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# Diversity in the student learning experience and time devoted to study: a comparative analysis of the UK and European evidence

Report to HEFCE by Centre for Higher Education Research and Information,  
The Open University

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# Contents

Executive summary.....	3
1. Introduction: recent research on the student experience .....	6
1.1 Contexts .....	6
1.2 Hours devoted to study: the HEPI report .....	8
1.3 Hours devoted to study: international experiences .....	8
1.4 Hours devoted to study: limitations of research .....	10
1.5 Factors affecting the hours devoted to study .....	10
1.6 Approaches to learning .....	11
1.7 The effects of term-time working .....	12
1.8 Conclusion: growing diversity.....	13
2. The ‘European’ student experience .....	15
2.1 Hours devoted to study .....	15
2.2 How students divided up their study time.....	16
2.3 Attitudes to study.....	18
2.4 Learning outcomes: qualifications gained.....	19
2.5 Learning outcomes: preparation for work and for personal development.....	20
2.6 Conclusion.....	22
3. Diversity in the student experience in the UK .....	23
3.1 Introduction.....	23
3.2 How students spend their time.....	23
3.3 Differences between science and non-science students.....	25
3.4 Institutional, subject and individual differences.....	27
3.5 Diversity in the UK student experience .....	28
4. Conclusions .....	29
4.1 Increasing diversity.....	29
4.2 Do differences matter? .....	29
4.3 Limitations and some further questions .....	30
Bibliography .....	31
Abbreviations .....	33
Appendix.....	34

## List of figures

Figure 1: Graduates' perceptions of the average hours spent on studying per week during term time, (graduate cohorts from 1995 and 2000).....	9
Figure 2: Average (mean) of study hours by country .....	15
Figure 3: Students who spent over 40 hours on study in a typical week (%).....	16
Figure 4: Modes of learning emphasised in study programmes to a 'very great extent' (%) ..	17
Figure 5: Participated in a work placement (%).....	18
Figure 6: Students who did more work than was required in order to pass (%) .....	19
Figure 7: Students who strived for the highest possible marks (%) .....	19
Figure 8: Students achieving the highest grade and studying under 40 hours compared to those studying over 40 hours (%).....	20
Figure 9: Study programme was a good basis for starting work (%) .....	20
Figure 10: Study programme was a good basis for a future career (%) .....	21
Figure 11: Study programme was a good basis for personal development (%) .....	21
Figure 12: Academic time: students spending 11 hours or more per week (%).....	24
Figure 13: University social time: students spending 11 hours or more per week (%) .....	24
Figure 14: Non-university time: students spending 11 hours or more per week (%) .....	25
Figure 15: Subject differences in how academic time was spent: students spending 11 hours or more per week (%) .....	26
Figure 16: Subject differences in how university social time was spent: students spending 11 hours or more per week (%) .....	26
Figure 17: Subject differences in how non-university time was spent: students spending 11 hours or more per week (%) .....	26

## List of tables

Table 1: ERASMUS students' assessment of the academic level of their courses at their host institution as compared to their home institution – by host country (mean %).....	10
<a href="#">Appendix</a> Table A1: The relationship between hours of study and the outcomes of degree programmes.....	34
<a href="#">Appendix</a> Table A2: Country differences in the outcomes of degree programmes.....	34

# Executive summary

## *Background to the study*

1. There is increasing awareness of 'differences' – between individual students, between individual higher education institutions and between different national systems – in the nature of the student experience of higher education. Awareness of these differences inevitably raises the question of whether some experiences are better than others.
2. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) commissioned the present report from the Open University's Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI). Its aim is to examine international differences (especially in respect of European higher education) in the student experience, based both on a review of literature and on the re-analysis of existing data on students collected as part of two recent studies. The initial and main focus was on the hours students devote to study activity but this was subsequently broadened to take account of other factors and different ways of conceptualising the student experience.
3. It is worth emphasising some caveats at the outset. The data reported on here were collected from students at different stages of their academic careers and beyond. They depend on the accuracy of the students' recollections and perceptions of their time at university. They may sometimes fail to distinguish between what was on offer and what was actually experienced. The time devoted to study may indicate little about the demands of that study or the quality of teaching experienced as part of that study. And as with all forms of aggregated data, they may fail to take account of differences between sub-groups, in this case especially in relation to factors such as the subject studied, the institution attended and the life circumstances of the individual student.

## *Hours devoted to study*

4. While there is considerable variation in the hours students devote to their studies – according to the subject studied, the institution attended and the individual student's circumstances and motivations – the research evidence supports a conclusion that United Kingdom (UK) students study for fewer hours each week during term-time compared with their counterparts in other European countries. This appears to be the case whether one takes a narrow definition of study hours in terms of teaching contact or a broader one based on all study-related activities. However, the size of the differences between countries when aggregated national data are compared has to take into account a range of intervening variables of which the subject mix within the national higher education system is an important one. (Sections 1.4 and 2.1)
5. However, there is also evidence to suggest that UK students are more likely than others to undertake additional work beyond what is required of them by their universities (Section 2.3) although ERASMUS students visiting UK universities are rather more likely to report the requirements as 'less demanding' than 'more demanding' in comparison with those at their home universities. It may be, however, that the perceived high quality of the teaching experienced in UK higher education had the effect of making courses appear to be 'less demanding'. (Section 1.3)
6. The way study time is spent appears to be broadly similar across countries, with lectures or classes and writing course assignments the most frequently experienced types of activity. UK students give slightly less emphasis to their teachers as their main source of knowledge than do students in other countries. (Section 2.2)

7. Much of the research literature continues to present the student experience as synonymous with young full-time students, living away from home, probably for the first time. It tends to ignore the different kinds of mature students and also the increasing numbers of international students. The experiences of different groups may be qualitatively different. The hours spent on study will differ as will the purposes and motivations to study. (Sections 1.8 and 3.5)
8. The distinction between full-time and part-time students has become increasingly blurred with many students on full-time courses spending substantial amounts of time on part-time jobs and domestic commitments. But for some increasingly 'busy' students, less time spent on study may be coupled with more efficiency in the use of that time. (Section 3.5)
9. In summary, too much significance should not be attached to contact hours in isolation from the wider context and conditions reported by the studies examined in this report. It is safe to conclude that the experience of higher education for UK students is increasingly diverse but that the contours of this diversity are hardly captured by comparisons of contact and study hours.

*Approaches to study and factors which affect them*

10. This study did not set out to answer the question of how much the amount of study impacts on learning. There is a considerable literature on approaches to study in higher education and on study methods which would suggest that 'time spent' may not be the crucial factor; it is by no means evident that spending more time on study is in all circumstances related to learning more. However, there does not appear to have been much comparative research on this subject and there is at least a suggestion that there may be some relationship between time spent and approaches to learning (with 'less time' being associated with 'surface' forms of learning). (Section 1.7)
11. There is evidence to suggest that students in UK higher education are less dependent on their teachers than are students in other European countries. They also appear to be amongst the most motivated of students in European higher education. (Section 2.2) Visiting ERASMUS students give positive evaluations of the teaching and student support that they receive in UK universities. (Section 1.4)
12. While the growth in term-time employment carries implications for the time available for study, there is evidence that it is the non-academic aspects of the student experience which get sacrificed in order to make time for paid work. (Section 3.3)
13. A very large difference between the student experience in the UK and elsewhere in Europe lies in the much greater use of work placements and internships in the latter. (Section 2.2)

*Study hours and learning outcomes*

14. There does appear to be a relationship between time devoted to study and degree results in most European countries. But the relationship is not particularly strong and the causality not particularly clear. (Section 2.5)
15. There is, however, a much stronger relationship between study hours and the perceived benefits of higher education in relation to factors such as career preparation and personal development. The investment of more hours of study appears to bring substantial pay-offs after graduation. (Section 2.5)
16. In relation to the other outcomes of university learning, the strengths of the UK student experience appear to lie more in the direction of personal development while elsewhere there is a more even balance between personal development and employment-related benefits. (Section 3.5)

### *Diversity and comparability*

17. Within the UK and elsewhere, there is growing diversity in the student experience of higher education. In England, the traditional model of young school leavers living away from home continues but is no longer dominant. For home-based students, the student experience exists alongside continuing daily engagement with family and friends. This reduces the time available for higher education but the evidence suggests that it is the social aspects of the student experience that are sacrificed. For many such students, the student experience is now almost entirely about academic study. (Sections 3.2 and 3.5)
18. There are undoubted differences to be found in both the extent and the nature of the engagement of students with their studies in higher education. These are differences between individuals, but also to some extent differences related to the subjects studied and to the kinds of institutions attended. Differences in engagement will produce differences in experiences which in turn may produce differences in outcomes. (Section 3.4)
19. One question concerns the extent to which differences in experience and engagement are largely a reflection of differences in the motivations and life circumstances of students or reflect differences in the demands and requirements which universities make on them. (Section 4.2).
20. In looking at European comparisons, the potential influence of the Bologna harmonisation processes should be noted. Bologna brings a claim about comparability of qualifications across different national systems and traditions that was previously largely absent. It also means that such data as exist reflect national systems that are, to a greater or lesser extent, systems in transition. (Sections 1.9 and 4.4)



# 1. Introduction: recent research on the student experience

## 1.1 Contexts

Two broad trends lead us to question assumptions about the nature of how and what students experience in contemporary higher education. The first of these is the increasing diversity of the student body and of higher education's institutional forms. In particular, many students on full-time courses effectively study part-time while they combine study with paid employment and/or domestic responsibilities. The consequence may be less time for and/or different approaches to study. The second trend is globalisation and the increasing internationalisation of higher education, as witnessed by the increasing volume of student movements across national borders and by the growth of attempts at supra-national co-ordination and regulation through processes such as Bologna. The latter draw attention to differences in national traditions and cultures of higher education, not just in terms of the length of courses but in the intensity and nature of study.

These trends themselves lead to an increasing awareness of 'differences' between individual students, between individual higher education institutions and between different national systems. And awareness of differences in the student experience inevitably raises the question of whether some experiences are better than others.

It is within this context that the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) commissioned the Open University's Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) to produce a report which looked at international differences in the experience of students and the hours devoted to study, based both on a review of literature and on the re-analysis of existing data collected as part of two recent studies, one European comparative project (section 2) and one UK national project (section 3), on students and graduates. As well as looking at data on the student experience, the report will also consider how that experience is conceptualised, including the social as well as the academic sides of academic life.

It is, however, worth emphasising some caveats at the outset. The data reported on here were collected from students at different stages of their academic careers and beyond. They depend on the accuracy of the students' recollections and perceptions of their time at university. They may sometimes fail to distinguish between what was on offer and what was actually experienced. The time devoted to study may indicate little about the demands of that study or the quality of teaching experienced as part of that study. And as with all forms of aggregated data, they may fail to take account of differences between sub-groups, in this case especially in relation to factors such as the subject studied, the institution attended and the life circumstances of the individual student.

In a paper to be published in the forthcoming third edition of the International Encyclopaedia of Education, McInnis notes that

*The complexity and multiplicity of student types and roles is currently challenging established research, policy and practice for governments, universities and academics. Traditional notions of a campus-based experience and the university as a cohesive learning community preparing undergraduates for citizenship and the workplace are being tested in most developed countries. Universities around the world are under pressure to adapt to significant changes in student needs and*

*expectations while maintaining core values concerned with the holistic development of students.*

(McInnis, forthcoming)

The notion of 'holistic development' might itself be something of an Anglo-Saxon conception of the student experience that contrasts, for example, with more professional/occupational traditions in other European countries. But what is important about the McInnis quote is that it relates the student 'experience' to the equally if not more important topic of what students 'become'. Questions about the nature of the student experience cannot sensibly or easily be separated from questions of what students are meant to be learning, or expressed more broadly, from questions about the personal and professional changes which are expected to occur as a result of the experience of higher education.

McInnis quotes Clark's portrayal of research on the student experience as a 'relatively massive but trivial literature' (Clark, 1973, p9) and more recently Terenzini and Reason's view that the literature, with a few exceptions, is 'highly segmented, even atomistic, and virtually atheoretical' (Terenzini and Reason, 2006, p1). Both quotations refer to the United States (US) literature which is certainly more massive and of longer standing than the research literature in Europe and elsewhere. But in terms of the growth of higher education into 'universal' systems in many parts of the world, the US experience may provide pointers of things to come. McInnis summarises the US approach to the student experience as follows:

*Despite evidence of diversity, the prevailing models of student life from the US assume an optimal level of student engagement with the university or college in a campus-based environment. These include the assumptions that: a positive experience is unlikely to occur in a social vacuum; that learning in a group is critical to the quality of student life; and that there are important learning outcomes from university beyond the mastery of subject matter.*

However...

*What students do in college and what that means for them and America's future is a common theme. The key issues generating research and policy most recently have been focussed on the need to improve the quality of the student experience set against an apparent drift away from the levels of student engagement that characterised the undergraduate experience for previous generations. Over the last five years or so there has been a wave of internal reviews of undergraduate programs in US universities and colleges to counter the perceived loss of focus and direction. This is particularly the case for large research intensive institutions.*  
(McInnis, forthcoming)

Turning closer to home, a report published by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), *The academic experience of students in English universities* (Sastry and Bekhradnia, 2007), explored the teaching contact hours of students at a sample of English universities. Data were based on a survey undertaken in March 2006 and repeated in March 2007 of first and second year students in English universities and focussed on various aspects of the amount of teaching and private study undertaken by students, their levels of satisfaction and other attitudinal questions<sup>1</sup>. Hours spent studying might be regarded as fairly basic to the student experience: the more time spent, the larger the experience and the amount and quality of learning that might accrue from it. The latter points do not of course necessarily follow from the former. It is, for example, important to know how these hours are spent, what learning outcomes are intended and what outcomes are actually achieved. But, nevertheless, hours of study do provide a fairly natural starting point for an examination of the student experience.

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<sup>1</sup>. With a grant provided by the Higher Education Academy, the survey was commissioned by the Higher Education Policy Institute and undertaken by Opinionpanel Research.

## 1.2 Hours devoted to study: the HEPI report

The HEPI report found that students at English universities received an average of 14 hours of teaching per week. However, there were large variations between subjects. For example (perhaps unsurprisingly), students in clinical and veterinary subjects had just over 20 hours teaching per week while students in historical and philosophical studies received less than nine hours of teaching per week.

However, the teaching 'contact hours' represent only a part of the students' workload. According to the HEPI report, the total workload of students in English universities, i.e. hours of teaching plus private study, amounted to an average of 26 hours a week, but there were wide variations of weekly workloads between and within subject groupings. For example, students from medicine and other natural science subjects had the highest workloads: with those studying medicine and dentistry having on average a total weekly workload of 36 hours, while those from mass communications courses put in an average of 20 hours a week. The HEPI report also found that there were large differences between individual institutions. In medicine and dentistry, the highest institutional mean was 46 hours a week and the lowest was 26 hours a week. Differences also existed between institutional types – students at Russell Group universities had a weekly workload of an average of 28 hours, while students at other pre- and post-92 institutions had a weekly workload of about 24 hours.

As well as looking at the variation in teaching hours between subjects and institutions in English universities, the summary of the HEPI report draws some comparisons between the data on English universities and the results of European surveys carried out by EUROSTUDENT and the European Commission Framework VI project, 'The Flexible Professional in the Knowledge Society' (REFLEX). However, only the latter allowed direct comparison between the experiences of students from the UK and those from other European countries. On the basis of these comparisons, the HEPI report concluded that overall the teaching contact hours of students in English universities tended to be lower than those in universities in some other European countries.

## 1.3 Hours devoted to study: international experiences

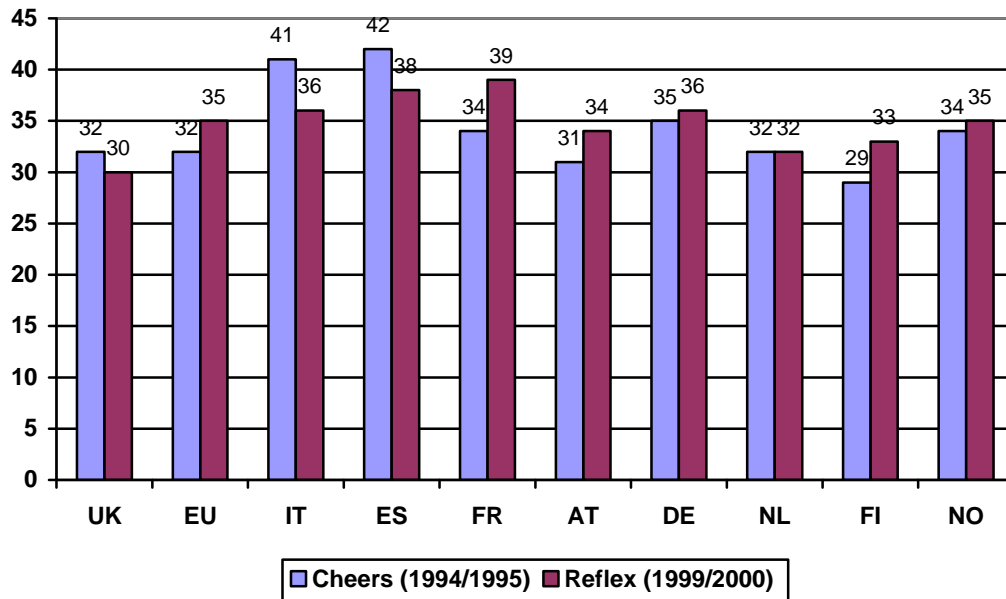
There is not a large amount of research evidence on the teaching contact hours of UK students in comparison with those of students in other countries. Hence, it has been difficult either to support or refute the conclusions of the HEPI report. However, some purely UK data do suggest that the HEPI survey may have underestimated study hours in the UK. Thus, the UNITE *Student experience report 2007* found that students spent an average of 3.4 hours a day, i.e. 17 hours a week, in lectures and other formal contact. This figure is significantly higher than the 14 hours reported by HEPI.

Comparing UK students with students in other countries, Schomburg and Teichler (2006) reported that UK students spent approximately 16 hours on attending lectures or classes, which is similar to students in Dutch and Italian universities (17 hours). Students from Spain, France Germany and Japan all spent more than 20 hours per week on attending lectures or classes. These figures are drawn from a study of graduates undertaken at the end of the nineties.

When looking at students' workload overall (i.e. lectures, classes and all forms of study) two separate studies (Brennan and Tang, 2008 and Schomburg and Teichler, 2006) both found that students in the UK spent an average of about 30 hours a week on studying, the least amount of time compared to their counterparts in other European countries. The former refers to the recent REFLEX study which involved a survey of students who had graduated in 2000; the latter to the European Commission CHEERS study of graduates from 1995. The results of these studies support the conclusions of the HEPI report and add to the body of evidence that UK students commit fewer hours to study than students in other European countries. While

little change in study hours appears to have occurred in the UK over the period of the two studies, the REFLEX survey found that time spent on studying per week had decreased in Italy and Spain since the earlier CHEERS study. However, French, German, Austrian, Finnish and Dutch students had increased their study time by an additional two to five hours a week. As Figure 1 indicates, while the fall in study hours among UK students is small over this period, the most recent data place the UK firmly at the bottom of the European range.

**Figure 1: Graduates' perceptions of the average hours spent on studying per week during term time, (graduate cohorts from 1995 and 2000)**



A unique source of evidence on how the student experience differs between countries can be obtained from the evaluations undertaken of ERASMUS study abroad programmes which provide data from students who are able to compare the teaching hours and experiences in universities belonging to at least two European countries (Maiworm and Teichler (2002). Overall, ERASMUS students with experience of UK higher education tended to report high satisfaction with the quality of teaching and student support in the UK but were less impressed with the demands placed on them when compared with their experiences of higher education in another European country (Maiworm and Teichler, op cit). Table 1 shows how ERASMUS students rated their host compared with their home country universities. For ERASMUS students visiting UK institutions, 38% found the courses less demanding than their home courses (more than any of the other countries listed). The average for ERASMUS students as a whole who found their host courses less demanding was 31%. Against this figure of 38% finding UK courses less demanding, only 22% found them more demanding than their home country courses. It may be, however, that the perceived high quality of the teaching experienced in UK higher education had the effect of making courses appear to be 'less demanding'.

**Table 1: ERASMUS students' assessment of the academic level of their courses at their host institution as compared to their home institution – by host country (mean %)**

(adapted from Maiworm and Teichler, 2002)

Visiting.....	UK	France	Germany	Netherlands	Norway	Sweden	Europe
More demanding	22	20	27	35	26	22	22
Equally demanding	41	48	52	46	43	51	47
Less demanding	38	27	22	19	31	26	31

#### 1.4 Hours devoted to study: limitations of research

A limitation of comparative studies such as the above is that they deal in aggregates and do not take account of factors such as subject differences, year of study and so on. For UK students, both the UNITE *Student experience report 2007* and Innis and Shaw (1997) pointed out that the average weekly hours spent on studying increase with the year of study, a factor ignored in the HEPI report and other literature reviewed here. UNITE (2007) found that students increased their hours of studying by 2.5 hours per week between the first year and final years of study. (The report also notes that 52% of students were aware that they should devote more time to studying than they currently did.)

Innis and Shaw (1997) reported that students' mode of learning changed as their courses progressed. There was a move away from time spent in lectures and classrooms to more time spent in independent study, often in the form of committing more time to assessments and independent learning. Students usually spent an average of 39 hours in study-related activities per week but this varied from 34 to 48 hours, according to subject of study, age and year of the course. This is somewhat higher than the figure quoted by HEPI and some other studies. However, it should be noted that in surveying students only in their first and second years of study, the HEPI study may have underestimated the average number of hours over the total three or four years' duration of a degree course. And we should also note the findings of a recent study for the National Union of Students (NUS) that students in the UK indicate overwhelmingly high levels of enjoyment and satisfaction with their experiences in higher education<sup>2</sup>.

It must always be remembered that when studies report student study hours using aggregate figures, they are likely to be disguising considerable variations according to subject, year of course, age etc. Unless the effects of these factors are taken into account when making comparisons, they will provide a distorted picture. Thus, humanities students spend fewer weekly hours in study and there are more humanities students in UK universities. Thus, one of the 'reasons' for the lower weekly hours devoted to study by UK students will be the higher proportion of humanities students in the UK. In future research, more use of weighted data and multi-variate data analysis techniques will be required in order to explore further the relationships between different aspects of the student experience.

#### 1.5 Factors affecting the hours devoted to study

A key factor is the approach to study and learning embedded in different national higher education systems and traditions. In some countries, students are expected to acquire most of their knowledge from their teachers during lectures, to remember it and then to reproduce it for examinations. In others, greater emphasis is placed on learner autonomy and 'learning how to learn' is a key objective of the academic experience. Thus, Schomburg and Teichler (2006) reported that 68% of UK students thought that independent learning was highly or very

<sup>2</sup> *Student Experience Report*, 2008, National Union of Students

highly emphasised in their course modules, compared with the European average of 59%. This is in stark contrast to the 29% of Spanish or 33% of Japanese students who perceived independent learning to be highly or very highly emphasised.

While comparative data on study hours appear to be in relatively short supply, there are other data bearing on the student experience which may suggest changes over time and which can be indicative of the factors affecting teaching hours. A UK study by Rolfe in 2002 reported on the perceptions of academic staff on both the demands made on and by university students. The following summarises the findings:

- most lecturers felt there has been no change in students' demands for the amount of teaching and other contact in recent years, particularly through provision of lectures and tutorials, despite increasing costs of higher education;
- some students make more demands for individual contact with teaching staff than in the past: to solve difficulties, to obtain more feedback, and to discuss results;
- lecturers felt that increased demand for individual contact came largely from students of lower ability who had increased in number in recent years;
- some felt students expect instant help and do not appreciate that teaching staff have other work responsibilities apart from teaching;
- students want more direction and guidance than in the past, more "prescribed" teaching, delivering required knowledge, rather than to do their own reading and research;
- the style of teaching and learning typically used in school at A level and in newer vocational provision seems to "spoon-feed" students rather than require independent study and so inadequately prepares students for higher education;
- lecturers believed that part-time working is increasingly common among their students and has a detrimental effect on their studies.

(Rolfe, 2002)

The above findings on staff perceptions of their students almost suggest an inverse relationship between study hours and a high-quality student experience, at least in terms of the maintenance of traditions of independent learning within UK universities.

The work of the French sociologist Francois Dubet (1994) points to differences in student orientations to their studies, again with time implications. The thrust of this tradition of work is that students to a considerable degree determine their own workloads, reflecting their ambitions (how important is a 'good' degree?) and their current life circumstances.

What the above data remind us of is that the student experience is shaped by an interaction of both the demands and expectations of students and of the higher education institutions they attend. With increasing differentiation of higher education institutions and greater diversity in the student population, these demands and expectations are likely to become increasingly varied.

## **1.6 Approaches to learning**

There is a substantial literature on student approaches to learning and the behaviours that constitute 'effective' study methods. Various studies over the years by writers such as Marton (1994), Entwistle et al (2004) and Richardson (2000) have made a central distinction between 'deep' and 'surface' approaches to learning. A deep approach is adopted in order to, in the main, grasp the meaning of course materials and a surface approach is adopted to memorise course materials for the purposes of assessment. These two approaches to learning involve significant differences in workload and engagement by students and, it is argued, in the outcomes of learning.

Kember (2004) and Lizzio et al. (2002) found that it was students' perception of workload which influenced the student experience rather than time spent on work per se. Both studies stressed that the teaching approach and environment influenced perceptions of workload and thus influenced students' approaches to studying and the study experience. Lizzio et al. (2002) argued that students' perceptions of a heavy workload, inappropriate assessment and bad teaching environment influenced them towards surface approaches to studying. On the other hand, students can be influenced towards deep approaches to studying through perceptions of a good teaching environment. Thus, teachers and curriculum design are very important factors in affecting the way students' approach learning (Kember 2004). However, it is not the case that 'deep' approaches are in all circumstances to be regarded as superior to 'surface' ones. Each may be appropriate to particular circumstances and purposes and, arguably, students need to possess both in their armoury of study methods coupled with knowledge of when each is to be used.

## 1.7 The effects of term-time working

One of the key factors influencing students' approaches to learning is the time available to them for it. It has been widely noted that students in the UK have become increasingly likely in recent years to engage in some form of part-time employment while at university. The reasons seem to be mainly financial but the consequences are likely to be educational.

There exists a vast array of research evidence on the effects of working on students' studies. Curtis (2007), Little and Callender, (2005), Hunt et al (2004), Finch et al (2006), Curtis and Shani (2002), and Carney et al (2005) all found that consistently more than half of all students undertook paid employment (53% to 59%) and the average time worked was around 15 hours per week. Students also believed that working during term-time had adverse effects on their academic studies. This ranged from missing lectures, failing to hand in assignments or handing work in late. Almost half of the students felt they would have achieved better grades if they had not been working whilst studying (National Union of Students 1999; Curtis and Shani 2002).

However, we can also identify research literature which finds positive features in term-time working and related changes in the experience of being a student. Studies such as those by Curtis and Shani (2002), Little and Callender (2005), and Curtis (2007) all report students finding positive features in part-time work. These went beyond the obvious financial benefits to include the development of skills and confidence and understanding of business needs.

There is little hard data in support of the perceptions of students, positive and negative, on the effects of term-time working. Perhaps what is affected by the phenomenon may be less the formal contact hours and experiences of study than the informal 'experience of university life', for a long time central to the 'English tradition' of the residential university. Rolfe's report (2002) suggests that some aspects of this tradition may be threatened by term-time working, at least in the views of the lecturer quoted here:

*The student experience is changing. When I think back to my own time at university, sitting in canteens and talking to my colleagues... that aspect of student life is suffering. They're coming on campus at the times they aren't working, picking up materials, doing what they need to do and going off again and not immersing themselves in student life. (quoted in Rolfe, 2002)*

Rolfe elaborates on some of these changes in student life in terms of the following:

- some were reported to attend university only for timetabled sessions, and this was believed to diminish the student experience for themselves and for others;
- students were less able or willing to undertake independent study than they were ten or more years ago, and expected more instruction and guidance from teaching staff;
- higher proportions of current UK students go to university for career reasons than in the past;
- a lot of students were less interested in their subject and more interested in vocational aspects of their studies.

(Rolfe, 2002)

While term-time working is an increasingly important aspect of the student experience in UK higher education, it is difficult to see this as being a significant reason for the lower hours of study reported for UK students when compared with their continental European counterparts. Term-time working is also an important feature – and arguably a more traditional one – for students in many continental European higher education systems. As reported most recently in Brennan and Tang (2008), continental European students are in fact more likely to spend time in paid employment although this is complicated by the much larger incidence of internships and work placements in other European countries.

## **1.8 Conclusion: growing diversity**

Throughout the literature on the student experience of higher education, generalisations abound, based either on anecdotal experiences or on aggregated data that disguise the growing diversity of students and their experiences of study. In particular, much of the literature – and national if not institutional policies – presents the student experience as synonymous with young full-time students, living away from home, probably for the first time. As McInnis (forthcoming) points out, there are at least four major sub-groups of students to be considered: (i) traditional domestic school leavers, (ii) traditional international school leavers, (iii) deferred entry under 25 years of age, (iv) mature age return to study over 25 years of age. McInnis suggests that the experiences of each group are qualitatively different. Thus, the hours spent on study will differ as will the purposes and motivations to study.

The divide between full-time and part-time modes of study has become increasingly blurred for many students. For some increasingly 'busy' students, less time spent on study may be coupled with more efficiency in the use of that time. But for some of these students, what will be sacrificed will not be time spent on study but time spent on the more social aspects of student life. In this respect, higher education in the UK may begin to lose some of its traditional 'holistic' and 'personal development' features and accord more closely with the academic/professional emphasis found within continental European higher education systems.

Though limited, European comparative data on the student experience do tend to point in the direction of fewer hours per week on average devoted to study by higher education students in the UK. When coupled with the significantly shorter duration of their degree courses, this suggests a substantially reduced amount of study by UK students. The key question, of course, is how much this impacts on learning. As discussed briefly above, there is a considerable literature on approaches to study and learning in higher education and it is by no means self-evident that spending more time on study is in all circumstances related to learning more.

As also noted above, there are differences in national higher education traditions, with the UK having in the past emphasised learner autonomy and independence rather more than some other national traditions. With this approach, arguably less substantive knowledge may be acquired than with more didactic approaches but the 'quality' of what is learned and the



acquisition of more effective study habits ('learning to learn') may be beneficial in the long run. That said, there is some evidence that these traditions of learner autonomy may be under threat in some parts of UK higher education as increasingly 'busy' students wrestle with the competing pressures of study, work and home.

In looking at European comparisons in particular, the potential influence of the Bologna harmonisation processes should be noted. Bologna brings a claim about comparability of qualifications across different national systems and traditions that was previously largely absent. It also means that such data as exist reflect national systems that are, to a greater or lesser extent, systems in transition.

In the next section of this report, we look at new data on the nature of the student experience within different national traditions of higher education within Europe. Then, in the following section, we focus on the contemporary student experience in the UK, on its diversities and commonalities, and on its consequences for learning and student development.

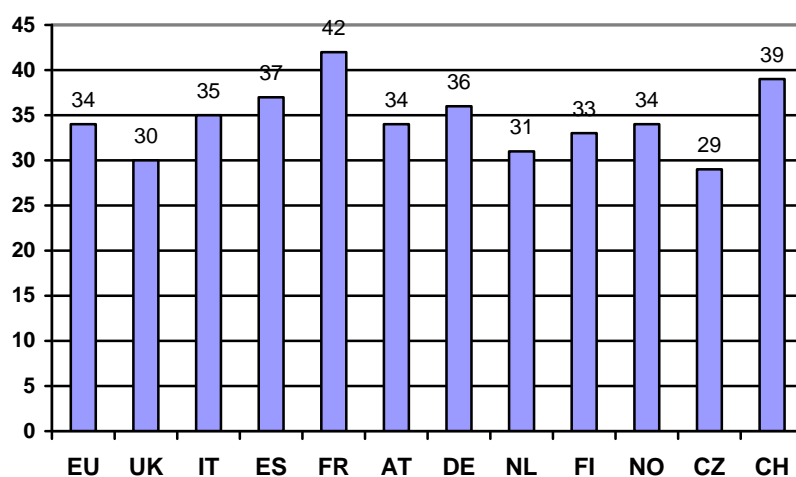
## 2. The ‘European’ student experience

In this section of the report, we use data collected as part of a recent European Commission Framework VI project on graduates<sup>3</sup>. The project collected data from graduates in sixteen countries five years after their graduation in 2000<sup>4</sup>. A total of 70,000 graduates took part in the study. Although the main focus of the study was on the graduates’ experiences of employment since graduation, the questionnaire did ask about certain features of their higher education experience, including how much time they spent on their studies, how that time was divided into different study activities and how time spent related to qualifications achieved. These provide a picture of the UK student experience within a European context, albeit an experience recalled with hindsight by graduates some five years after the experience had been completed. The main features are summarised below.

### 2.1 Hours devoted to study

Figure 2 shows the average hours devoted to study (of all kinds) each week during term-time by students in 11 European countries. As can be seen, the UK is well below the European average and second lowest overall to the Czech Republic in terms of time spent.

**Figure 2: Average (mean) of study hours by country**

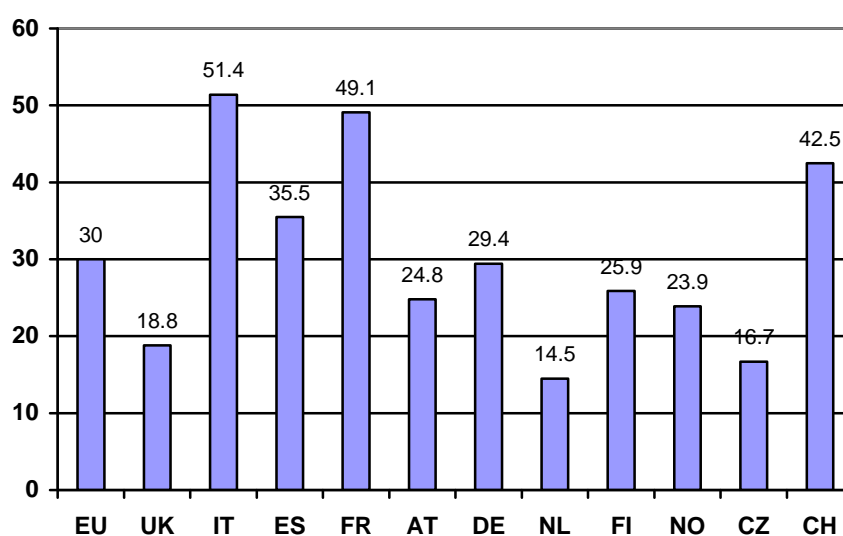


However, comparisons based on means can disguise certain differences. For example, in Figure 3 we compare countries in terms of the proportions of students who reported that they had spent over 40 hours per week on their studies (including lectures, private study, seminars, labs, tutorials etc.).

<sup>3</sup> The Flexible Professional in the Knowledge Society (REFLEX). Six reports based on the project’s findings on graduate employment across Europe have been prepared for HEFCE and are available on the HEFCE website.

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this report, data from 11 countries were used in the analysis: (United Kingdom (UK), Italy (IT), Spain (ES), France (FR), Austria (AT), Germany (DE), Netherlands (NL), Finland (FI), Norway (NO), Czech Republic (CZ), and Switzerland (CH). Data from other countries were not fully available at the time of writing.

**Figure 3: Students who spent over 40 hours on study in a typical week (%)**

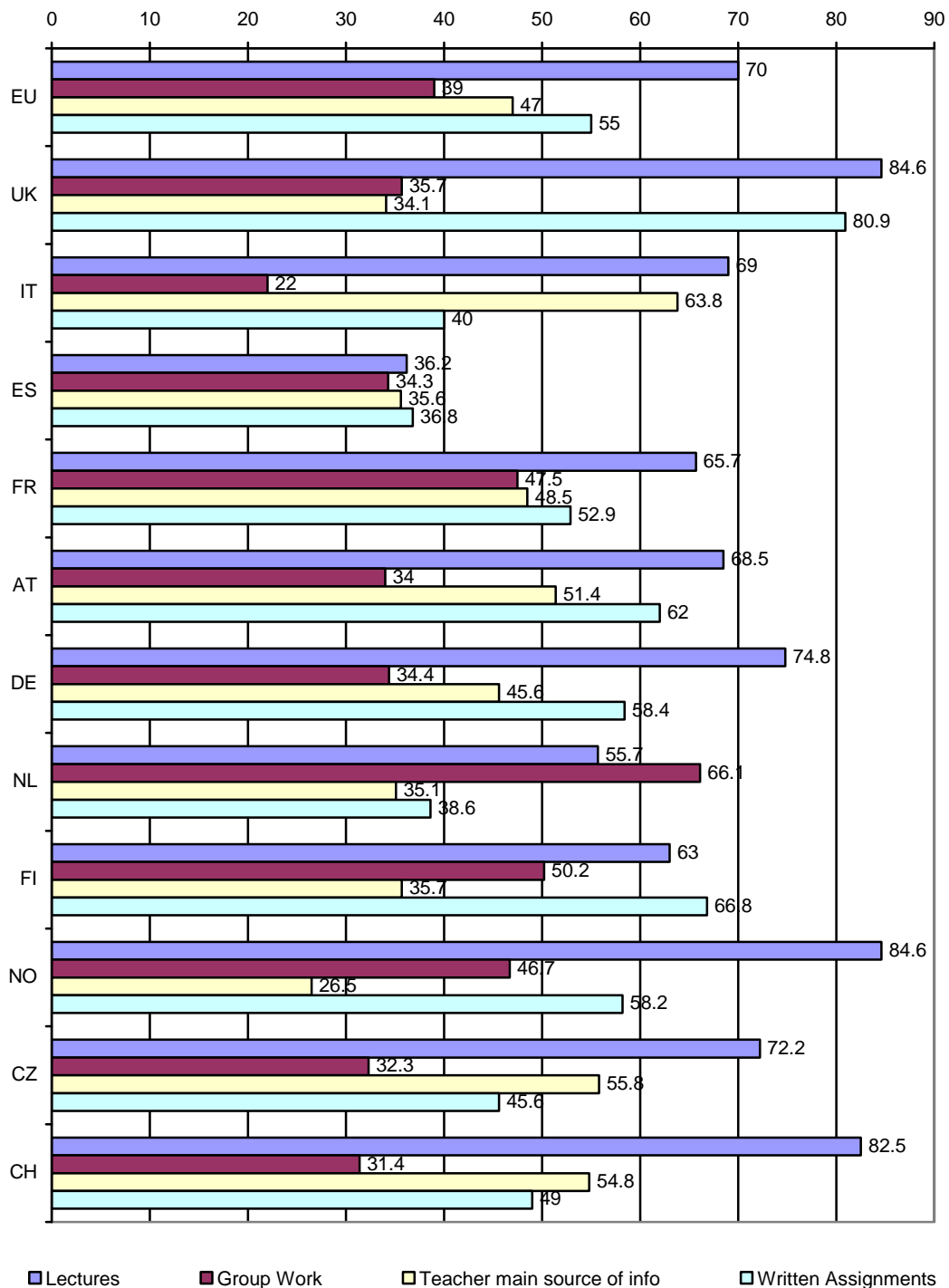


Only 18% of the UK graduates had spent over 40 hours per week on their university studies, one of the lowest among the 11 countries. Italian, French and Swiss graduates appeared to have devoted the most hours per week to their studies, with over 50% of them spending over 40 hours in the case of the Italian graduates. Along with the UK were the Dutch and Czech graduates with only small proportions (under 20%) reporting high study hours. While, to some extent, these figures may be affected by the subject breakdown within higher education in the different countries, we know from previous analyses of these data (Brennan and Tang, 2008, p3) that UK students appeared to be below the European average in terms of study hours per week, irrespective of subject studied.

## **2.2 How students divided up their study time**

In addition to the number of hours the graduates had spent each week on their studies while at university, the survey collected information on how this time had been apportioned between different forms of study activity. Figure 4 illustrates how different forms of study activity had been emphasised, according to the graduates, in the different European countries.

**Figure 4: Modes of learning emphasised in study programmes to a 'very great extent' (%)**



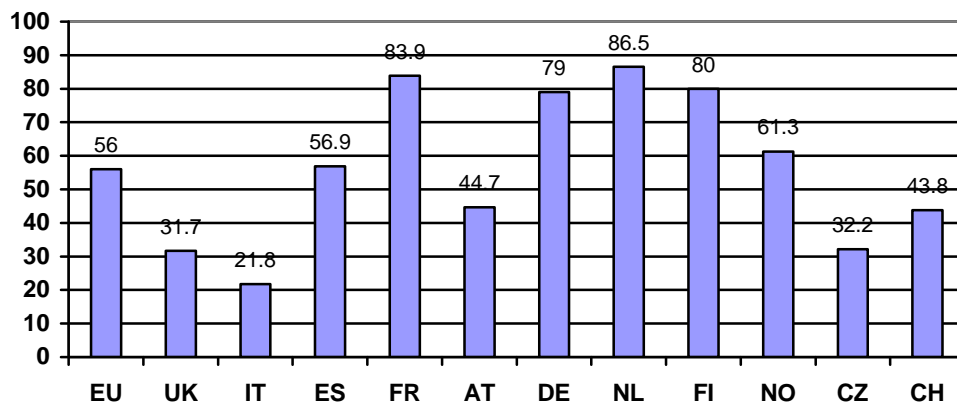
In virtually all countries, graduates reported that most emphasis had been put on lectures and written assignments. This was particularly so in the UK with over 80% of the graduates reporting great emphasis on both forms of study. Compared with other countries, written assignments appeared to receive particularly strong emphasis in the UK. Another feature of the UK appeared to be a relatively low reliance on teachers as the main source of information, with around 35% of UK graduates reporting this emphasis. In several other countries, the figure was at or around 50% and in Italy was well over 60%.

Graduates from the Netherlands reported a lot of emphasis (66%) on group work, something which received relatively low emphasis in the UK (35%). Italian graduates reported the lowest emphasis (22%) on group work.

Of course, the perception of a lot of emphasis on something is not necessarily the same thing as devoting a lot of time to it. Students might have been assigning greater importance to some of their study activities, irrespective of how much time was actually spent on them.

Another important element of the student experience can be an internship or work placement. Even though work placements and other employability measures have been given much emphasis in higher education policy discussions in the UK in recent years, Figure 5 indicates that the UK has one of the lowest rates of participation in work placements. Around 30% of the UK graduate sample reported that they had had a placement, the second lowest figure to Italy among the 11 countries. In several countries – France, Germany, the Netherlands and Finland – the figure was closer to 80%.

**Figure 5: Participated in a work placement (%)**

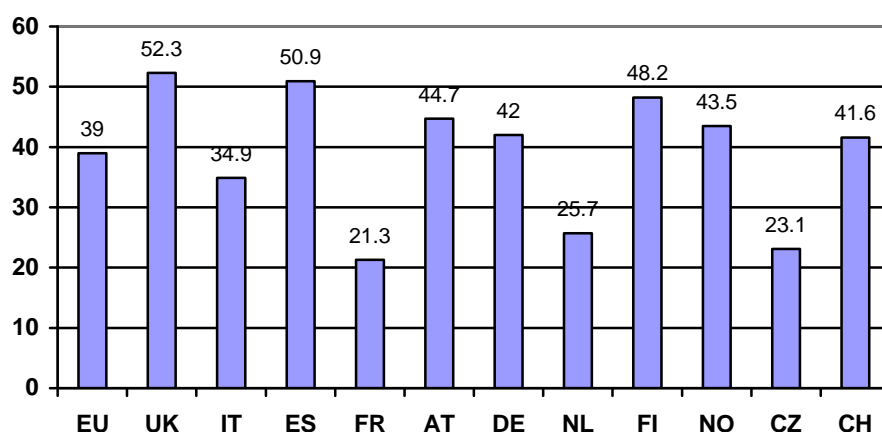


### 2.3 Attitudes to study

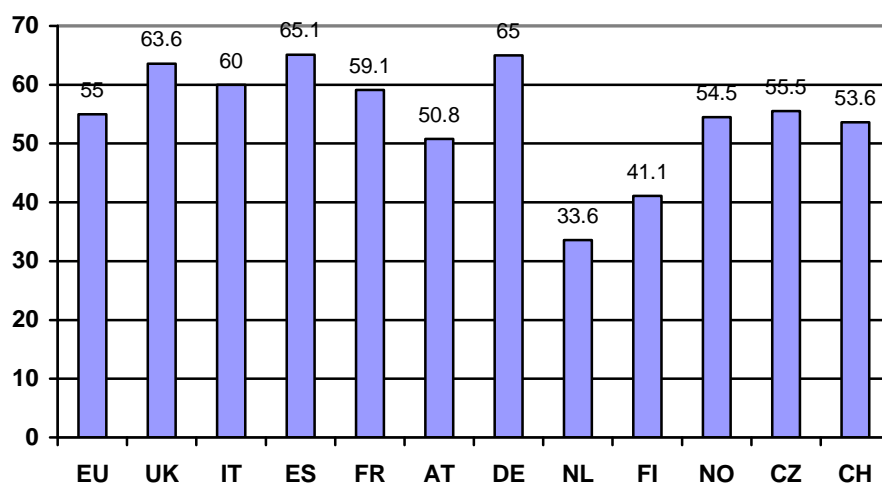
The survey also collected data from the graduates about their attitudes to study while at university, in particular whether they had done more work than was required of them for examinations and whether they had been striving for the best possible marks during their studies. These data are summarised in Figures 6 and 7.

It appeared from these figures that UK students were amongst the more highly motivated students in Europe. 52% of them – more than from any other country – reported that they had done extra work above what was required in order to pass and a similar proportion reported that they had been striving for the highest possible marks. Of course, doing extra work beyond requirements may reflect relatively low requirements. But, overall, these figures are consistent with a picture of UK students as being among the more highly motivated and ambitious students in Europe, a contrast with the picture that emerges if study hours alone are looked at.

**Figure 6: Students who did more work than was required in order to pass (%)**



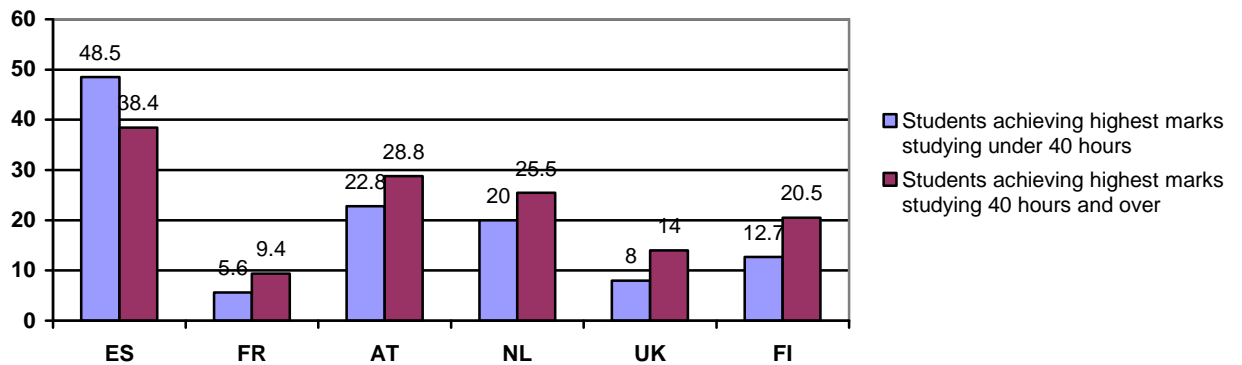
**Figure 7: Students who strived for the highest possible marks (%)**



## 2.4 Learning outcomes: qualifications gained

The key test of the effectiveness of time spent and approach to study would come in data on learning outcomes. The survey had only limited information on this. For six of the countries, information was collected on grades achieved at the end of the period of study. While there may be little comparability between the grade requirements in the different countries, they are nevertheless useful in helping to assess the relationship between study hours and academic achievement within the different national systems. Figure 8 compares the proportions achieving the highest possible grades among students who had been studying below and above 40 hours per week. With the exception of Spain, all countries showed better results among the students who had worked the longer hours, although the differences are not all that great in any of the countries.

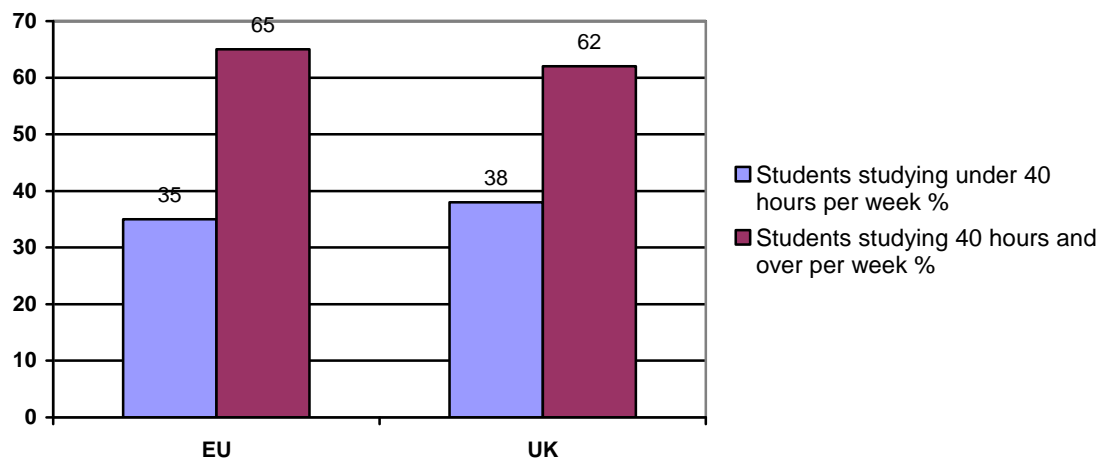
**Figure 8: Students achieving the highest grade and studying under 40 hours compared to those studying 40 hours and over (%)**



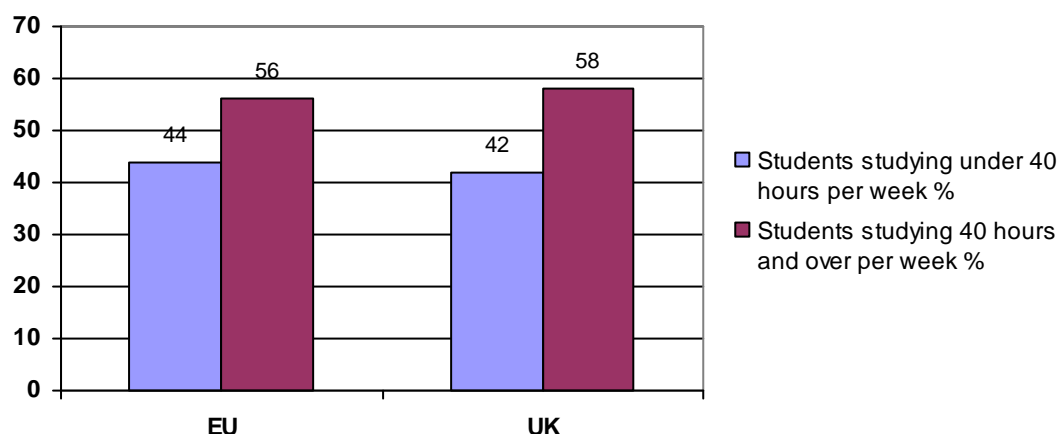
## 2.5 Learning outcomes: preparation for work and for personal development

The outcomes of study are about more than the acquisition of qualifications. Time spent studying may bring many benefits which may or may not be directly measured by an academic qualification. Figures 9 to 11 below indicate the relationship between time devoted to study while in higher education and the perceived benefits after having left higher education. The differences are substantial, especially in relation to graduates' perceptions of higher education's contribution to their personal development. The returns on their investments of time appear to have been considerable.

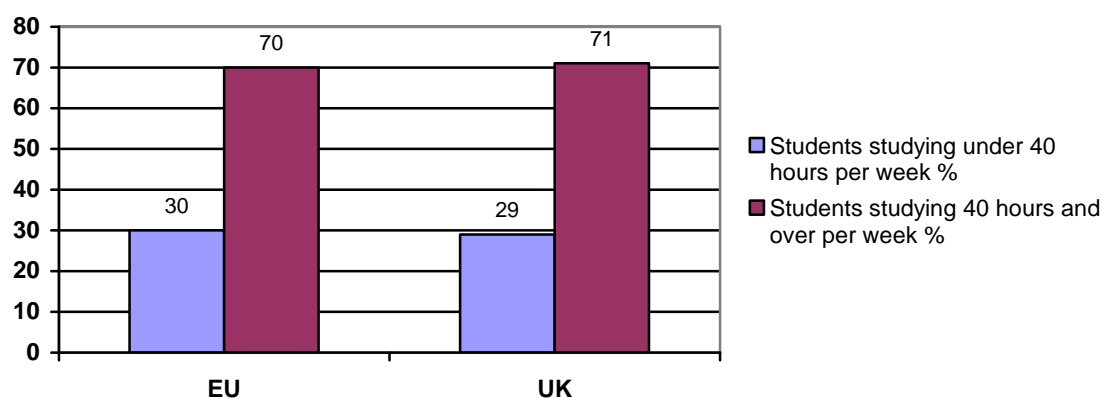
**Figure 9: Study programme was a good basis for starting work (%)**



**Figure 10: Study programme was a good basis for a future career (%)**



**Figure 11: Study programme was a good basis for personal development (%)**



Appendix Table A1 provides more information on the relationship between study hours and a wider range of perceived benefits from graduates from all 11 countries. Again, the differences are substantial and supportive of a conclusion that hours devoted to study do indeed matter. While the patterns are pretty consistent between countries, there are some differences. For example, for graduates from the UK, Italy and Spain, there appears to be an inverse relationship between study hours and whether study programmes were felt to have provided a good basis for performing current work tasks (five years after graduation). It might be that this reflects a different subject balance within these three countries (for example, more arts and humanities students) and consequently a looser relationship between study and work. Inspection of Table A1 also suggests that hours spent in study matter more in some places than others. For example, the Norwegian data on study programmes as a good basis for starting work show extreme differences according to hours spent in studies. Only 16% of those who had spent fewer than 40 hours per week on their studies reported a good basis for starting work compared with 84% of those who spent over 40 hours. (The comparable figures for Europe as a whole were 35% and 65% and for the UK, 38% and 62%.)

The caveat needs to be added, however, that it may not be study time itself that is responsible for these relationships but some intervening variables such as the subject studied, age or orientation to study that are at least partly responsible.

Looking overall at country differences in the perceived benefits of higher education (appendix Table A2), it is the factor of personal development which students in most countries – the



Scandinavian countries of Finland and Norway provide the only exceptions – rate as the most important benefit from their higher education experience. UK graduates were less likely to report that their higher education had provided them with a good basis for starting work, for further learning on the job or for performing current work tasks. Only in their estimation of its value to their future careers did they equal the European average in estimating the employment-related benefits of their higher education. But in respect of their personal development, they were actually above the European average.

## 2.6 Conclusion

Looking at the comparative figures for 11 European countries on how students spend their time, we find some confirmation that students in the UK seem, on average, to devote fewer hours per week to their studies than do their counterparts in other countries. In how they spend that time, however, they are broadly similar to students elsewhere in placing most emphasis on their formal teaching and course work assignments. It seems that it is more important to UK students to 'do well' than it is to students in some other places, with a high proportion claiming to do more than was required of them to pass their course. However, when put alongside the lower student hours of UK students, this might suggest that they face somewhat lesser requirements from their universities than students in other countries.

Other important differences in the student experience for UK students are the lower frequency of work placements, the shorter duration of study to the bachelors rather than the masters degree<sup>5</sup>, and the lack of opportunity to 'stretch' degree courses beyond their formal minimum duration.

In addressing the question of whether these differences in the student experience actually matter, we can point to the link between hours devoted to study and degree results and to a more substantial link between study hours and a range of perceived benefits of higher education. These relationships are to be found in all of the countries that took part in the survey. We can also note the apparently strong personal development benefits of higher education to UK students but the relatively lesser benefits in terms of employment. However, it would be somewhat naïve to ascribe these differences simply to the effects of differences in hours devoted to study. Differences in subject mix, in the lifestyles and personal circumstances of students, and in the value assigned to different aspects of the student experience by employers and others are among the many intervening variables that affect the outcomes of learning. (See the HEFCE reports on Graduate Employment from the EC REFLEX project for a more detailed discussion of differences in employment experiences among graduates from European universities.) Even where relationships between factors appear strong, assigning causality may be complex and ambiguous.

In any event, differences in the experiences of students from different countries provide only an aggregate picture and can disguise a growing diversity of experience within national borders. Some indication of diversity within UK higher education is provided in the next section of this report.

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<sup>5</sup> Though this may, of course, be a difference that will change as a result of the Bologna reform processes.

## 3. Diversity in the student experience in the UK

### 3.1 Introduction

As we have already indicated, 'hours of study' subsumes a range of activities. And hours of study sit alongside 'hours of lots of other things', inside and outside higher education, for most students. In this section, we look in rather more detail at the undergraduate student experience in universities within the UK.

We do so by drawing on a recent Economic and Social Research Council Teaching and Learning Research Programme (ESRC/TLRP) research project entitled 'The social and organisational mediation of university learning' (SOMUL)<sup>6</sup>. The project attempted to study 'what is learned' by students within the UK's increasingly diversified system of higher education. This entailed detailed quantitative and qualitative study of the student experience at fifteen contrasting UK universities where undergraduate students were contacted at various points during their studies and asked about their aspirations, their experiences and 'what they had learned'. For the purposes of this report, we are drawing on a survey of final year students undertaken in November 2006 in nine of these universities. The over 600 students who replied to the survey were studying biology, business studies, computing, geography, history, mathematics and sociology.

As well as finding out how the students had been spending their time at university, the project had asked how the students felt they had benefited from their time. In the following sections, we look at i) how students spent their time, ii) how this differed according to whether they were studying science or non-science subjects, iii) further differences between subjects, institutions and individual students, and finally iv) whether there appeared to be any relationship between the way time was spent and how students perceived the benefits of their higher education.

### 3.2 How students spend their time

The survey divided time up between a wide range of activities including such things as attending lectures, wider reading, participating in student clubs or societies, socialising with other students, socialising with non-university friends, paid employment and household tasks/childcare. These different activities were grouped within three activity categories of i) academic time, ii) university social time, and iii) non-university time. It is worth recalling that a distinctive feature of the traditional student experience in the UK has been the importance attached to the second of these categories – university social time – whether this be spent on playing fields or in university bars, in ancient colleges or modern halls of residence.

Figures 12 to 14 show the breakdown of time spent within each of these three categories. 'Academic time' was spent mainly in lectures (and other formal teaching activities) and private study, with around 30% of the students spending more than 11 hours per week on the former and over 50% spending more than 11 hours per week on the latter. Only around 10% spent a similar amount of time in wider reading and time spent in discussing courses with lecturers or

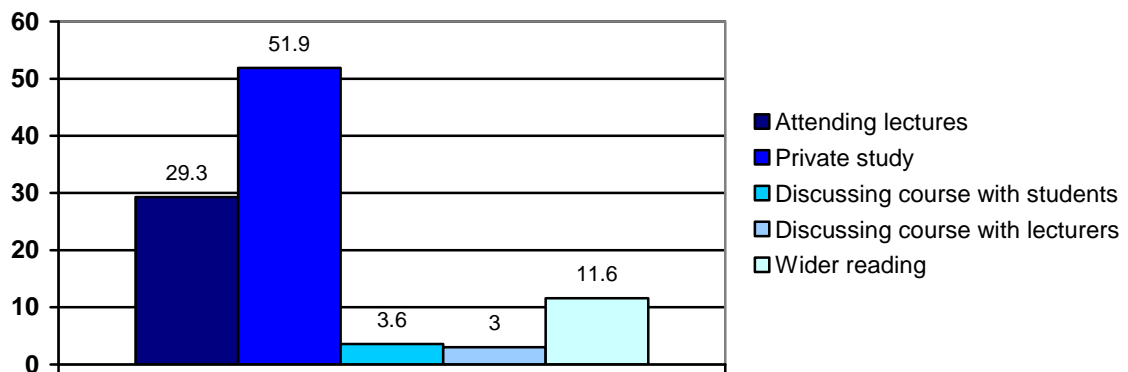
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<sup>6</sup> The ESRC/TLRP 'research briefing' (No. 32, March 2008) on the findings of this project – 'What is learned at university? The social and organisational mediation of university learning' is available from the TLRP website: [www.tlrp.org](http://www.tlrp.org).

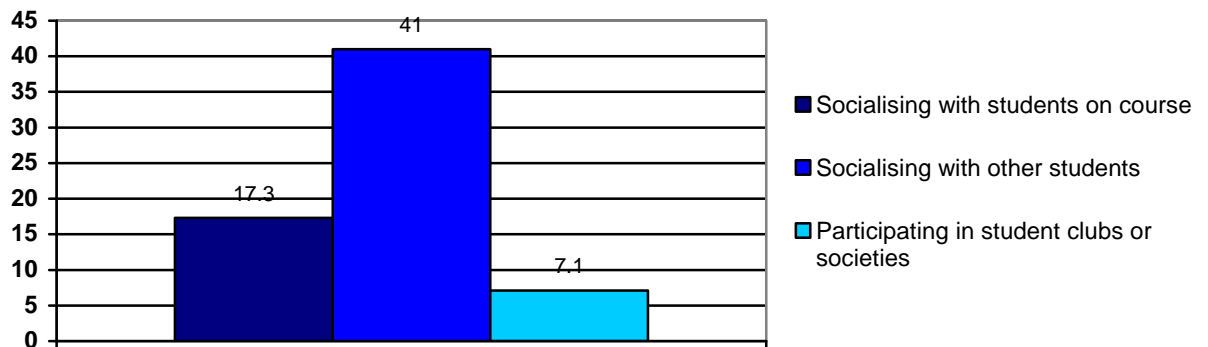
other students was quite small. On the basis of this set of data, the traditions of relatively autonomous study in UK universities seem to be alive and well.

The traditions of an active social life also appear strong, at least for some students, and it is a social life which takes students beyond the boundaries of their subjects and courses. Around 40% of the students reported spending over 11 hours of each week socialising with other students at the university while fewer than 20% reported spending equivalent amounts of time socialising with students from their own course. Clubs and societies were a significant activity for only a minority of students, with around 8% of students spending 11 hours a week or more.

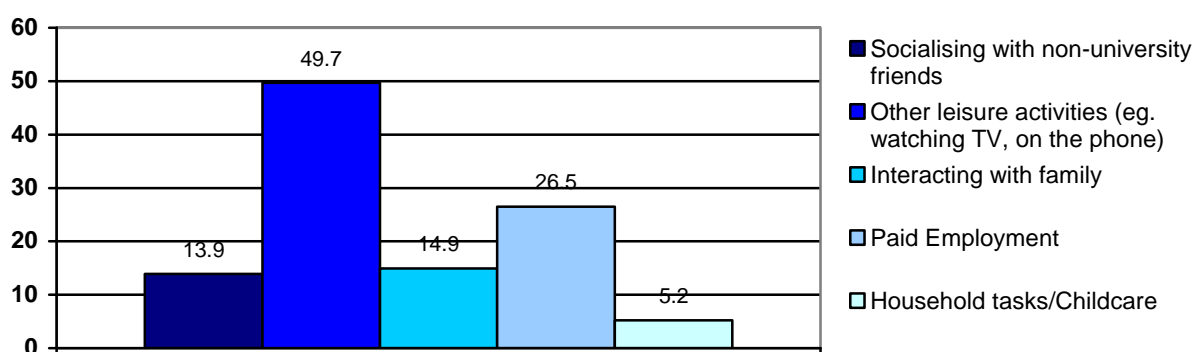
**Figure 12: Academic time: students spending 11 hours or more per week (%)**



**Figure 13: University social time: students spending 11 hours or more per week (%)**



**Figure 14: Non-university time: students spending 11 hours or more per week (%)**



While much has been made of the impact of term-time work on the student experience, it appears that watching television and similar activities consume more time for more students. Around double the proportions of students (50%) were spending 11 hours or more each week on leisure activities such as watching television, reading books or making phone calls as spent similar amounts of time in paid employment. However, it should be noted that the figure for the latter is somewhat lower than the figures recorded in other recent research (e.g. NUS, 2008 and the REFLEX project data reported in section 2 above).

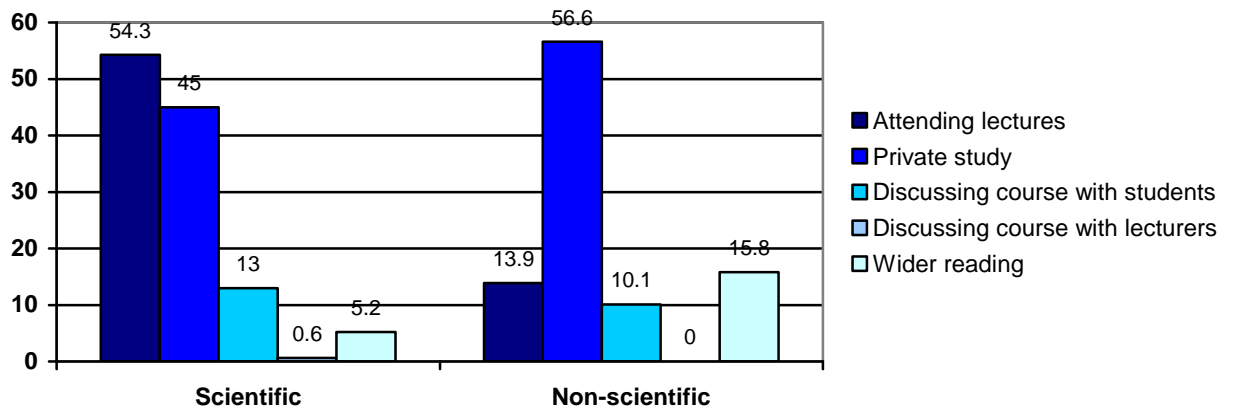
### **3.3 Differences between science and non-science students**

The demands on students differ according to the subject they are studying. It is well-known that science students have more teaching contact time at university, especially with laboratory work, and the survey data as summarised in the next set of figures confirmed this. Over 50% of science students were spending 11 hours or more in formal teaching situations (including lab work) compared with a figure of 13.9% among non-science students. The latter only partly made up for it through private study where around 55%, slightly more than science students, spent 11 hours or more. Perhaps not unexpectedly, non-science students were a little more likely to spend time on their wider reading and science students were a little more likely to spend time discussing their courses with their fellow students, presumably in labs.

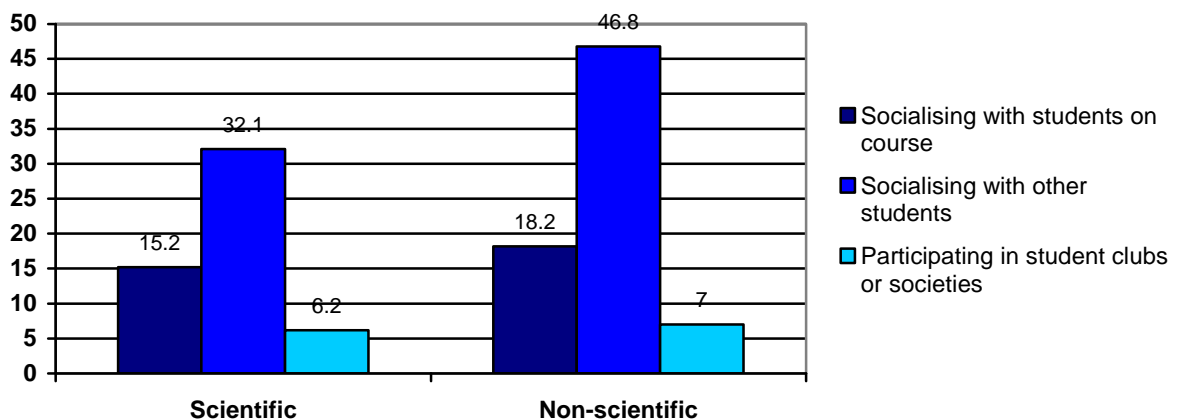
The reduced time in formal teaching enabled non-science students to spend rather more time socialising with students from other courses, about 45% spending over 11 hours each week compared with around 30% of science students. However, it is interesting to note that the preference for socialising beyond (rather than within) the course was common to both science and non-science students.

There were not major differences in how time was spent outside university. Around 50% of non-science students and 40% of science students were able to devote more than 11 hours per week on leisure activities such as watching television or reading books for pleasure. Non-science students were a little more likely to spend significant amounts of time in paid employment whereas science students were a little more likely to spend time on household tasks and childcare (a little surprising given the assumed gender distribution between science and non-science students).

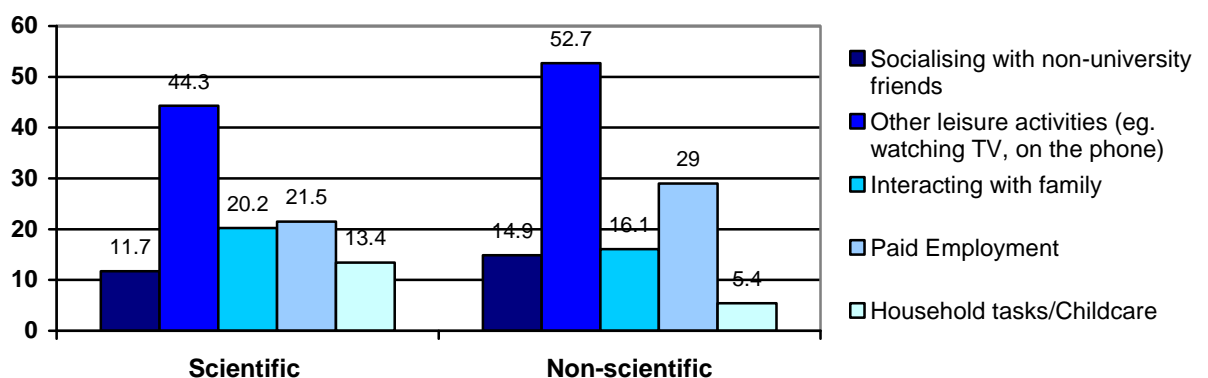
**Figure 15: Subject differences in how academic time was spent: students spending 11 hours or more per week (%)**



**Figure 16: Subject differences in how university social time was spent: students spending 11 hours or more per week (%)**



**Figure 17: Subject differences in how non-university time was spent: students spending 11 hours or more per week (%)**



### 3.4 Institutional, subject and individual differences

As we have already noted, aggregate data on how students spend their time inevitably disguises much of the diversity which is a characteristic of UK and other higher education systems. To illustrate the point, below we look at some of the differences between institutions in the way in which different subjects are experienced. What is also clear is that individual students on a particular course at a particular institution also differ in their time commitments. Thus, if 50% of students are spending over ten hours a week in lectures, it follows that 50% are not. It is a common experience among higher education teachers that their lecture rooms are not always full! Some of the variations found in the way time was spent by students in seven different subject fields are described below.

#### *Biology*

At one pre-92 university, over 50% of the students reported that they were spending eleven hours a week or more attending lectures and other formal teaching occasions. Yet at a broadly similar pre-92 university, only 4% of the students appeared to be committing this amount of time. However, over half of the students at both institutions reported that they were spending between 11 and 21 hours a week on course work or other forms of private study. Nor was there any difference between the two universities in the time spent on wider reading relevant to the course.

#### *Computing*

Comparing the students at a Russell Group university with the students at a post-92 university, 37% of the former students and 89% of the latter students reported that they were spending eleven hours a week or more in lectures or similar teaching situations. However, in course work and private study the institutional positions were reversed with the pre-92 university students the more likely to be devoting substantial time (54% spending over 10 hours against 30% at the post-92 university). The students at the pre-92 university also spent more time on wider reading related to the course.

#### *Mathematics*

Rather a lot of maths students' time was spent in formal teaching situations, with percentages spending over 10 hours varying from 53% (at one Russell Group university) to 91% (at another nearby Russell Group university). Time spent on course work at these same two institutions was pretty similar at 50% and 54% spending over 10 hours. At a third Russell Group university, however, this figure was 29%.

#### *Geography*

As far as geography was concerned, overall, 14% of students spent over 10 hours per week in formal teaching situations but this disguised a range from a low of 5% in one Russell Group university to a high of 22% at another nearby Russell Group university. Two other universities, one pre- and the other post-92, were between the two. Looking at course work, over 65% spent more than 10 hours per week with an institutional range of 78% (Russell Group) to 43% (post-92). Looking at the other end of the spectrum, it was also a Russell Group university where 57% of the students spent 5 hours or less on lectures and a different Russell Group university where 24% of students spent 5 hours or less on course work.

#### *History*

Only 17% of history students spent more than 10 hours a week in formal teaching situations and in most of the institutions, no students spent this much time. The exception was one Russell Group university where 36% of students reported this amount of teaching time. However, this same institution was the place where students spent less time on their course

work (52% spending 10 hours or more compared with 63% across the six institutions offering this subject).

### *Business studies*

Of three universities offering business studies, the proportions spending over 10 hours a week on formal teaching varied from a high of 41% at one Russell Group university to a low of 17% at a post-92 university with the third university, pre-92, reporting 25% spending this sort of time. However, when turning to coursework, it was the Russell Group university which reported the lowest figure with 33% devoting over 10 hours per week and both of the other universities reporting 49% spending this amount of time.

### *Sociology*

Not much time was spent in formal teaching among sociology students with only 4% spending over 10 hours. 40% spent five or less. The highest figure of 11% was at a large post-92 university. In course work, 48% overall spent over 10 hours. This disguised a range from 29% at the post-92 university to a high of 56% at a Russell Group university.

## **3.5 Diversity in the UK student experience**

The SOMUL project attempted to gauge the effects of the increasing diversity of the student experience in UK higher education arising from both a greater diversity of students (backgrounds and conditions for study) and of institutional contexts for their studies. The project's four main findings are repeated here<sup>7</sup>:

- Although contexts for learning differ within an increasingly diverse higher education system, there are important commonalities in the outcomes of learning.
- Students differ in their engagement with higher education, with their subject, with university life and with life outside university.
- Students often seem to assign more importance to the personal and social dimensions of change than to the academic.
- In attempting to cope with increasing student diversity, certain institutions are effectively running 'parallel universities' for different types of student.

In the light of these findings, too much significance should not be attached to hours devoted to study in isolation from the wider context and conditions of those studies. The SOMUL project describes three main types of context for study within UK higher education (and arguably elsewhere). In 'Type A' contexts, a diverse group of students comes together to share a largely common experience. In 'Type B' contexts, broadly similar kinds of students come together to share a largely common experience. And in 'Type C' contexts, students have only limited contact with other students and have largely diverse experiences depending on what is happening in the other aspects of their lives. While there is some relationship between these 'types' and hours spent studying, they are by no means great nor predictable. Type C students, for example, appear to sacrifice the social or non-academic side of university life rather than their studies in balancing higher education with their other commitments. And the SOMUL project also finds important commonalities in the outcomes of learning at university, irrespective of the contexts and conditions of study.

In summary, it is safe to conclude that the experience of higher education for UK students is increasingly diverse but that the contours of this diversity are hardly captured by differences in study hours.

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<sup>7</sup> For discussion of these findings, see the TLRP Research Briefing referred to in note 6.

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1 Increasing diversity

Trends towards greater convergence in the character of higher education systems in different countries have not, as yet, removed the considerable differences which exist in national traditions and their implications for the student experience, either in the amount of time that students spend studying or in how that time is spent. Nor have they removed differences in the outcomes of study. However, what is also apparent is the increasing diversity of the student experience, both within and between national borders. This report has described some of the differences to be found in the student experience between the UK and some other European countries. It has also looked at some of the diversity to be found in the student experience within UK higher education.

Concerning the former, there is evidence to support the view that UK students do indeed spend fewer hours each week on their studies (broadly defined) than do students in other European countries. At the same time, there is some evidence that a higher proportion of UK students than elsewhere believe that they are doing *more* than their universities actually require of them. There are not major differences between countries in how students spend this time (mainly in lectures/classes and on written assignments) although UK students appear to rely somewhat less on their teachers than is common in other countries.

### 4.2 Do differences matter?

We have provided some evidence that there is a relationship between time spent on university studies and successful learning outcomes from those studies, though the relationship is not a particularly strong one. There is, however, a much stronger relationship between hours devoted to study and the benefits graduates perceive from their higher education in terms of factors such as preparedness for work, career prospects and the individual's own personal development.

There is also some evidence from the recent set of reports for HEFCE on graduate employment across Europe<sup>8</sup> that UK graduates feel less well-prepared than graduates from other European countries for entry to work after they have left higher education. But many factors may be responsible for this – the length of degree courses, the age of the graduates, the much higher incidence of work placements and internships in continental Europe – and too much should not be attributed to the relatively small differences between countries in hours devoted to study.

The student experience is not 'just about' study, especially within the UK with its traditions of a residential experience and emphasis on breadth and personal development. The perceived impact of higher education on the personal development of the individual is strongly emphasised by graduates in all European countries for which we have data. But it is a particularly strong emphasis among UK graduates. And it is something which appears to be strongly related to the hours devoted to study.

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<sup>8</sup> The Flexible Professional in the Knowledge Society (REFLEX) – new demands on higher education in Europe, HEFCE research and evaluation reports, 2008.



Yet, within the UK and elsewhere, there is growing diversity in the student experience of higher education. For many students in the UK, the student experience is now almost entirely about academic study. But these are often older students living at home and with much life experience behind them and who may be looking for other things out of their higher education. The traditional residential experience of an English university education might be quite unsuited to the needs of such students. Difference is not necessarily deficit and, as we have also pointed out, there are also considerable commonalities in the experiences of students across UK higher education's increasingly diversified landscape.

There are undoubted differences to be found in both the extent and the nature of the engagement of students with their studies in higher education. These are differences between individuals, but also to some extent differences related to the subjects studied and to the kinds of institutions attended. Differences in engagement will produce differences in experiences which in turn may produce differences in outcomes.

One interesting question is the extent to which differences in experience and engagement are largely a reflection of differences in the motivations and life circumstances of students or whether they reflect rather differences in the demands and requirements which universities make on them. When we find that 'fewer hours are spent in lectures', we really need to know whether that reflects the existence of fewer lectures or higher rates of non-attendance at lectures. And there are important related questions to be asked about how universities respond to different motivations and levels of engagement amongst their students.

### **4.3 Limitations and some further questions**

The data analysed for this report have been restricted mainly to European higher education and, although broader experiences have been drawn upon for the literature review in section 1 and some references made to data on Japanese students in section 2, wider comparisons have not been attempted. One interesting question, therefore, remains as to how far Anglo-Saxon traditions of higher education, which have been widely exported around the world, remain broadly similar to each other and how far they have diverged from their origins, following wider global or regional trends. Answers to such a question would have a bearing on whether the differences reported above between the UK and other European higher education systems simply reflect deep-rooted differences between Anglo-Saxon, Humboldtian and Napoleonic traditions or whether they reflect contemporary circumstances and policies (e.g. on student fees) of different European nation states. The forthcoming 'EUROSTUDENT IV' survey may help to answer this question.

The ESRC/TLRP SOMUL study referred to above pointed up a number of implications arising from the increasing diversity of the student experience. We repeat them here:

- reputational differences between universities may not always correspond to differences in 'what is learned';
- universities need to understand and take account of a range of student orientations and types of engagement;
- current policy priorities on knowledge, skills and employability may not be in tune with the priorities of many students;
- diversity requires universities to meet the different needs of very different types of students.

The greater diversity in the experience of higher education, both within and between national borders, brings with it some benefits for the higher education policy maker: the benefits of comparison, of learning from diversity – both in what to avoid as much as in what to emulate – and of improving our understanding of the connections between, and the consequences of, different types of diversity in the experiences and outcomes of higher education.

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## Abbreviations

CHEERS	Careers after Graduation - an European research study (CHEERS)
CHERI	Centre for Higher Education Research and Information
ERASMUS	European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
ESRC/TLRP	Economic and Social Research Council/Teaching and Learning Research Programme
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEPI	Higher Education Policy Institute
NUS	National Union of Students
REFLEX	The Flexible Professional in the Knowledge Society (the REFLEX Project)
SOMUL	The Social and Organisational Mediation of University Learning

## Appendix

**Table A1: The relationship between hours of study and the outcomes of degree programmes**

*(Study programme was a good basis for... (% of responses 4 & 5): a comparison of graduates according to whether they had studied under or over 40 hours per week)*

### Under 40 hours

	EU	UK	IT	ES	FR	AT	DE	NL	FI	NO	CZ	CH
Starting work	35	38	52	40	33	27	38	34	35	16	36	37
Further learning on the job	39	43	50	43	31	48	47	33	27	43	36	37
Performing current work tasks	46	58	54	56	41	40	52	44	36	29	49	46
Future career	44	42	59	49	46	35	50	41	48	25	46	42
Personal development	30	29	37	36	34	33	28	27	23	23	32	37

### 40 hours and over

	EU	UK	IT	ES	FR	AT	DE	NL	FI	NO	CZ	CH
Starting work	65	62	48	60	67	73	62	66	65	84	64	63
Further learning on the job	61	57	50	57	69	62	53	67	73	57	64	63
Performing current work tasks	54	42	46	44	59	60	48	56	64	71	51	54
Future career	56	58	41	51	54	65	50	59	52	75	54	58
Personal development	70	71	63	64	66	77	72	73	76	77	68	63

**Table A2: Country differences in the outcomes of degree programmes**

*(Study programme was a good basis for... (% of responses 4 & 5))*

	EU	UK	IT	ES	FR	AT	DE	NL	FI	NO	CZ	CH
Starting work	58	48	48	54	50	63	54	59	61	80	61	61
Further learning on the job	59	48	52	53	57	56	49	63	71	72	61	61
Performing current work tasks	50	39	46	42	44	53	44	52	59	69	49	55
Future career	53	53	45	50	48	58	46	54	51	71	53	57
Personal development	69	72	67	63	64	77	73	70	65	74	67	68