

NUS/ HSBC Students Research Experience Report:

Students in employment & Post Course Plans

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1 Introduction & Methodology

This report discusses the second wave of a programme of research carried out by the NUS and HSBC in May 2010 into students' expectations and experiences of university. The research looked at a variety of areas, including accommodation, finances, assessment, teaching and resources.

The research programme was a quantitative approach and consisted of an online survey, which ran between 3rd and the 31st of June 2010 and the respondents were selected via a Student Panel. A total of 3863 students took part in the survey, fulfilling a variety of interlocking quotas including year of study, institution type and gender. The final results are weighted to ensure representativeness.



2 Executive Summary

- 63% of students said they either had, or intended to have, some form of paid employment during the current academic year. 32% said that they worked during the term time and 46% worked, or intended to work, during the holidays.
- Within this, there are some significant differences by year of study, as first year students are significantly less likely to have paid employment during term time than second year or third year students. First and second year students are more likely to work in during university holidays than third year students.
- Over a third of students cite "basic costs exceed the amount that they can borrow" (36%) as the reason for working and 33% "to pay for books and other equipment", this is again influenced by year of study. Third year students are significantly more likely than first year students to say that they work to meet their basic living costs, which appears to indicate a higher level of financial stress among final year students.
- Of those students working during term-time, one fifth (20%) work 17 or more hours a week. Within this group, 34% say that it has impacted on their studies. This is higher among third year students where 41% say that it has impacted on their studies.
- 80% of students thought that the current economic climate "has made it more difficult to find work". Of those who are working, 77% undertake unskilled or hourly paid employment.
- The vast majority of final year students, 76%, mentioned that their plans after their current course of study were to get some form of paid employment. A significant minority, 33%, planned to do further studying. This has decreased from 38% last year.



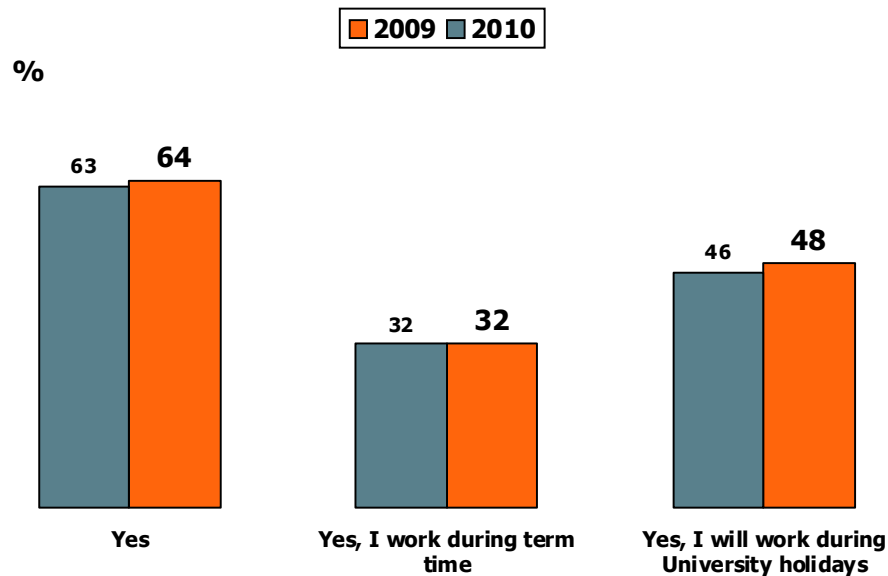
- The majority of final year students, 70%, are concerned about the current economic climate, an increase from 66% last year.
- Significantly more final year students thought that their time at university had enhanced their career prospects, 64%, than felt their studies equipped them with the necessary skills to enter the labour market, 43%.

3 Current employment

The majority of students, 63%, either had, or intended to have, some form of paid employment during the current academic year. When this is split between work during the term time and work during the holidays, a higher proportion of students, 46%, worked or intended to work during the holidays; though almost a third of students, 32%, said that they worked during the term time. When students were asked if they thought that the current economic climate has made it more difficult to find work, the overwhelming majority, 80%, said yes they thought it had.

Chart 1: Majority of students either have, or intend to arrange, paid employment during the current academic year

Q89. Do you currently have any form of paid employment or intend to arrange any in the current academic year, including the summer holidays? Please select all that apply

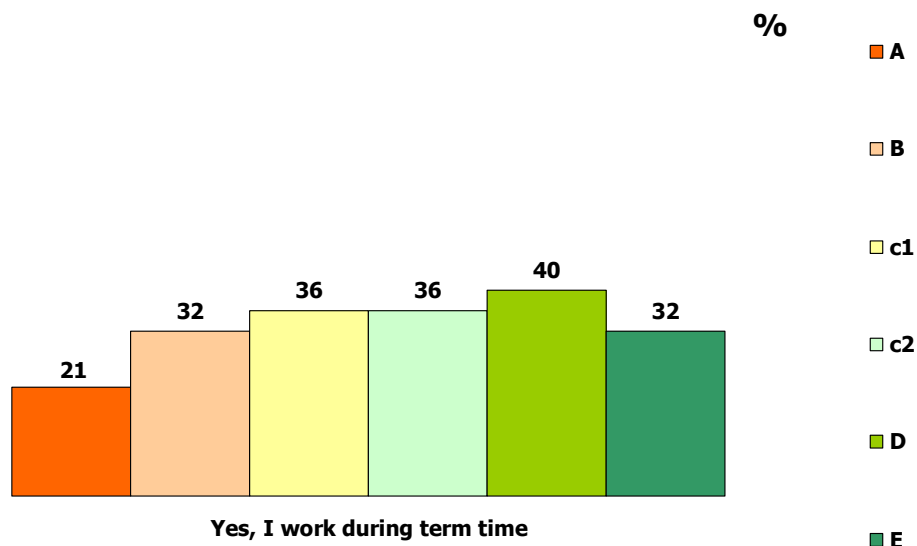


Base: All answering section 9 (3176)

When the number of students working during the term time is looked at by socio-economic group a number of statistically significant differences appear. Students in the lower socio-economic group, E, are more likely to not work than students in the middle-higher groups; B, C1 and C2, perhaps due to access to grants and bursaries. And those students in socio-economic group A are significantly less likely to work during term time than all those in other socio-economic groups, bar group E – see chart 2.

Chart 2: Term time paid employment significantly influenced by socio-economic status

Q89. Do you currently have any form of paid employment or intend to arrange any in the current academic year, including the summer holidays? Please select all that apply



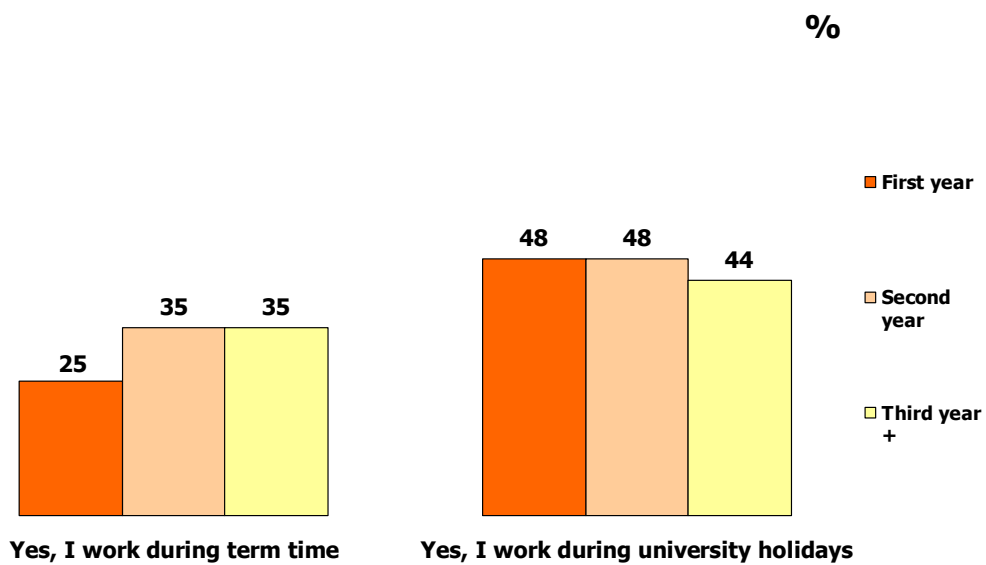
Base: A (622); B (1033); c1 (808); c2 (422); D (221); E(70)



In addition, when employment is looked at by year of study an interesting difference appears, as first year students are less likely than final year students, or students in interim years, to have paid employment during the term time – see chart 3 - and more likely not to work at all; 36% of first years, compared with 31% and 25% for second and third years respectively. This is surprising as you may expect students in the later stages of their studies and with a heavier academic workload to be the least likely to work during the term time. In part this may be explained by the finding, identified below, that students in the later stages of their studies appear to be under more financial pressure **(they are significantly more likely to cite meeting basic living costs as a reason for work – see chart 9)**. Therefore, while students in the later stages of their studies may have less time available to undertake paid employment, financial pressures may force them into work. **Having said this, final year students are also more likely to take work related to their intended career – see chart 7 – which may also be a contributing factor in final year students, or students in interim years, taking paid employment during the term time.** When looking at students who work by subject, it is with no surprise that we see few differences except for those studying Medicine & Dentistry, where half (49%) said they do not have or intend to arrange any paid employment, obviously with such an intense and work-load heavy course, it is unlikely many students get time to work.

Chart 3: First year students are the least likely to work during the term time.

Q89. Do you currently have any form of paid employment or intend to arrange any in the current academic year, including the summer holidays? Please select all that apply



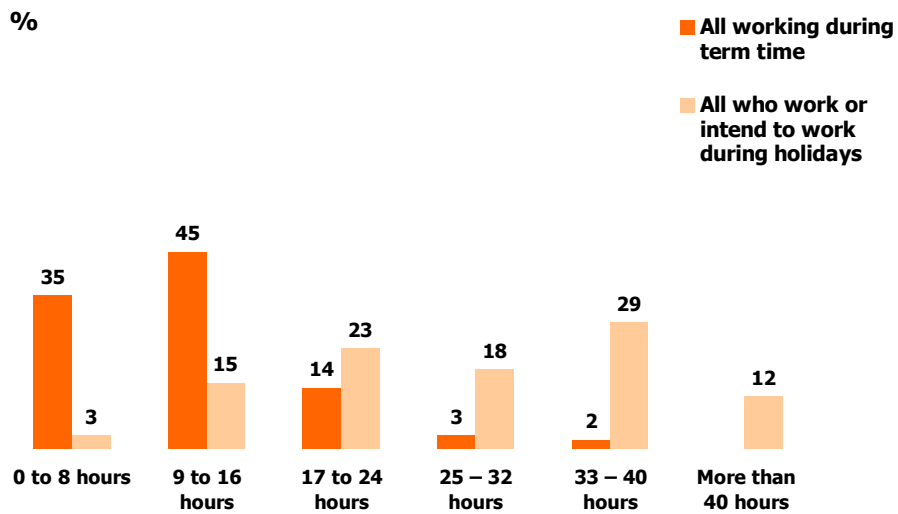
Base: First year (863); Second year (1059); Third year + (1254)

Unsurprisingly, when looking at the number of hours a week that students work there is a large difference between term time work and holiday work – see chart 4. In the term time students work on average 11.6 hours a week, compared to an intended 27.8 hours in university holidays.

Chart 4: Student likely to work longer hours during the holidays

Q90 How many hours a week do you work during term time?

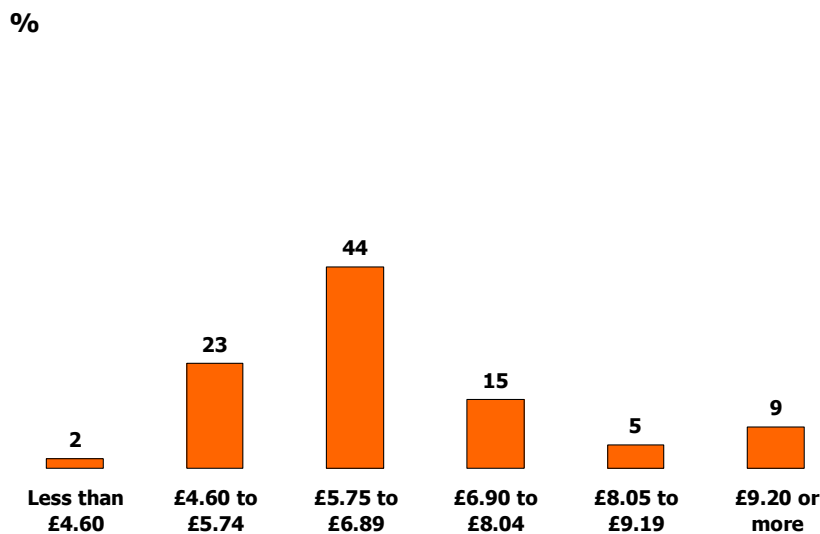
Q91 How many hours a week do you work, or intend to work, during the holidays?



Base: All working during term time (1019); All working/planning to work during holidays (1459)

Chart 5: Approximate hourly pay of students working

Q93. Approximately how much do you get paid per hour?

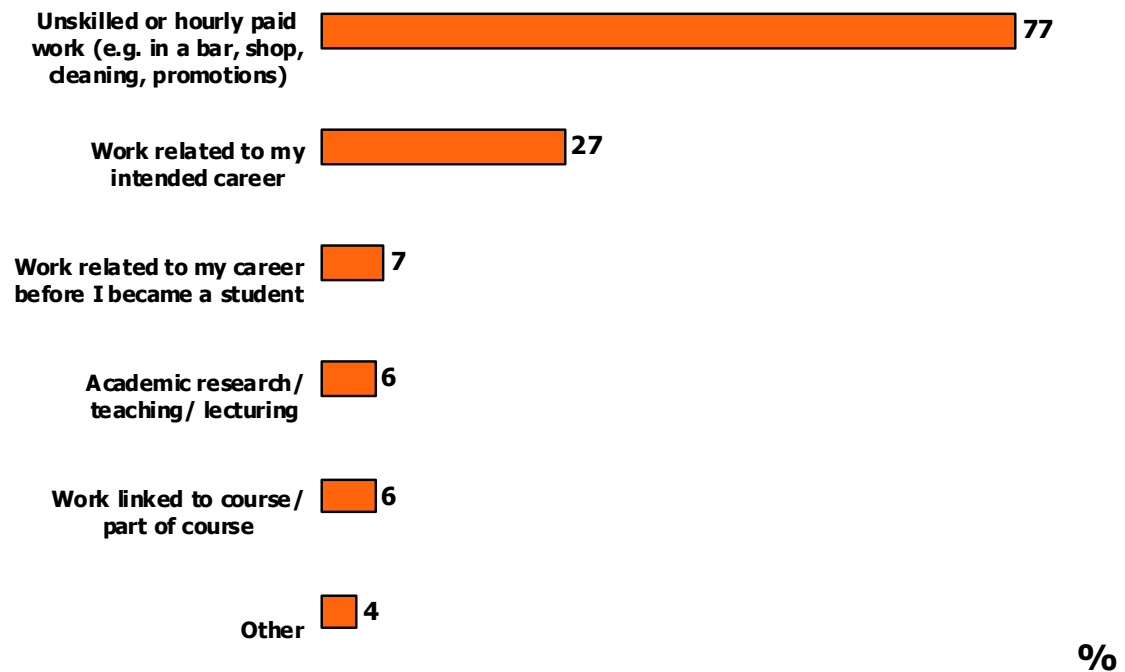


Base: All who work (2001)

The vast majority of students, 77%, do unskilled or hourly paid work and there are no significant differences in the type of work when this is split by those that work during the term time and those that work during the university holidays. Despite the fact that most students do unskilled work, one quarter of students said that their work was related to their intended career. When breaking this down by age, we see that younger students are significantly more likely to do unskilled work (91% of 18 year olds), whereas those students 21 plus are significantly more likely to do work related to career before they became a student (15% of 21 plus students compared with 7% overall). There are also interesting findings when breaking it down by subject, where we see significantly more students studying Medicine & Dentistry, and Physical Sciences doing academic research, teaching or lecturing as their paid work, obviously typified by subjects which require strong interests in to study.

Chart 6: Majority of students do unskilled or hourly paid work

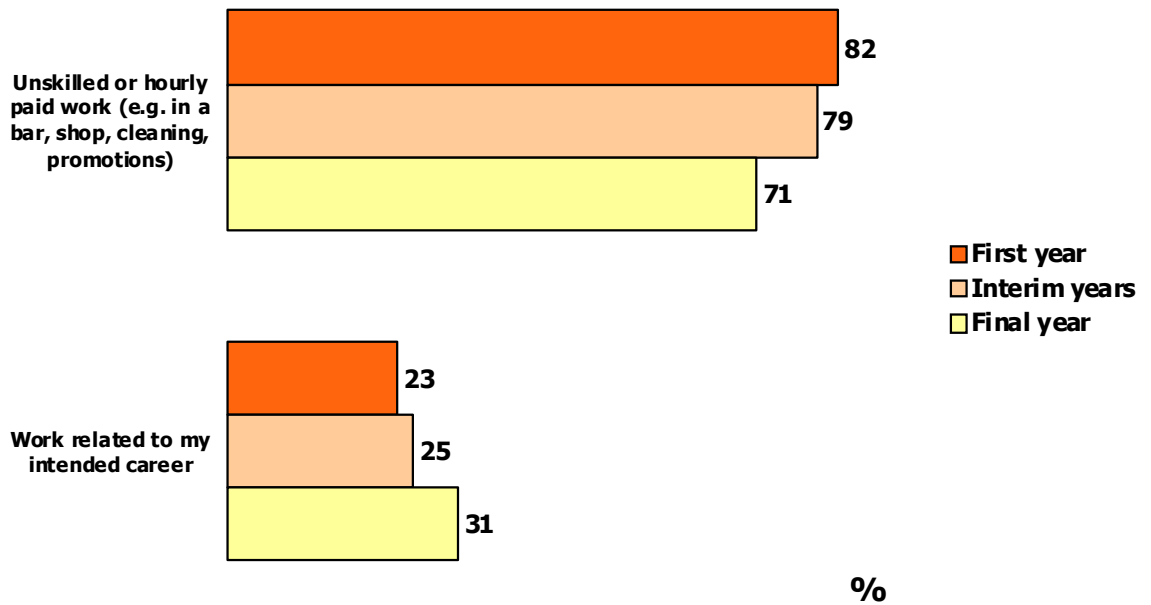
Q92. What type(s) of paid work do you do? Please select all that apply



Base: All who work (2001)

Chart 7: Type of work significantly influenced by year of study

Q92. What type(s) of paid work do you do? Please select all that apply

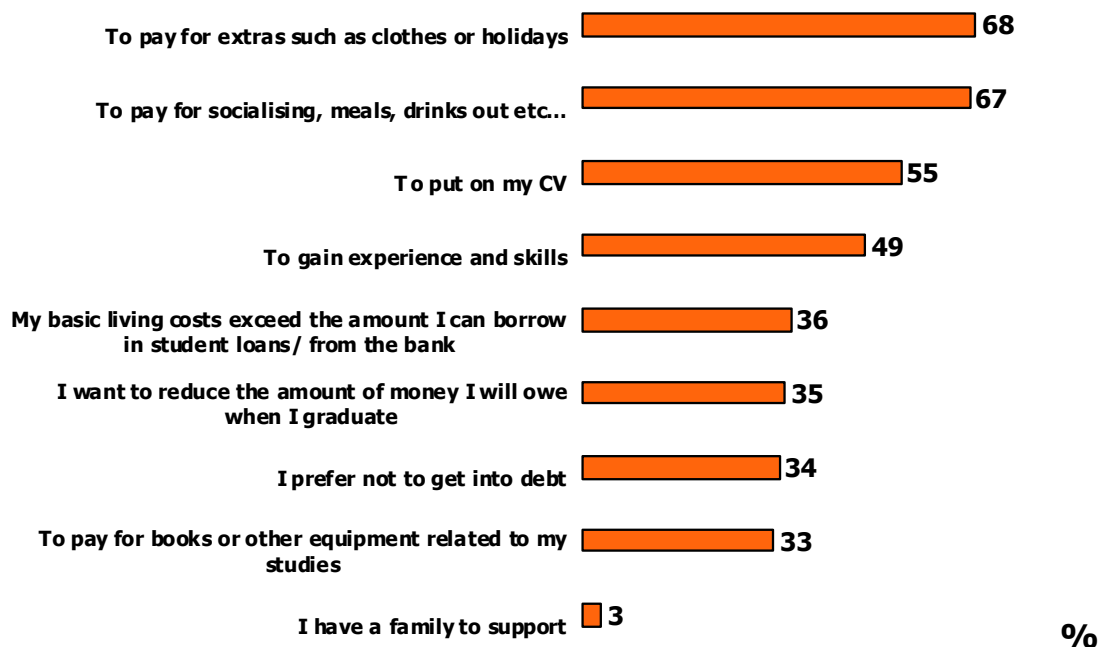


Base: All first years who work (539); All second years who work (698); All third + years who work (764)

Among those students that work, the most common reasons for working are 'to pay for extras such as clothes or holidays' (68%) and 'to pay for socialising, meals and drinks out' (67%) - see chart 8. Therefore for some students paid employment seems to be geared towards paying for luxuries rather than meeting their living expenses. Having said this, over a third of students that work, 36%; said that they worked because their basic living costs exceeded the amount they can borrow and 33% said they worked to pay for books or equipment related to their studies. Therefore, while many students may use paid employment to buy luxuries, for a significant minority paid employment seems to be an essential part of funding their studies.

Chart 8: Most common reasons cited for working are to pay for extras such as clothes or holidays or to pay for socialising

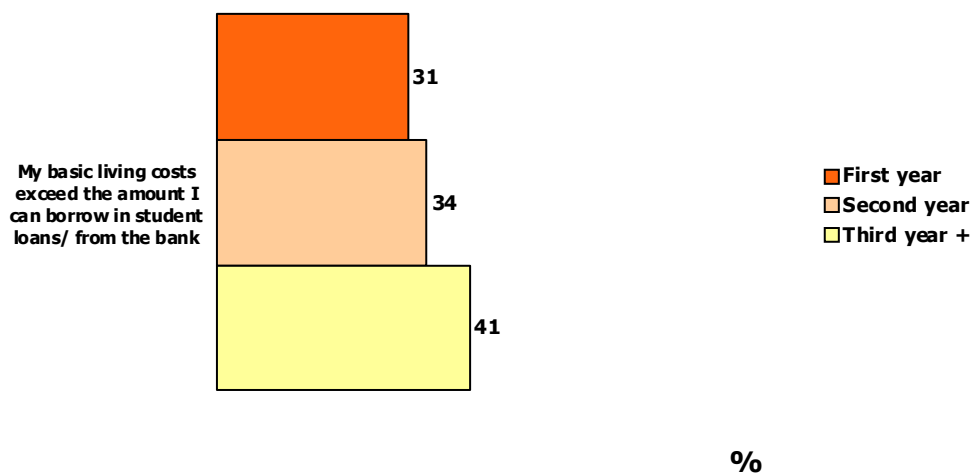
Q94. Why do you work?



Base: All who work (2001)

Chart 9: Final year students are significantly more likely than first year students to work to meet their basic living costs

Q94. Why do you work?



Base: All first years who work (539); All second years who work (698); All third years + who work (764)

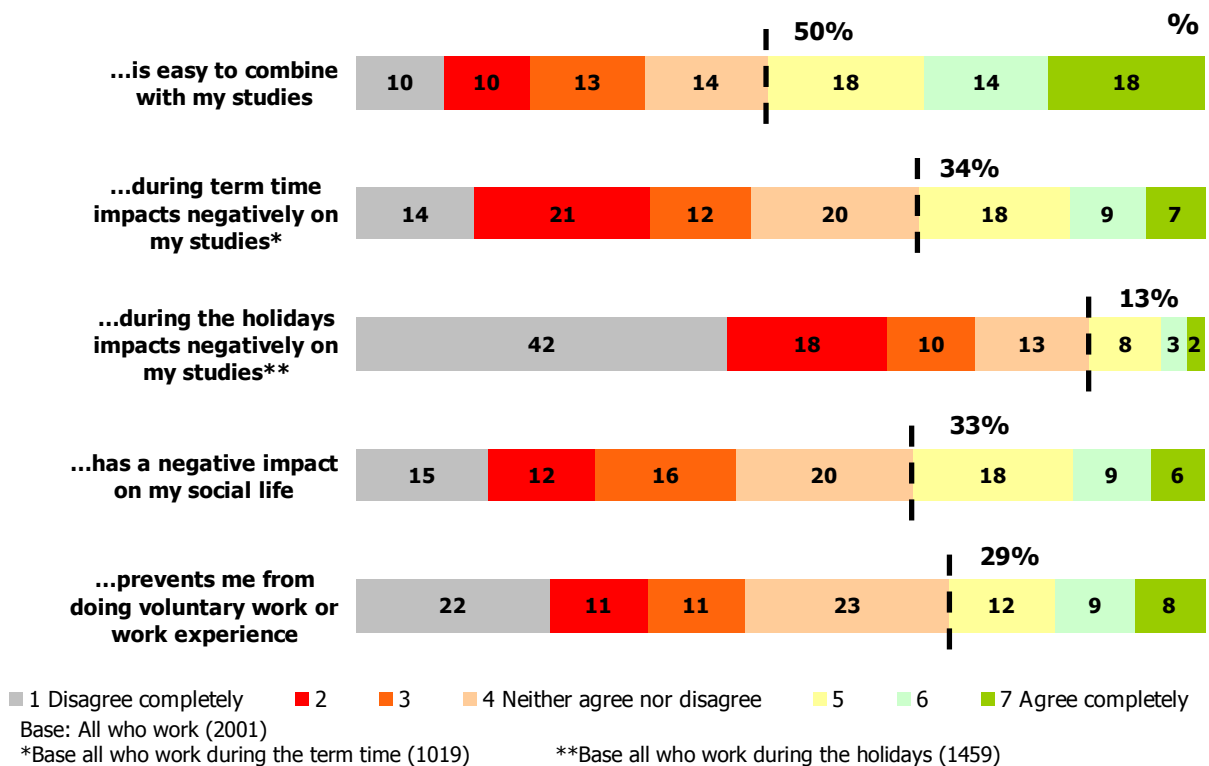
In chart 9, we see that final year students are also significantly more likely than first year students to work in order to meet basic living costs; this is supported by findings in the previous report, where we saw paid employment being used to a greater extent by third years as sources of funding for university. It also indicated the deteriorating finances of students as they progressed through university. However they are doing something to address that. When we look at the breakdown by subject area, we see significantly more language and business and admin studies students doing to work to gain experience and skills, presumably so they are able to use the language they study, and get experience working in admin or an office environment.



When students were asked about the impact that paid employment has on their studies, 50% of students said that it is easy to combine paid employment with their studies, while 33% said that it was not. However, when students who worked during the term time were asked if they agreed that work impacts negatively on their studies 34% agreed. This was significantly affected by year of study, as third year plus students were significantly more likely to agree with this statement than first year students (41% of final year students agreed with this statement compared to 24% of first year statements; though both figures are less than the previous year). As is to be expected, a much lower proportion of students who planned to work during the holidays thought that it would negatively affects their studies, among students planning to work during the holidays, only 13% agreed that paid employment during the holidays impacts negatively on their studies. Interestingly this figure is significantly increased for students in social class group A (20%), compared with 11% for both group B and C1.

Interestingly, 33% of students that worked agreed with the statement 'my paid employment has a negative impact on my social life' and 29% agreed that 'my paid employment prevents me from doing voluntary work or work experience' – interestingly this is significantly higher amongst females than males (33% compared with 24% for males). This suggests that it is not just studying that can be negatively affected by working, but also other areas of students lives. It may also explain why many employed students are drawn to bar work, as this is seen as a more social form of employment; resulting in less of a negative impact on their social life.

Chart 10: Paid work during the term time is more likely to have a negative impact on studies compared to work during the holidays
Q95. My paid employment...

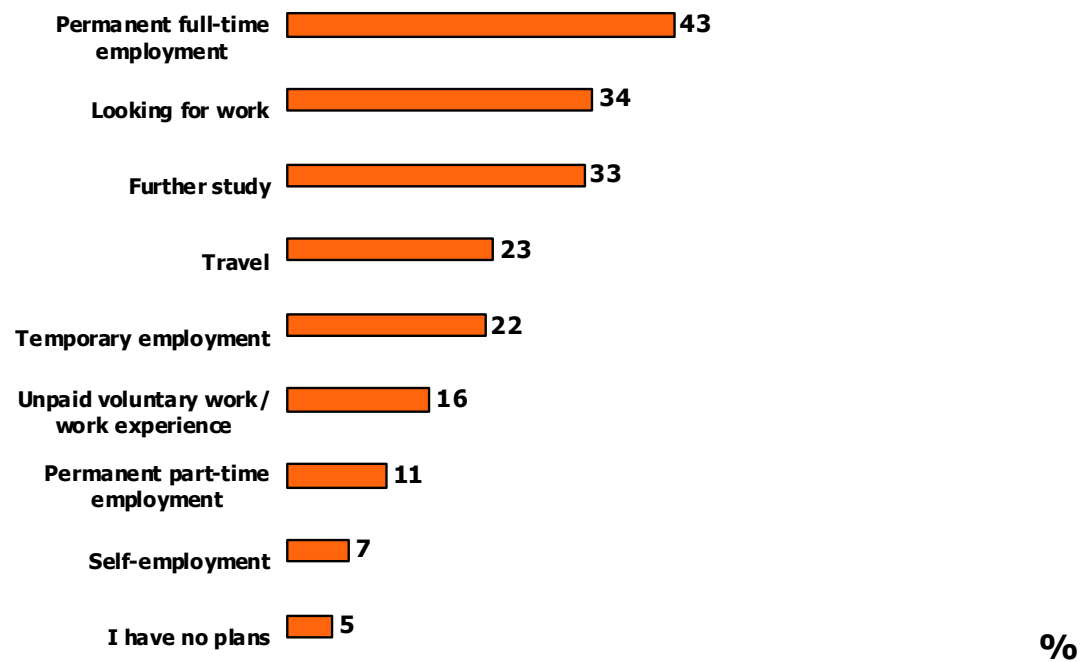


4 Post course plans

When students in their final year were asked what best describes their plans after their current course of study more than three quarters, 76%, said paid employment (either full time, part time, temporary or self employment or looking for work). The most popular response was 'permanent full-time employment' which was identified by 43% of these students. Additionally, just under one quarter, 23%, of final year students said that they planned to travel after their current course of study.

Chart 11: Almost half of final year students plan to enter permanent full time employment after their current course of study

Q97. Which of the following best describes your plans after your current course of study?



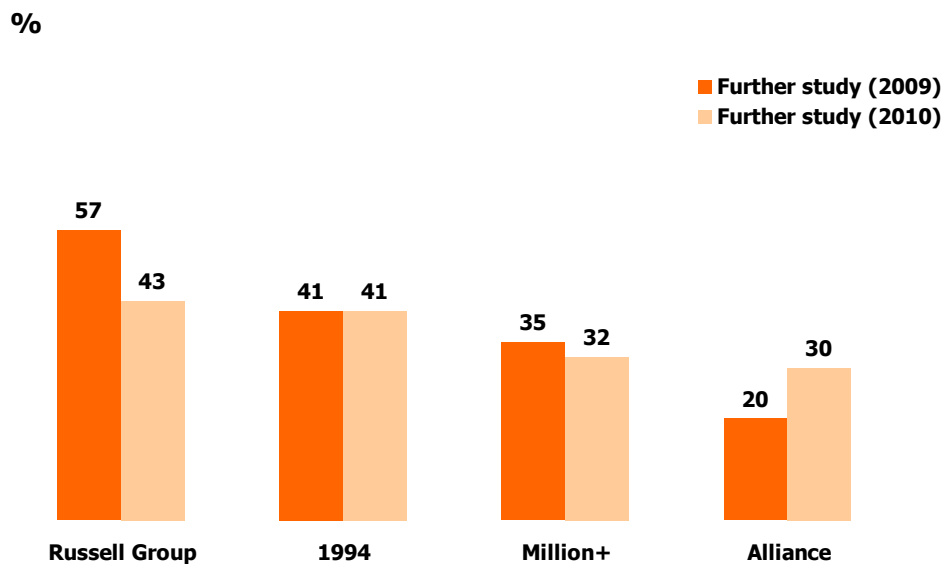
Base: All final year students (951)

A large proportion of final year students, 33%, said they planned to undertake further study after their current course had finished. This has decreased since last year's study, where 38% said that they planned to undertake further study. This could be due to the fact that the economic climate seems to have improved since 2009, and is making students more confident about their ability to find work. However, given that 70% of students say they are concerned about the economic climate (see below), it seems more likely that media coverage of the high competition for places on undergraduate and postgraduate courses is leading students to no longer see further study as a safer option.

The percentage of students planning to undertake further study continues to be affected by institution type. Students attending either Russell Group or 1994 institutions are still more likely than those attending Million+ or Alliance institutions to say they plan to do further study. However, the difference is less marked, as Russell Group students are much less likely to say they plan to undertake further study (43%) than they were in 2009 (57%). Conversely, Alliance+ students are much more likely to plan to undertake further study (30%) than they were in 2009 (20%).

Chart 12: Students attending Russell Group institutions are the most likely to be planning to do further studying, but are much less likely to be planning this than they were in 2009

Q97. Which of the following best describes your plans after your current course of study?

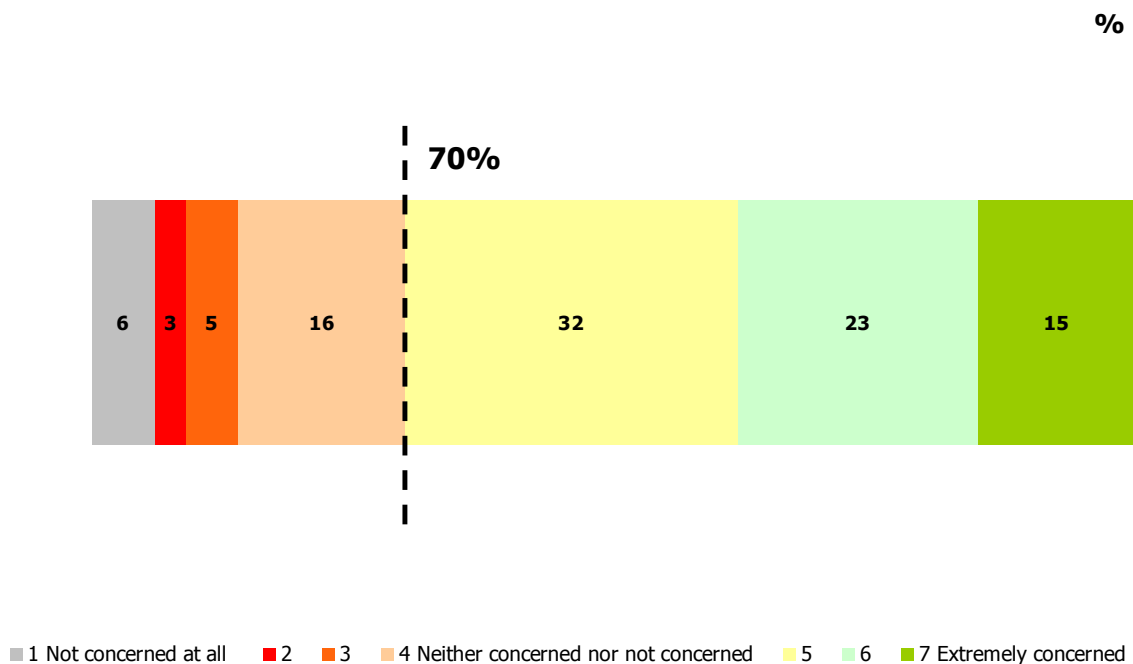


Base: Russell Group 2009 (60); Russell Group 2010 (211); 1994 2009 (48); 1994 2010 (146); Million+ 2009 (55); Million+ 2010 (149); Alliance (61) 2009; Alliance 2010 (156)

Among final year students there is a high level of concern about the current economic climate, with 70% of students saying they are concerned – see chart 13. This is more than the percentage saying they were concerned, 67%, in 2009. Interestingly, females are significantly more likely to be concerned (77%) than males (62%).

Chart 13: The majority of students are worried about the current economic climate

Q98. How worried are you about the current economic climate?

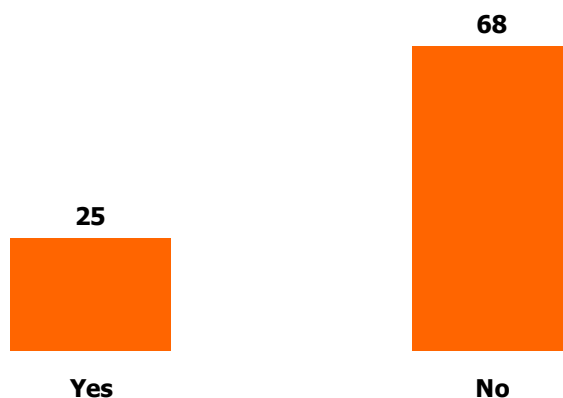


Base: All final year students (951)

For the majority of students, this concern about the economic climate does not appear to have affected their plans after studying. Among those students concerned about the economic climate, one quarter said they had changed their plans as a result of the economic climate – see chart 14. This means that over all the final year students surveyed, just under one fifth, 18%, have changed their plans due to the economic climate.

Chart 14: Among those students concerned about the economic climate, one quarter said they have changed their plans as a result of the economic downturn

Q99. IF CONCERNED Have you changed your plans after studying as a result of the current economic climate?
%



Base: All final year students concerned about economic climate (663)

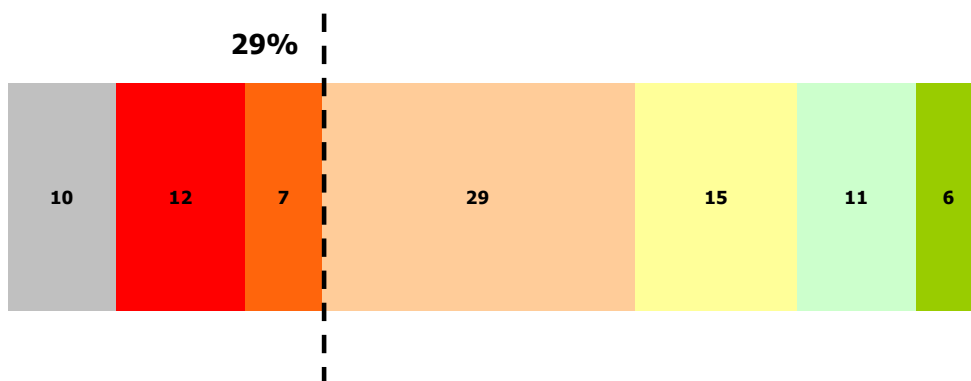
Students from socio-economic group C2 are much more likely to have changed their plans due to the economic climate. Of the C2 students concerned about the economic climate, nearly half, 42%, have changed their plans.

When final year students were asked if their university's advice about careers and future study meets their needs over one quarter, 29%, said that it didn't meet their needs – see chart 15. This is significantly higher than the percentage who said it did not meet their needs in 2009, 23%. As it seems unlikely that the facilities provided by universities have changed substantially since 2009, this suggests that students' expectations of careers services have increased, potentially due to increased concern about the economic climate leading them to better recognise the need for adequate preparation before leaving university.

Chart 15: More than a quarter of final years students said the advice provided by their university about careers and future study does not meet their needs

Q100. To what extent does advice provided by your university about careers and future study meet your needs?

%



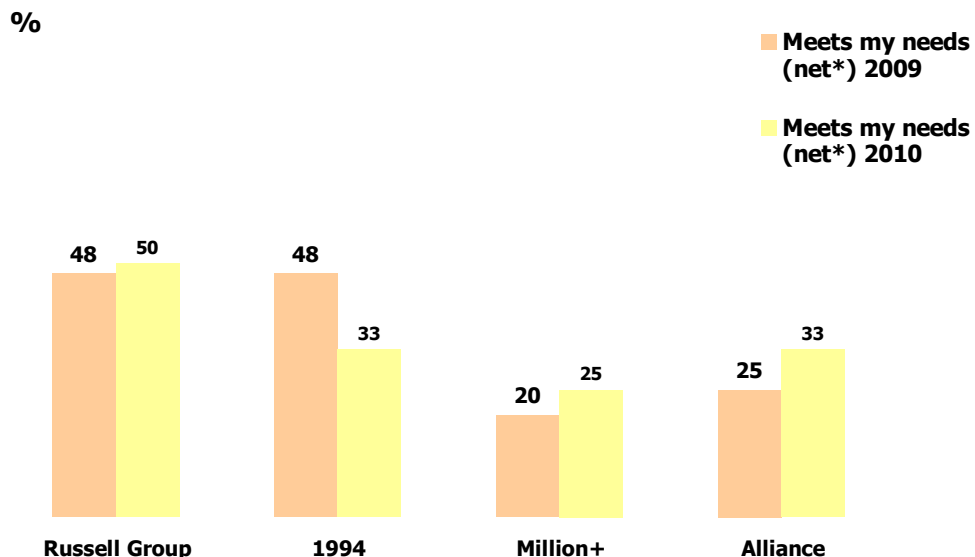
■ 1 Does not meet my needs at all ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 Partly meets my needs ■ 5 ■ 6 ■ 7 Meets my needs completely

Base: All final year students (951)

However, when this is looked at by institution type, a number of differences appear. In 2009 it was found that students attending either Russell Group or 1994 institutions were significantly more likely to say their university's advice about careers and future study meets their needs than students attending Million+ or Alliance institutions. However in 2010, the percentage of 1994 Group students saying their university's advice meets their needs has decreased substantially, from 48% to 33%, and is now similar to the percentage of Million+ and Alliance students saying this. Students attending Russell Group institutions are therefore significantly more likely to say their careers advice meets their needs than students from any of the other institution types.

Chart 16: Students attending Russell Group institutions were significantly more likely to say that the careers advice provided by their university meets their needs

Q100. To what extent does advice provided by your university about careers and future study meet your needs?



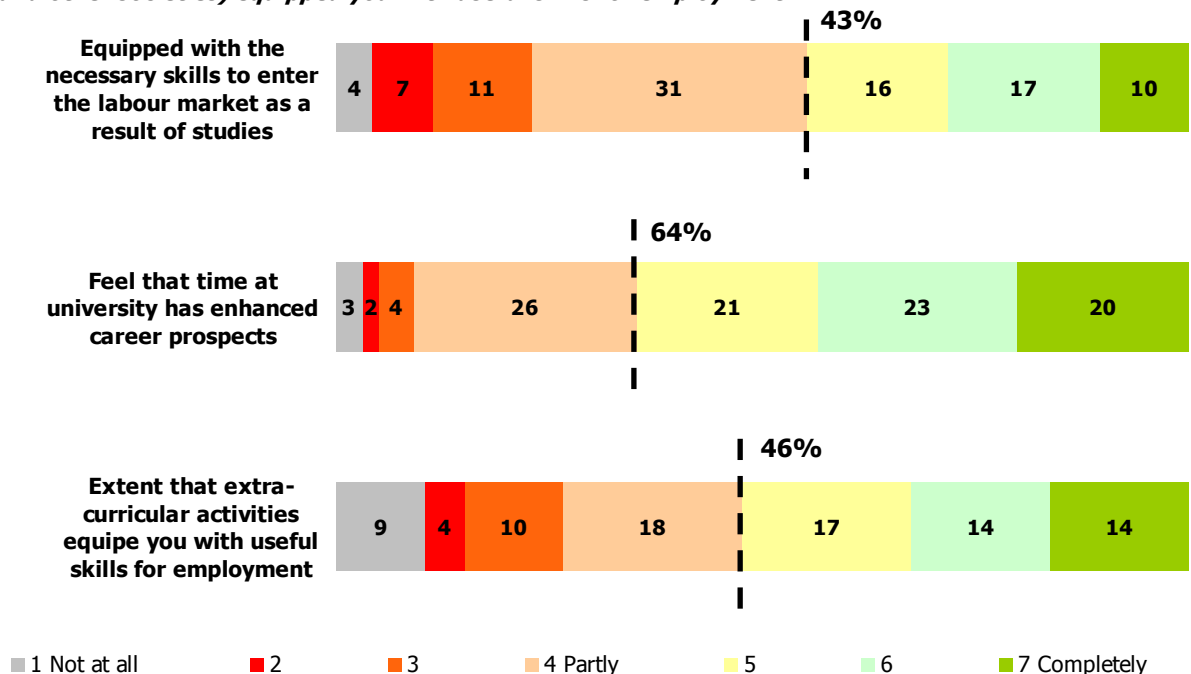
Base: Russell Group 2009 (60); Russell Group 2010 (211); 1994 2009 (48); 1994 2010 (146); Million + 2009 (55); Million+ 2010 (149); Alliance 2009 (61); Alliance 2010 (156)

*Sum of codes 1, 2 and 3 on a 7 point scale

When final year students were asked about how they felt their studies, time at university and extra-curricular activities had equipped them with useful skills for employment and enhanced their career prospects, significantly more thought that their time at university had enhanced their career prospects compared with the number who felt their studies equipped them with the necessary skills to enter the labour market. This suggests that for many students while a degree is seen as generally enhancing your career prospects it does not necessarily provide you with vocational skills.

Chart 17: A much higher proportion of final year students feel that university has enhanced their career prospects than feel equipped with the necessary skills to enter the labour market

*Q101. Do you feel equipped with the skills necessary to enter the labour market as a result of your studies?
 Q102. To what extent do you feel that your time at university has enhanced your career prospects?
 Q103. To what extent have your extra-curricular activities (such as volunteering, representation, sports clubs and other societies) equipped you with useful skills for employment?*



Base: All final year students (951)

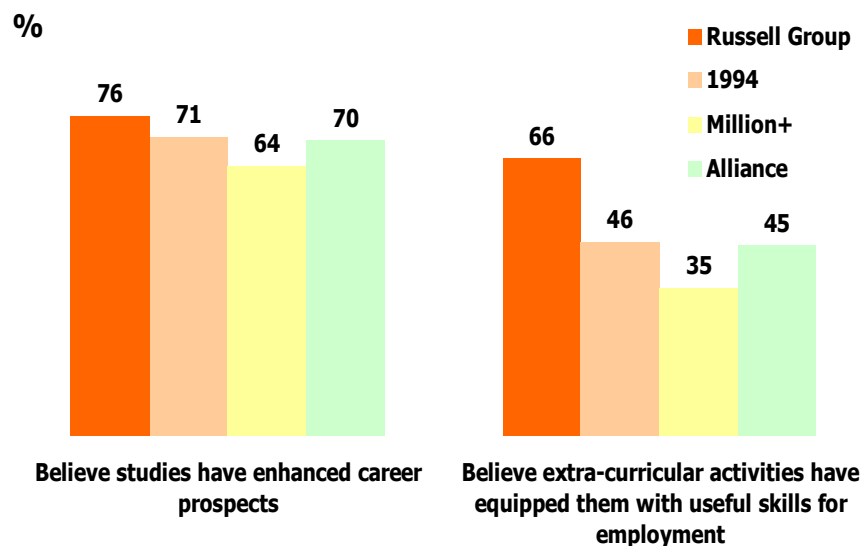
The results also indicate that this year students are more pessimistic about the benefits of their degree than they have been in previous years. The percentage believing their time at university has enhanced their career prospects has decreased significantly, from 75% in 2009 to 64% in 2010. Approximately one quarter, 26%, say university has partly enhanced their career prospects, while just under one tenth, 9%, say it has not enhanced their career prospects. Russell Group students are the most likely to say that their studies have enhanced their career prospects, with 76% saying this, compared to 71%, 64% and 70% of 1994 Group, Million+ and Alliance students respectively.

The percentage believing extra-curricular activities have equipped them with useful skills for employment has also decreased, from 51% to 46%, less than half of final year students. Here, Russell Group students are significantly more likely to believe that extra-curricular activities have equipped them with useful skills, with two thirds, 66%, saying this, compared to 46%, 35% and 45% of 1994 Group, Million+ and Alliance students respectively.

Chart 18: Students attending Russell Group institutions are the most likely to believe their studies have enhanced their career prospects

Q102. To what extent do you feel that your studies have enhanced your career prospects?

Q103. To what extent have your extra-curricular activities (such as volunteering, representation, sports clubs and other societies) equipped you with useful skills for employment?



Base: Russell Group (211); 1994 (146); Million+ (149); Alliance (156)



Finally, the percentage thinking they are equipped with the necessary skills to enter the labour market has decreased significantly, from 50% in 2009 to 43% in 2010. Just over one fifth, 22%, say they do not feel equipped.

These findings suggest that students this year are more concerned about the economic climate, and less likely to believe that their degree has equipped them for finding employment in it. A possible explanation for this is that the negative press coverage of the competitive state of the graduate job market has led students to doubt whether their degree alone will be enough to secure the future employment they are looking for, having heard case studies of students from previous years who have struggled to find work.