working suggest that more recognition is needed by the University that students work. Whilst part-time work doesn't appear to impact on actual academic performance, a finding which mirrors findings from the earlier study in 2018, the relatively low number of responses restricts our ability to make statistically significant inferences. This is a limitation of our research, which is likely due to timing of the survey and limited methods available to publicise the survey despite the excellent support from student ambassadors.

The full findings will inform a set of recommendations and actions for the University, and specifically the Careers and Employability Service, which will include plans to work proactively with regional employers of students.

References

Please provide links to any relevant websites or further information about the activity in this section.

A full report detailing the prevalence, nature and impact of part-time work among students

will be published on this webpage by end 2026: [Research Activities | Careers and Employability Service | The University of Aberdeen.](#)

The report will contain practical recommendations for students, staff and policy-makers.

Dennis, C., Lemon, J., & Louca, V. (2018). Term-time employment and student attainment in higher education. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 6(1), 28–38. <https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v6i1.294> (Accessed: 21 November 2025)

Wright, A., Wilding, M., Lawler, M. and Lowe, M. (2025) *Student Working Lives*. Higher Education Policy Institute. Available at: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/> (Accessed: 19 November 2025).