



Research undertaken on behalf of the Higher Education Careers Services Unit

## Working Paper 2

# Job search strategies and employment preferences of higher education students

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## *Job search and motivations*

The first part of this paper looks at the *process* of searching for post-graduation employment. Firstly, the key issue of whether respondents had started searching for employment and whether their search had been successful is discussed. The point at which someone starts searching for employment is influenced by various factors, including the type of employment they are hoping to obtain. Traditional graduate employers, for example including the Civil Service and various financial institutions, tend to start recruiting early in the students' final year. Personal factors, including self-confidence and the wish to focus on academic work in the final year of HE are clearly also important.

Following this, the paper examines the *sources* final students used to look for post-graduation employment. The types of resources students use are related not only to the type of employment they are looking for, but also the availability of various job search resources. Although graduates are, as a group, highly skilled and qualified, there are variations in the types of cultural capital and information sources they have at their disposal, which makes different resources more or less accessible and useful in the job-search process.

The second part of this paper looks at the *motivations* respondents gave for looking for particular types of employment. These include the characteristics of the employer they hoped to work for, as well as the content of the job itself, and the locations where they were willing to work. Some groups face particular constraints due to family commitments and cost of living, which highlights the differential access experienced by different individuals in the final year student cohort.

### *Searching for employment*

The Futuretrack cohort approached graduation during a period of economic recession. The recession has inevitably had a different impact on the availability of different types of employment, but it is evident that the students themselves have reacted in different ways to developments in the graduate labour market. Some had clearly responded by undertaking an early, very intensive search for employment, while at the other extreme, some had postponed their employment search entirely, preferring to apply for further courses or to focus on their academic work. Additionally, some respondents can be seen to have taken a short-term satisficing strategy, looking for employment that is unrelated to their long-term career aims, including continuing in jobs they had started while in HE or before, possibly in the hope that opportunities in their preferred field of employment might improve in the future.

### *Timing of the job search*

Overall, just over half (50.6 per cent) of the Futuretrack final year cohort had started searching for employment at the time point when they completed the survey, in the second half of their final year. There were, however, clear differences based on the type of employment they were hoping to obtain, as well as their personal characteristics.

Looking first at the characteristics of the employment that respondents were interested in, students who had no plans to move to a different location in their medium-to-long term career were the least likely to have started looking for employment, with 46 per cent having

done so, and the likelihood that someone had started looking for employment increased as the scale at which they saw their career developing increased, although those who were expecting to work in or travel to other countries were slightly less likely to have started seeking employment (52 per cent) than those who expected to move within the UK in the medium-to-long term (53 per cent).

Those respondents who hoped to obtain a job that was unrelated to their course of study were much more likely to have started looking for work than either those who hoped to find a job related to their course of study or those who had no preference. A higher proportion of those who hoped to find a job not related to their course (57 per cent) had started searching for work, compared to 51 per cent of those who hoped to find employment related to their course subject, and 46 per cent of those who had no preference. Students hoping to find employment related to their course subject were more likely to have decided to undertake further training, while the low figure for those who have no preference may indicate that this group is undecided about the career plans in general and so have postponed their employment search until their ideas are clearer.

As well as aspirations to find a career related to their course subject, the course subject itself appeared to be related to whether a student had started looking for employment. As Table 1 shows, respondents studying more vocational subjects were more likely to have started looking for employment, although there were some anomalies in this, such as the comparatively low proportion of those studying subjects allied to Medicine who had started looking for employment. While the figure for this group was higher than average, a smaller proportion of those studying subjects allied to Medicine had begun seeking employment than those studying social studies and mass communication and documentation. It may be that this reflects the recruitment patterns of particular key employers in the healthcare or medical sciences fields.

**Table 1: Whether students had started searching for employment by subject**

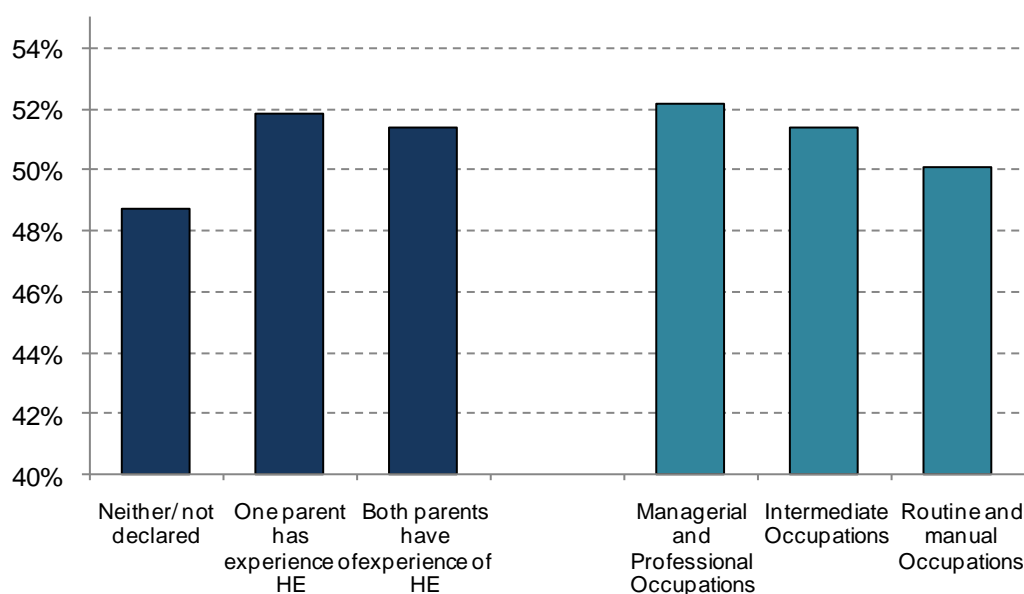
Broad subject group	Started searching for employment, including internships, excluding vacation work (%)
Business and Administration studies	66.9
Education	63.9
Engineering and Technologies	61.2
Architecture, Building and Planning	60.9
Law	57.1
Social Studies	54.6
Mass communication and Documentation	53.6
Subjects allied to Medicine	52.6
Physical Sciences	50.4
Interdisciplinary subjects	49.1
Mathematical & Computing Sciences	48.8
Biology, Veterinary Science, Agriculture and related subjects	46.2
Linguistics and Classics	44.8
Creative Arts and Design	41.2
Historical and Philosophical studies	40.5

*Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted)*

The type of institution at which respondents were studying appears to have little effect on the likelihood of them having sought work. Those at highest tariff universities were slightly more likely to have started looking for employment, despite previous stages of the Futuretrack survey showing that a lower proportion<sup>1</sup> of students at these universities were studying subjects that can be regarded as vocational and a higher proportion aspired to further study. However, they were more likely to have been applying for graduate traineeships with ‘traditional graduate employers’. It is also noticeable that students at the lower tariff universities were more likely than the students at medium tariff universities and specialist colleges to have started looking for employment, with 51 per cent having done so, compared to 53 per cent at highest tariff universities, 51 per cent at high tariff universities and 49 per cent at medium tariff universities and at specialist colleges. Those at general HE colleges were the least likely to have started looking for employment (42 per cent) but are a small sample that requires further analysis.

Personal characteristics also appeared to play a role. As Figure 1 shows, students coming from families with at least some experience of HE were more likely to have started looking for employment, as were those from higher socio-economic backgrounds. As will be seen later in this paper, the cultural and social capital of different types of students plays a clear role in determining how they approach the job search process, giving different types of students access to knowledge about how to search for jobs in particular professions and the social networks that aid recruitment, as well as shaping their long-term employment aspirations.

**Figure 1: Whether students had started searching for employment by parental experience of higher education and socio-economic background**



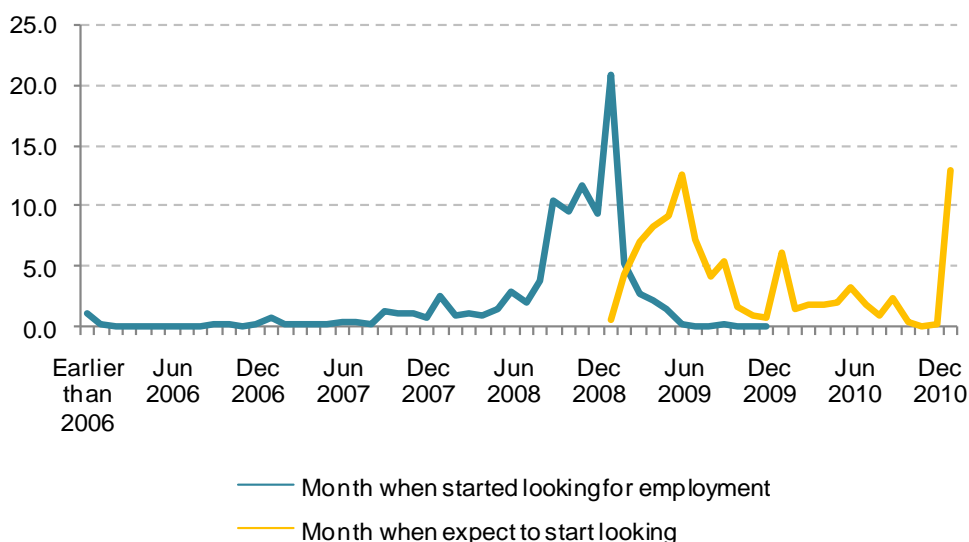
Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students who responded to both stages 1 and 3 (weighted).

<sup>1</sup> The extent to which they were looking for career-related employment is discussed below.

There was little difference in the likelihood that people in different age groups had started looking for employment, although those over 26 were slightly less likely than the other groups, with 47 per cent having done so. This is likely to reflect the particular make-up of this group, which contains respondents who are retired and have no plans to seek employment, as well as respondents who already have jobs and have no immediate aspirations to seek different employment. Similarly, there was no difference between the genders, with half of both men and women having started looking for employment. There was, however, some difference between the different ethnic groups. Black students appear to be significantly more likely than other ethnic groups to have started looking for employment. Fifty nine per cent of this group had begun searching for a job, including 71 per cent of the students with a Black-African background. Previous stages of the Futuretrack survey have shown that Black students are more likely to be studying subjects that they regard as vocational, which may account, in part, for this finding. Asian students were the least likely to have started searching for employment, with 48 per cent having done so, including just 45 per cent of students from a Bangladeshi background.

Respondents were asked when they had started searching for employment, or if they had not done so, when they expected to start. As Figure 2 shows, peak times primarily correspond with university vacation periods. There is some overlap between the lines which coincides with the time the survey was open. Those students who had started looking for employment prior to their final year were the most likely to have been offered a job, which will be discussed further later in this paper, but they are a small and very specific group of respondents. Other than the success of this group, there was no clear relationship between the time respondents started looking for work and whether they had been offered a job that they expected to accept.

**Figure 2: When students started looking for employment or when they expected to do so**

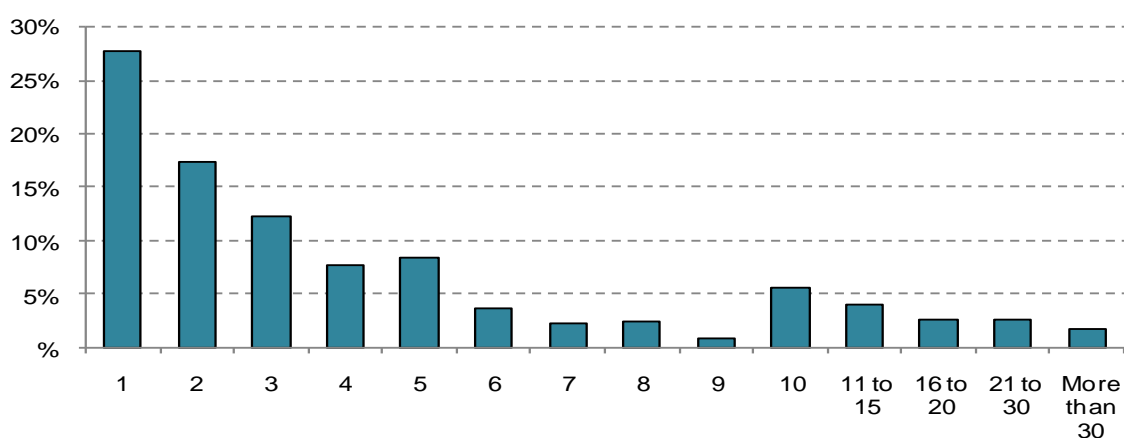


Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

## Applying for jobs

The respondents who had started looking for employment were asked whether they had applied for any jobs, either related to their long-term career plans or otherwise. Of those who had started looking for work, 51 per cent had applied for a job related to their long-term career plans and 18 per cent had applied for a job not related to their long-term career plans. Figure 3 shows the number of jobs related to their long-term career plans that students had applied for. There was no clear relationship between the number of jobs a respondent had applied for and their success in finding employment.

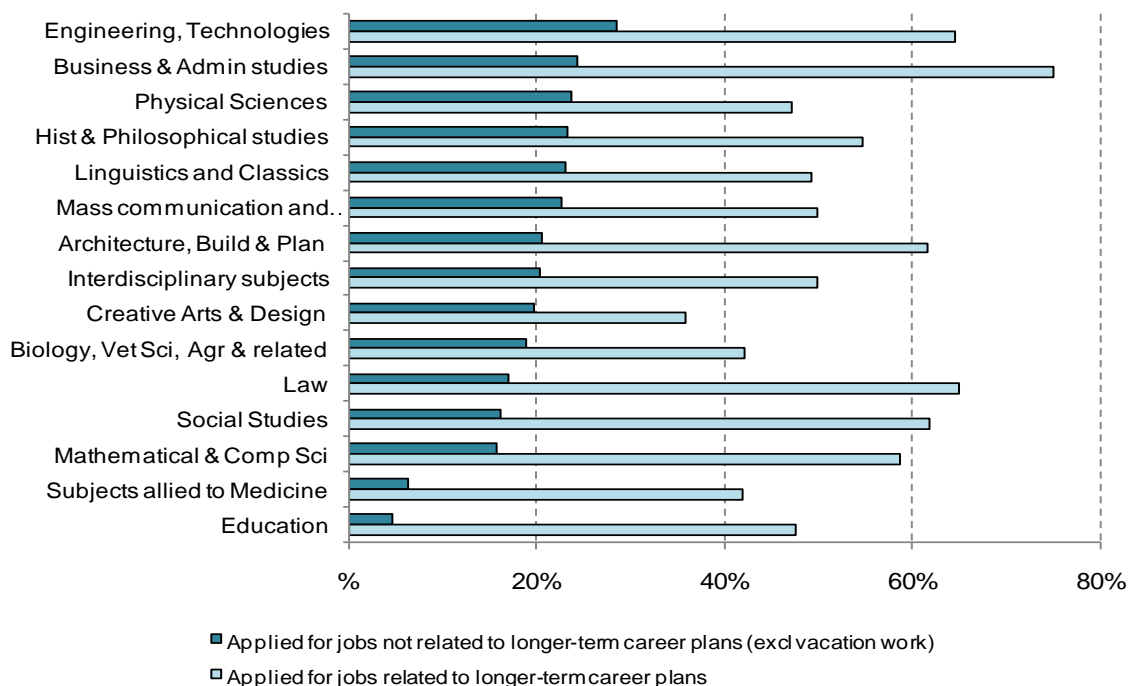
**Figure 3: Number of jobs related to long-term career plans that students who had started applying for jobs had applied for**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students who had applied for at least one job (weighted)

Figure 4 shows the proportion of students in each broad subject group who had applied for a job related to their long-term career plans and not related to their long-term career plans. Students studying Engineering and Technologies and Business and Administration Studies were the most likely to have applied for a job not related to their career plans, but they were also amongst the most likely, together with students studying Law, to have applied for a job related to the long-term career plans, suggesting that there is a higher propensity to apply for employment in general amongst these groups. Respondents studying Physical Sciences were amongst the most likely to have applied for employment not related to their long-term career plans, but were less likely than many other groups to have applied for employment related to their long-term career plans. Engineering and Technologies and the Physical Sciences are both subjects where a relatively large proportion of students study for degrees lasting for four years, and these students are not included in this data but were surveyed a year later, when they were in their final year. Consequently, those who are included in this data (those on three year degrees) may have quite a different profile to those who studied for four year degrees. The extent of the difference between these groups will be examined when composite data is produced.

**Figure 4: Whether students had applied for employment related to their long-term career plans and not related to their long-term career plans by broad subject group\*\***



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students who had started applying for jobs (weighted).

Students at the highest tariff universities (62 per cent) were the most likely to have started applying for jobs related to their long-term career plans, but unlike in the case of starting to look for employment, students at the high tariff universities (57 per cent) were more likely to have started applying for jobs than those at the lower tariff universities (47 per cent). Students at lower tariff universities were more likely than those at medium tariff universities (44 per cent) to have made at least one application for employment related to their long-term career plans. The percentages were not significantly different among types of HEI of those who had applied for jobs that were not related to their long-term career.

Younger students were more likely than older ones to have applied for jobs that were not related to their long-term career plans, with 20 per cent of those who were 18 or under when they entered HE having applied for a job that was not related to their long-term career plans, compared to 19 per cent of those aged 19 to 20, 17 per cent of those aged 21 to 25, and nine per cent of those aged over 26. The picture was much less clear when looking at applications for jobs related to long-term career plans. The group most likely to have applied for a job related to their long term career plans was those aged 21 to 25 (55 per cent), followed by those aged 18 and under (53 per cent), those aged 19 to 20 (50 per cent), and finally those aged 26 and over (47 per cent).

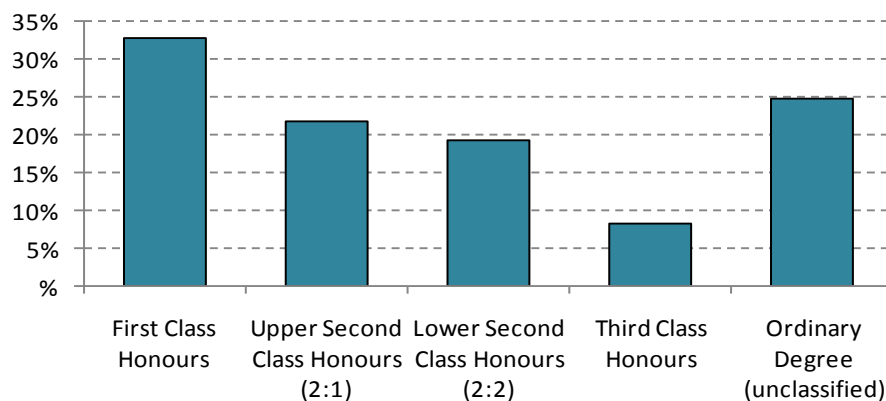
Male students, while no more likely to have started looking for employment than female students, were more likely to have actually applied for a job. Fifty-six per cent of male students had applied for a job related to their long-term career aims and 20 per cent had applied for a job not related to their long-term career aims, while the figures for female students were 48 per cent and 16 per cent respectively.

## Job offers

Respondents who had started applying for jobs were asked whether they had been offered a job that they had accepted or planned to accept. Overall, 23 per cent of respondents who had applied for at least one job related to their long-term career plans had been offered a job they had accepted or planned to accept.

While Archer and Davison (2008:8) found that a good degree classification was considered more important by employers than the reputation of the university itself, in their study of graduates in the Netherlands, van der Klaauw and van Vuuren (2010) found that labour market returns on good academic performance were low, and that those students who focussed on academic work and achieving high marks in preference to seeking employment were not particularly more successful in finding employment. Amongst the Futuretrack cohort, there does appear to be some advantage from expecting to achieve higher grades, in particular expecting to get a first class honours degree, as Figure 5 shows. The proportion of students expecting to get a first class degree who had been offered a job related to their long-term career plans was more than 10 per cent higher than the proportion of those who expected to achieve a 2:1 or 2:2. The group of students expecting to receive an ordinary degree (unclassified) are primarily students at Scottish universities, where this is a recognised route to take rather than remain at university for a 4<sup>th</sup> 'Honours' year.

**Figure 5: Whether students who had started applying for jobs related to their long-term career plans had been offered a job by the class of degree they expected to obtain**



*Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students who had started applying for jobs (weighted).*

Students reporting that both their parents had experience of HE appear to be more successful than students who had only one parent with experience of HE and those who had not indicated whether their parents had HE experience or whose parents had no experience of HE. Although all three groups were approximately as likely to have applied for employment related to their long-term career plans, 28 per cent of respondents whose parents both had experience of HE had been offered a job they had accepted or planned to accept, compared to 21 per cent of students who had one parent with experience of HE and 20 per cent of students whose parents had no experience of HE. This may reflect access to

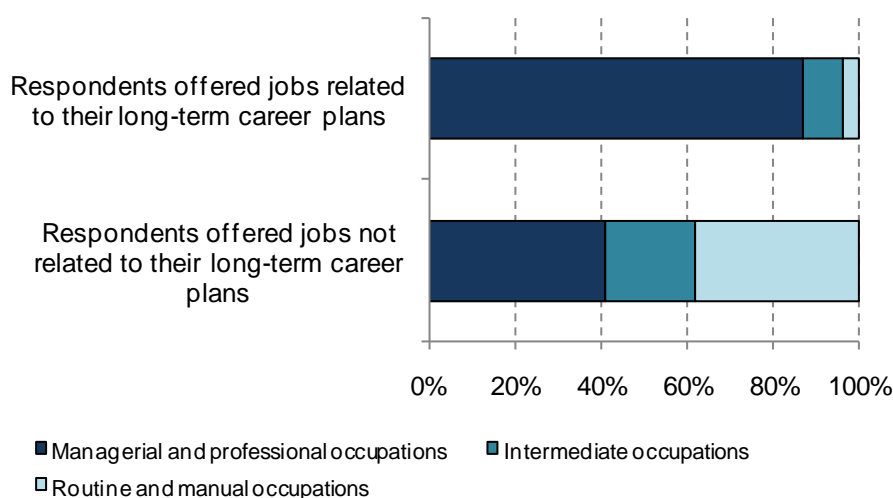


networks or simply better knowledge of the graduate labour market. Students from higher socio-economic backgrounds were also more likely to have been offered a job related to their long-term career plans, although the difference between the groups was not as marked, with 24 per cent of students from a managerial or professional background having been offered a job related to their long-term career plans, compared to 21 per cent of students from an intermediate occupational background, and 19 per cent of students from a routine and manual background, which suggests that, as at previous stages of the research, although there is a clear overlap between parental HE participation and high socio-economic background, parental experience of HE is the more significant element of the equation.

Figure 6 shows the socio-economic classifications of the jobs students had been offered related to their long-term career aspirations and not related to their long-term career aspirations. As is shown, the students who had been offered jobs related to their long-term career plans had predominantly been offered employment in managerial and professional occupations (87 per cent). These types of occupations are most likely to have started recruiting early in student’s final year, so this impressive early distribution is unlikely to reflect the final distributions.

A substantial minority of students who had been offered employment not related to their long-term career plans been offered employment in routine and manual occupations, but it is interesting that over 40 per cent of the jobs they had been offered were professional and managerial occupations and over 21 per cent in intermediate occupations. In some cases, these jobs will be ones that they were employed in while they were in HE, and which they plan to continue while seeking employment that is more relevant to their long-term aspirations. It is likely that many of the students who have been offered jobs not related to their long-term career plans see these jobs as short-term solutions to the need to find employment to earn money or gain general experience.

**Figure 6: Socio-economic categories of the jobs students had been offered comparing those related to long-term career plans and those not related to long-term career plans**

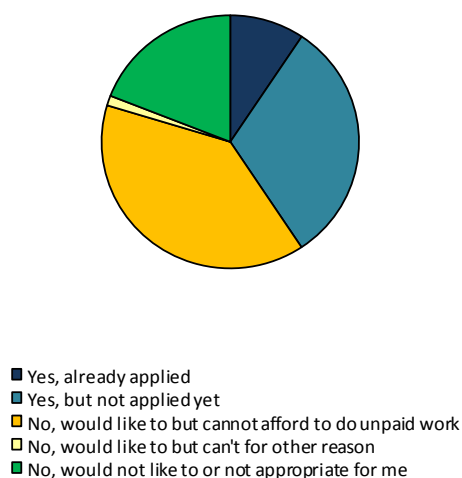


Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students who had been offered employment that they had accepted or expected to accept (weighted).

### Unpaid work and internships after graduation

In addition to asking whether respondents had looked for paid employment, a question was also asked about whether respondents had applied or would consider applying for any unpaid jobs or graduate internships to obtain experience related to their long-term career plans. This type of experience is becoming increasingly important in determining entry to a growing range of professions, including in the arts, media and publishing (Cabinet Office, 2010). As Figure 7 shows, more than three quarters of respondents would like to do this kind of job or internship, but 38 per cent said that they could not.

**Figure 7: Whether respondents had applied or would consider applying for any unpaid jobs or graduate internships to obtain experience related to their long-term career plans**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

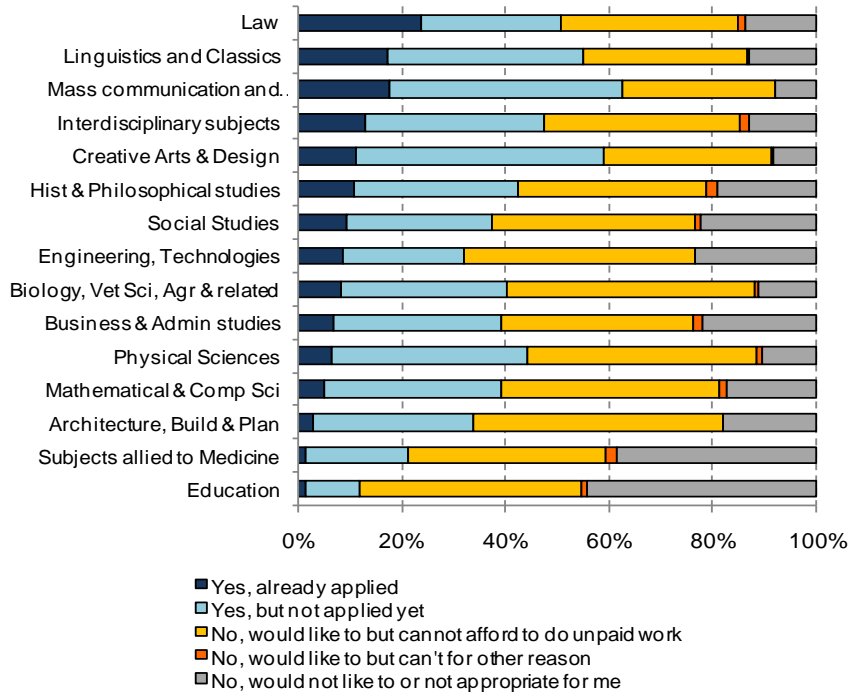
Despite financial reasons being an important barrier for many students, socio-economic background appears to have little effect on the likelihood of applying for unpaid jobs or internships. Forty-one per cent of students from a professional or higher managerial background said they had applied or planned to apply for an unpaid job or internship, and 37 per cent said they would like to but could not afford to, while 42 per cent of students from an intermediate occupational background and 38 per cent of students from a routine or manual occupational background said they had or would apply and 39 and 40 per cent respectively said they would like to but could not afford to.

There were clear differences by gender, subject studied and type of HEI. Female students were more likely than male students to say that they would like to do an unpaid job or internship, but were unable to afford to, with 40 per cent giving this response compared to 35 per cent of male students.

As Figure 8 shows, respondents studying arts subjects, particularly Mass Communications and Documentation and Creative Arts and Design, were the most likely to say that they had, or were planning to, apply for this kind of employment. This is likely to reflect the types of industry students of these subjects expect to work in and the prevalence and importance of unpaid internships in these areas. Additionally, students who had not done work placements

as part of their course were more likely to say that they planned to do unpaid work or an internship to gain experience after they graduated.

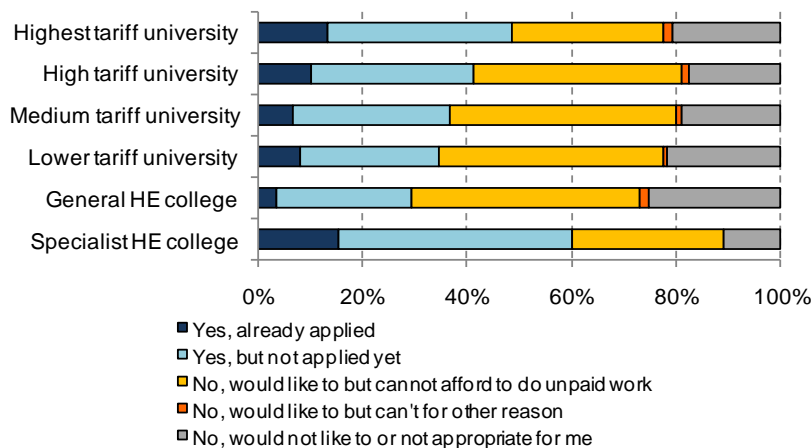
**Figure 8: Whether respondents had applied or would consider applying for any unpaid jobs or graduate internships to obtain experience related to their long-term career plans by broad subject group**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

Students at specialist colleges were the most likely to say that they had or would apply for unpaid employment or an internship, followed by students at the highest tariff universities, which is likely to reflect the types of subjects taught at these HEIs.

**Figure 9: Whether respondents had applied or would consider applying for any unpaid jobs or graduate internships to obtain experience related to their long-term career plans by type of HEI**

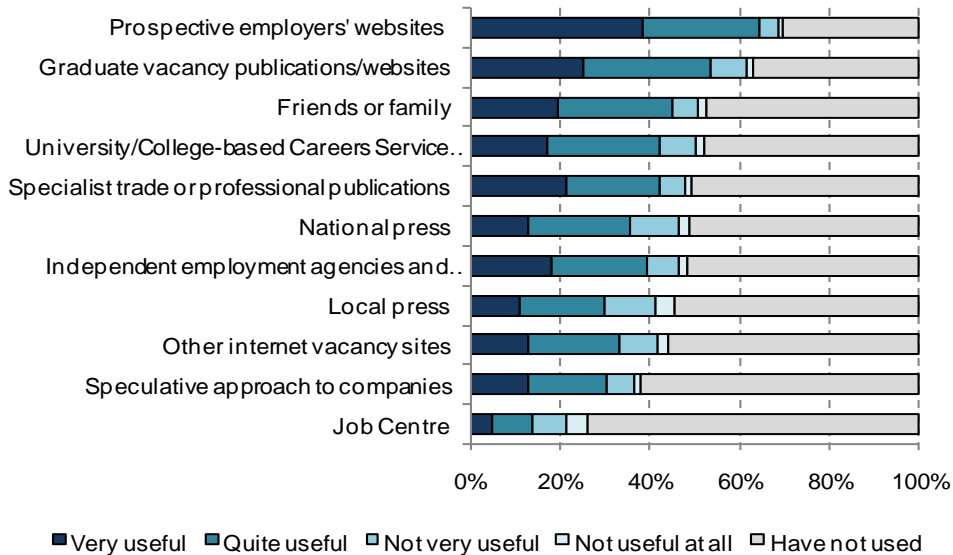


Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

## Sources of employment

Students who had started searching for employment were asked what sources they had used to do so, and how useful those sources were. Figure 10 shows their responses.

**Figure 10: Sources students used to look for future employment, and how useful they found them**



Source: *Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students who had started looking for employment (weighted)*.

NB: The 'prospective employers' websites' option was missing from the generic survey. Only respondents who replied to the main survey are included in this.

Try (2005) found that graduates were much more likely to use formal methods of job searching, such as responding to advertisements or using employment services, rather than informal methods, such as contacting employers or asking friends or family, and Mau and Kopischke (2001) found that highly skilled and educated workers were unlikely to have found their first job through informal methods. Conversely, amongst the Futuretrack cohort, friends and family were the third most commonly-used source used for looking for future employment and the fourth most likely to have been rated by respondents as 'very useful'. Some formal sources, such as using the Job Centre were used relatively infrequently, and were least often regarded as having been useful. Thomas (1997) and Gregg and Wadsworth (1996) found that people looking for employment tended to use these types of employment service only after other methods had proved to be unsuccessful, often after being unemployed, and although these studies were undertaken some time ago, this aspect of the public employment service as predominantly to serve the low-skilled and socially excluded has been, if anything, amplified. More recent research (e.g. Try 2005) characterises job seeking through these agencies as time-consuming. It is notable in the Futuretrack sample that the most commonly used sources are those that can be accessed relatively easily, either on the internet, in the case of employers' websites and graduate vacancy publications or are sources that are immediately available to students, such as their university or college careers service and speaking to family and friends. Use of the internet as a job search strategy is becoming increasingly common.

Although authors such as Huffman and Torres (2001) and Straits (1998) found that women were more likely than men to use informal job search strategies, in the Futuretrack cohort, men were more likely than women to have used family and friends as a job seeking resource. This reflects an overall pattern of male students using more job seeking resources than women, but may also reflect gendered subject clustering. The local press was the only resource that was much more likely to have been used by women than men (49 per cent compared to 41 per cent), and women were slightly more likely than men to have used the Job Centre and independent employment agencies, which suggests that women are seeking work at a more local level than men, but a more targeted job seeking approach is also evident amongst female students. With the exception of friends and family, female students were more likely than male students to rate the job seeking resources they had used as 'very useful' or 'quite useful'.

Subject studied, as well as the type of job a student is looking for, had an impact on the type of resources they use to look for employment. Table 2 shows which resources were particularly more or less likely to be used by students studying different subjects. The first two columns show simply which groups were most and least likely to have used each resource, while the second two columns are based on the percentage of those who used the source who said it had been 'very useful' or 'quite useful'. As the Table shows, there is generally some congruence between how frequently a resource was used by students in a particular subject group and how useful they found the resource, which suggests that students have a good idea about the best sources of employment for students in their subject.

Students in the Engineering and Technologies group are the only group that in several cases are amongst the groups that are likely to use a resource but also likely to rate it as not very useful, but this group of student is very diverse and a significant proportion are studying four year courses and so patterns in their job-seeking resource use may become clearer after the students on four year courses are surveyed and the cohort enters employment.

In only one case, Education students using friends and family as a job-seeking source, was a resource that was infrequently used but found by those who had used it to be very useful. This is likely to reflect the specialist nature of job searching in education. Those students who have people with experience in the education sector within their social network are likely to find them very useful, whereas people without experience of job-seeking in the education sector are likely to prove much less useful.

**Table 2: Subject groups with the highest and lowest proportions of students who had begun looking for employment who had used each job seeking source, and the subject groups with the highest and lowest proportions of those who had used each source who found it very or quite useful**

	<b>Most likely to have used</b>	<b>Least likely to have used</b>	<b>Most likely to have found useful</b>	<b>Least likely to have found useful</b>
University/College-based Careers Service or their website	Physical Sciences, Maths & Comp, Law, History & Phil, Bus & Admin, Ling & Classics	Allied to Medicine, Arts & Design, Education	Maths & Comp, Business & Admin	Engine & Tech, Arch, Build & Plan, Mass Comm, Arts & Design
Graduate vacancy publications/website	Physical Sciences, Maths & Comp, Law, Business & Admin, Ling & Classic	Allied to Medicine, Arts & Design, Education	Maths & Comp, Law, Business & Admin	Engine & Tech, Arch, Build & Plan, Arts & Design
National press	Mass Comm, Education	Allied to Medicine	Social Studies, Education	Physical Sciences, Maths & Comp, Engine & Tech
Local press	Education	-	Bio, Vet, & Agric, Arch, Build & Plan, Social Studies, Education	Physical Sciences, Maths & Comp, Engine & Tech, Business & Admin, History & Phil, Arts & Design
Specialist trade or professional publications	Allied to Medicine, Engine & Tech, Arch, Build & Plan, Education	Maths & Comp, Business & Admin, Ling & Classics, History & Phil	Allied to Medicine, Law, Education	Engine & Tech, Mass Comm, History & Phil
Job Centre	Engine & Tech		Bio, Vet & Agric, Maths & Comp, Social Studies	Physical Sciences, Arch, Build & Plan, Business & Admin, Arts & Design
Independent employment agencies and their websites	Engine & Tech, Mass Comm		Social Studies, Education	Engine & Tech, Arch, Build, & Plan, Business & Admin
Other internet vacancy sites	Maths & Comp, Engine & Tech, Business & Admin, Mass Comm	Allied to Medicine, Education	Social Studies, Mass Comm	History & Phil
Speculative approach to companies	Engine & Tech, Arch, Build, & Plan, Law, Business & Admin, Arts & Design	Allied to Medicine, Education	Allied to Medicine	Maths & Comp, Engine & Tech, Law, History & Phil, Education
Prospective employers' websites	Engine & Tech, Arch, Build, & Plan, Law, Business & Admin	Mass Comm, Education		Engine & Tech
Friends or family	Maths & Comp Arch, Build, & Plan, History & Phil	Allied to Medicine, Education	Education	Engine & Tech, Arch, Build & Plan, Mass Comm

*Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students who had started looking for employment (weighted).*

At this stage, it is difficult to gauge which sources are most likely lead to suitable employment. Most students had used several resources to look for employment, and as mentioned above, the proportion who had been offered employment was, at this stage,

relatively low. It appears that students who had been offered employment used a wider range of sources compared to those who had started applying but had not yet been offered a job, but this may simply reflect the fact that these students have been searching much more intensively for employment and have spent more time doing so. Students who had been offered a job were much more likely to say that they had used prospective employers' websites, speculative approaches to companies, specialist trade or professional publications and the Job Centre, whereas students who had started applying for jobs but had not been offered a job were more likely to have used graduate vacancy publications or websites and their university or college careers service. This suggests that a targeted, active approach is more effective than a more generalist approach.

### *Motivations and important job characteristics*

Students have various reasons for choosing different types of employment. This section looks at some of these motivations. Firstly, the attributes associated with selecting a particular job or employer are examined, followed by the type of work students hoped to do and whether this was related to the subject of their degree, and finally the locations in which respondents were considering seeking employment.

### *Job attributes*

Respondents were given a list of attributes and asked to rate these attributes on a scale of '1' to '7' with '1' being an attribute that was very important and '7' being an attribute that was not important at all. Respondents could give the same ranking to different attributes. Figure 11 shows the mean score for each attribute.

**Figure 11: Mean score on a scale of '1' to '7' for each job attribute, with '1' meaning most important and '7' least important**



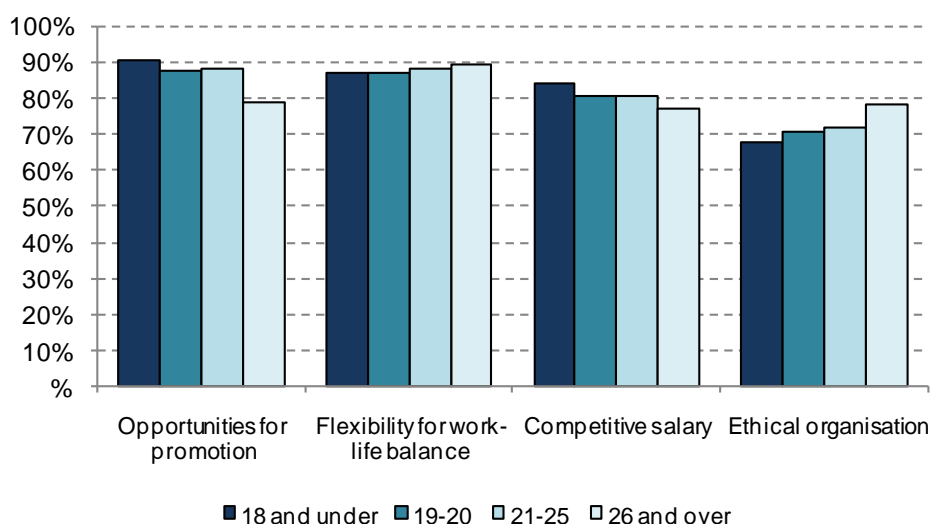
Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

In addition to having lowest average score, in other words, being the most important attribute final year students looked for in a job, opportunities for promotion was the attribute that was most likely to receive a rating of '1' on the seven point scale. Thirty five per cent of

respondents rated it as very important, followed by flexibility for work-life balance, long-term security and opportunities for further training which were all rated as '1' by 28 per cent of respondents. Socially useful work (24 per cent) was more likely to be rated as very important than a competitive salary (23 per cent), although competitive salary had a slightly higher mean score. It is interesting that 'opportunities for an international career' was rated as less important on average by the UK domiciled students than intrinsic organisational and job qualities, given the relatively high proportions of students who anticipated that their longer-term careers would be in international labour markets.

Age, gender, type of HEI and subject studied were all associated with a preference for different job attributes. Figure 12 shows the proportion of respondents who rated selected attributes '1' to '3' on the seven point scale – that is, those who rated the attribute as being important.

**Figure 12: Proportion of respondents rating selected job attributes between '1' and '3' by age**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

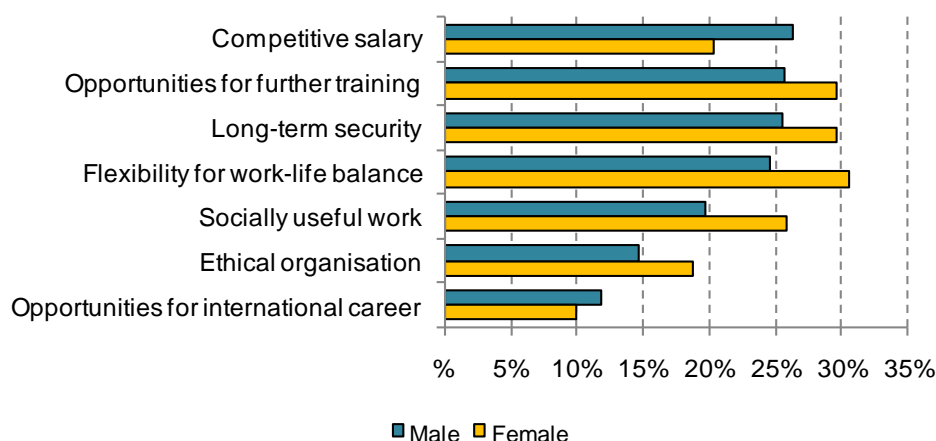
As the Figure shows, for the selected attributes, age had an impact. The importance of opportunities for promotion and a competitive salary decreased with age, while the importance of flexibility for work-life balance and working for an ethical organisation increased. Some respondents appeared to contrast attributes associated with personally fulfilling work with those associated with earning a competitive salary:

*'I'm not particularly interested in any other subjects. Some graduate jobs are quite strange. I have no idea what a "support consultant" is or what it involves and the job descriptions can be baffling and sound very dull indeed. I like being out in the field with some nice rocks and glaciers; much more exciting and mentally stimulating. I was in a hotel in London once and I overheard one suit-wearing chap say to another: "I feel we need to restructure the demographics of that department." Good grief! I was about 12 years old and I scowled at them and thought "What a pair of prats". I have no desire to push the envelope, no matter how much I would be paid to do so. I like glaciers.'*  
 [Female physical sciences student at a high tariff university]



Figure 13 shows the differences between male and female respondents in terms of the attributes they found most important. Female respondents overall gave more attributes a rating of '1', but as the Figure shows, a competitive salary and opportunities for an international career were more likely to be rated as very important by men than women. This all echoes previous findings among recent graduates in early career surveys.

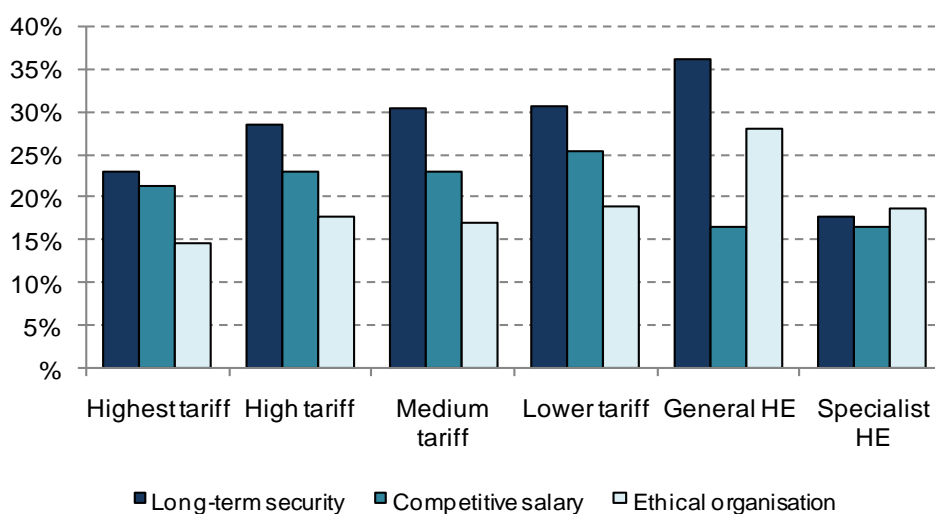
**Figure 13: Proportion of respondents rating selected job attributes as '1' – very important by gender**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

Figure 14 shows the importance of selected job attributes for students at different types of HEI. As can be seen, as tariff points for entry fell between the highest and lowest tariff universities, the proportion of students rating each attribute as very important increased, with the importance of long-term security, a competitive salary and working for an ethical organisation showing a particularly clear increase.

**Figure 14: Proportion of respondents rating selected job attributes as '1' – very important by type of HEI**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

The students at the general HE colleges do not follow this pattern, being particularly likely to rate long-term security and working for an ethical organisation as very important, but not earning a competitive salary, but this is a very small group of students who were particularly likely to rate attributes as '1', with 30 per cent of the ratings given by students in this group being '1', so the statistic needs to be regarded with caution. The students at specialist HE colleges were notable in being the only group to rate working for an ethical organisation as more important than both long-term security and a competitive salary, and also because, in contrast to students at the general HE colleges, they were unlikely to rate attributes as '1', giving this rating in only 19 per cent of cases.

Table 3 shows the groups of students by subject who were particularly more or less likely to rank attributes as '1', that is very important to them, and '1' to '3', in other words as an attribute that was more important than average to them. There are no subjects listed under flexibility for work-life balance because the scores across the subjects were very similar for this category.

**Table 3: Subject groups that were most and least likely to rank job attributes as '1' and '1' to '3' on the seven point scale of importance**

	<b>Most likely to rank attribute 1</b>	<b>Most likely to rank attribute 1 to 3</b>	<b>Least likely to rank attribute 1</b>	<b>Least likely to rank attribute 1 to 3</b>
Competitive salary	Business & Admin, Law, Engine & Tech, Social Studies	Business & Admin, Law	Arts & Design	Arts & Design
Ethical organisation	Social Studies	Social Studies, Education, Allied to Medicine	Engine & Tech, Mass Comm., Maths & Comp, Business & Admin	Engine & Tech, Mass Comm, Maths & Comp
Flexibility for work-life balance	-	-	-	-
Long-term security	Education, Law, Allied to Medicine, Business & Admin, Engine & Tech	Education, Law, Allied to Medicine	Arch, Build & Plan, Arts & Design, Mass Comm., Physical Sciences	Arch, Build & Plan, Arts & Design
Opportunities for international career	Engine & Tech	Engine & Tech, Arch, Build & Plan, Business & Admin, Physical Sciences	Education, Maths & Comp ,	Education, Maths & Comp
Opportunities for further training	Bus & Admin , Allied to Medicine Engine & Tech,	Bus & Admin, Allied to Medicine	Arts & Design, History & Phil, Mass Comm, Maths & Comp	Arts & Design, History & Phil, Arch, Build & Plan, Engine & Tech
Opportunities for promotion	Business & Admin, Law	Business & Admin, Law	Arts & Design, Education, Maths & Comp	Arts & Design
Socially useful work	Social Studies, Allied to Medicine	Social Studies, Allied to Medicine, Bio, Vet & Agric	Mass Comm., Maths & Comp, Arch, Build & Plan, Business & Admin, Physical Sciences	Mass Comm, Maths & Comp, Engine & Tech

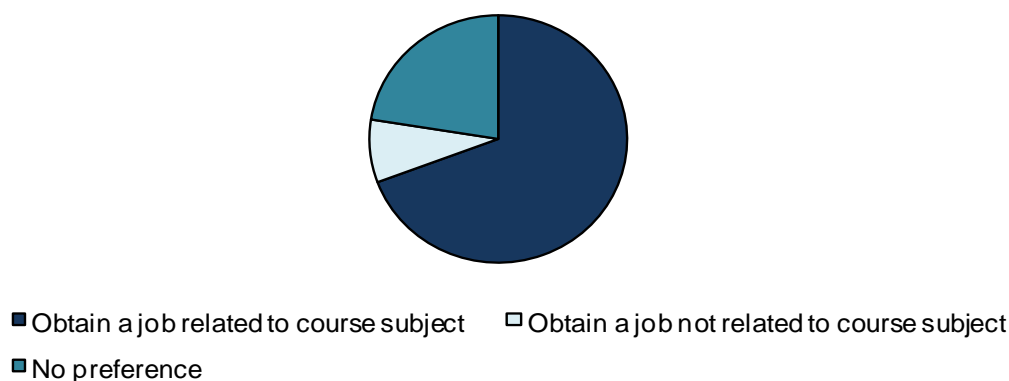
*Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).*

The students studying Engineering and Technologies again provide a slightly anomalous case, in that they were among the most likely to rate opportunities for further training as '1' on the seven point scale, but amongst the least likely to rate it between '1' and '3', which again illustrates the diversity within this group that will be investigated further when the students on four year courses are surveyed. These comparisons illustrate the patterned heterogeneity of the HE population, in terms of values as well as attributes and educational capital.

#### *Relationship between subject studied and job sought*

In addition to being asked what job attributes were important to them, respondents were asked whether, in the medium to long term, they hoped to obtain a job related to the subject of their course. As Figure 15 shows, overall more than two thirds of respondents hoped to obtain a job related to the subject they had studied, while just under a quarter said they had no preference and eight per cent said that they hoped to obtain a job not related to the subject of their course.

**Figure 15: Whether students hoped to obtain a job related to the subject of their course in the medium to long term**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

The most common reasons for wanting to obtain a job related to their course subject were enjoyment of the subject and feeling that having invested time and money studying a particular subject, it would be wasteful to now not use the knowledge and skills they had developed.

*'I had a career path in mind before I enrolled upon my course and it would seem relatively foolish to spend a substantial amount of money on a course that would have no bearing on my future.'*

[Male student studying Interdisciplinary subjects at a lower tariff university]

Amongst students who had decided that they did not want to pursue a career related to the subject they had studied, the reasons for their decision were more diverse, but the most common reason given was simply that they no longer enjoyed the subject.

*'I am sick of it now.'*

[Female student studying Physical Sciences at a highest tariff university]

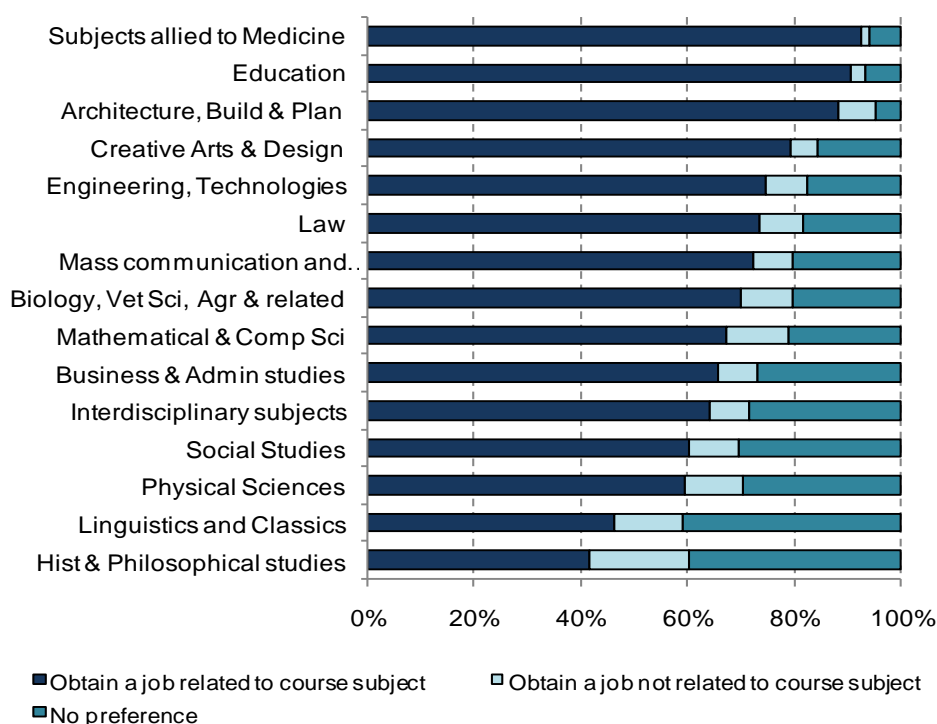
Other respondents had discovered or developed other interests. In some cases, this was a result of finding out more about the options open to them, whereas in other cases, respondents had simply decided that although they had enjoyed their course, their interests lay elsewhere.

*'I have become aware of options for employment which I intend to pursue since beginning my undergraduate degree yet decided to finish my course for the sake of it.'*  
[Male Social Studies student at a highest tariff university]

*'Although Mathematics is fascinating, Music (specifically recording/producing) is the hobby that takes up all of my free time, and doing that professionally is my dream job.'*  
[Male student studying Mathematical and computing sciences at a highest tariff university]

Whether students hoped to obtain a job related to the subject of their course was clearly related to the subject they had studied, as Figure 16 shows, with students doing more vocational courses being most likely to say they hoped to find a job related to the subject they had studied.

**Figure 16: Whether students hoped to obtain a job related to the subject of their course by broad subject group**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

Students who were studying more vocational subjects but who did not plan to find a job related to their subject in the medium to long term generally attributed this to making the wrong decision in choosing the subject in the first place, as the following quotes illustrate.

*'Since my reasons for having a career in law were initially all for the wrong reasons-only for financial gain. Having studied law for 3 years it has made me realise that although it is a stimulating degree, it is completely different when used in practice in a working*

*environment. Studying law is completely different to practice thus I am not keen to have a career in law.'*

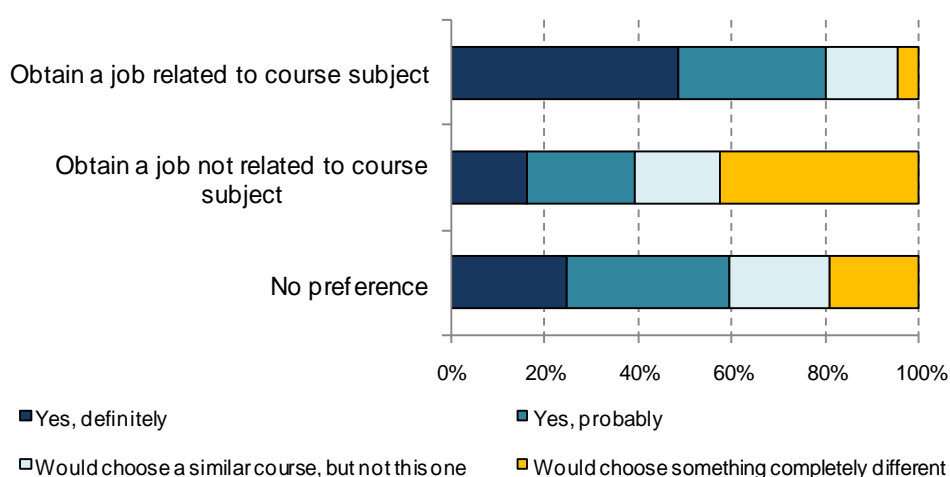
[Female Law student at a highest tariff university]

*'I only studied my course because it sounded interesting and because at Sixth Form we were told we had to pick a course. I do not intend to restrict myself to one particular area of work. I have also decided that I want to work outdoors with a practical skill, and my course does not allow me to do that.'*

[Male student studying a combination of subjects allied to Medicine at a medium tariff university]

This can also be seen in Figure 17, which shows that amongst those students who said they did not want to obtain a job related to their course subject, 40 per cent would choose to study something completely different if they were starting their course again. Interestingly, four per cent of students who said that they hoped to obtain a job related to their course subject would nonetheless study something completely different if they were starting their course again.

**Figure 17: Whether students would choose the same course again by whether, in the medium to long term, they hoped to obtain a job related to their course subject**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

Among students who were studying less vocational subjects, many respondents commented that they did not think that there were many jobs that were related to the subject of their course

*'Because the range of jobs directly related to an English degree is somewhat limited, and it is naive to think that is why I came to university to read for an Arts degree. My degree is not vocational.'*

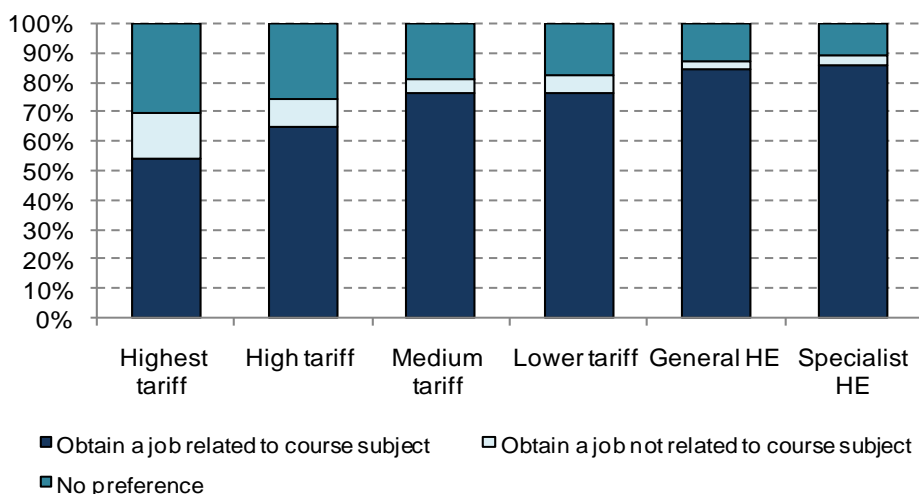
[Male student studying Linguistics and Classics at a highest tariff university]

*'being a philosopher is not really a job'*

[Female student studying Historical and Philosophical Studies at a highest tariff university]

Reflecting these differences across the broad subject groups, there were also clear differences between the students at different types of HEI, as Figure 18 shows.

**Figure 18: Whether students hoped to obtain a job related to the subject of their course by type of HEI**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

The highest tariff universities have a higher proportion of courses that are not regarded as vocational. Additionally, it may be that students at these types of HEI are more likely to go into more prestigious types of employment that are not associated with a particular course, as is discussed in the following quote by a student who was hoping to pursue a career related to the subject of his course:

*'Because I have spent three years developing a specialist vocabulary, knowledge, critical analysis abilities, and interest in politics. Plus, the normal destinations for [students from my university] with non-specialist degrees - financial sector, large corporations, law - are not as attractive now as they were two years ago (or, if they indeed ever were attractive). I would like to pursue a career that is exiting where I feel that I am able to learn new knowledge and techniques. A lot of jobs in the city (well, the few that are left) are more about being able to work late hours, wear a suit well and banter around the coffee machine, not my kind of career.'*  
 [Male social studies student at a highest tariff university]

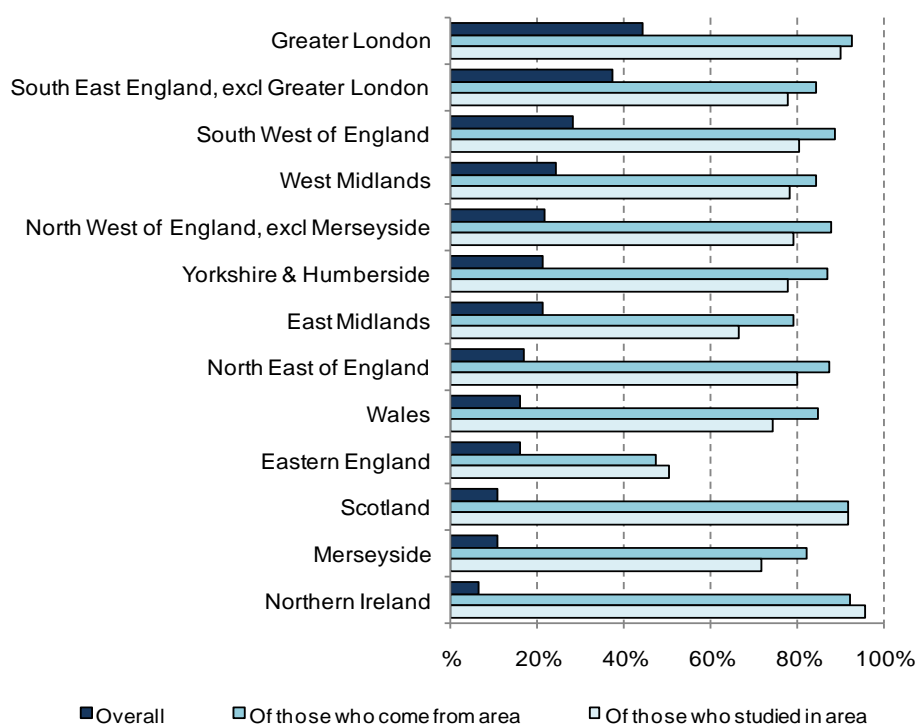
### Preferences about job location

Respondents were asked in which geographical areas they had applied or would consider applying for employment and why this was, with multiple responses possible. As Figure 19 shows, overall, the area that was mentioned by the largest proportion of respondents was Greater London. Forty four per cent of respondents said that they would consider applying for employment in this area. Despite this, both Northern Ireland and Scotland had a higher proportion of the students who studied in these areas saying that they would consider looking for employment in the area. Greater London has the largest proportion of students who were domiciled in the area before they entered HE saying that they would consider working in the area, but both Northern Ireland and Scotland scored highly on this measure as well. Until the actual destinations of graduates are known, it is not possible to say which areas are most likely to retain their students, but based on the evidence provided at this

stage, it would appear that the East Midlands and Eastern England may face a greater challenge in this respect.

Eastern England, despite being selected more frequently than three other areas by students as a whole, is by far the least likely to be selected as an area to seek employment by students who were originally domiciled there or who studied there. Less than half of respondents who were originally from Eastern England and only half of the respondents who had studied in the area said that they would consider looking for work there.

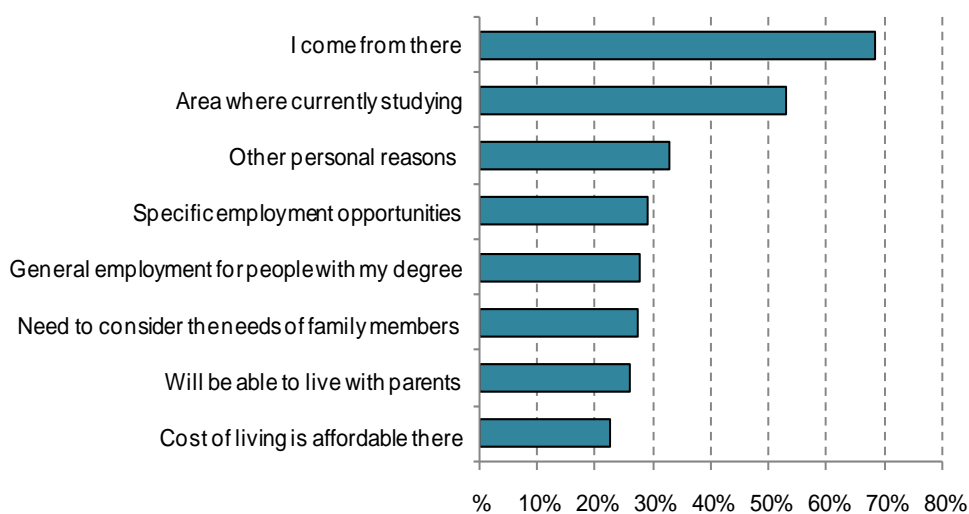
**Figure 19: Geographical areas where students had applied or would consider applying for employment**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

Overall, having some kind of personal connection to the area was the most common reason for considering working there, as Figure 20 shows, but the patterns are likely to reflect knowledge of opportunities in the area too. Lower proportions of those who came from or had studied in Eastern England and the East Midlands, and to a lesser extent, Wales, appear to consider applying for work there. These are, relatively, areas with fewer graduate employment opportunities than most other regions; although Figure 20 indicates that coming from or studying in a region remains a stronger driver, in general than labour market opportunities in themselves.

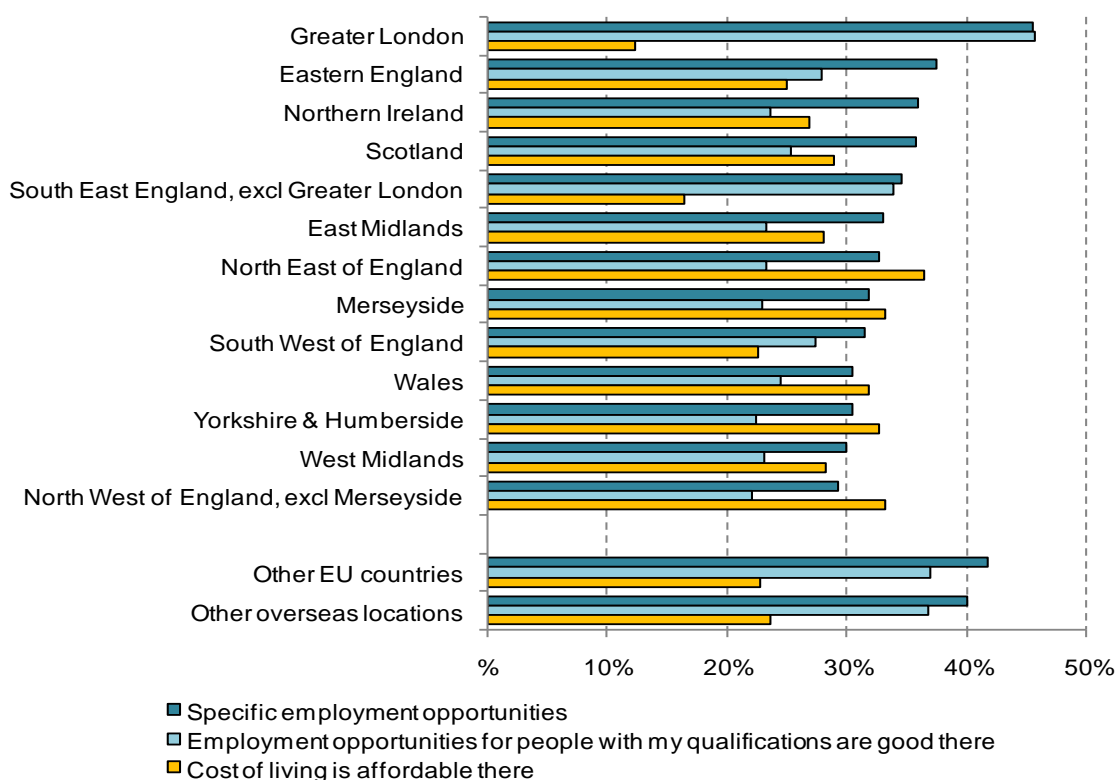
**Figure 20: Considerations upon which students' location preferences were based**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

Overall, employment, both in terms of specific opportunities and a feeling that generally opportunities for people with their degree were likely to be good there were rated as more important than the cost of living in an area. However, as Figure 21 shows, this was not uniform across the different regions.

**Figure 21: Proportion of students saying they would consider working in a particular region who said their location preferences were based on the selected considerations**



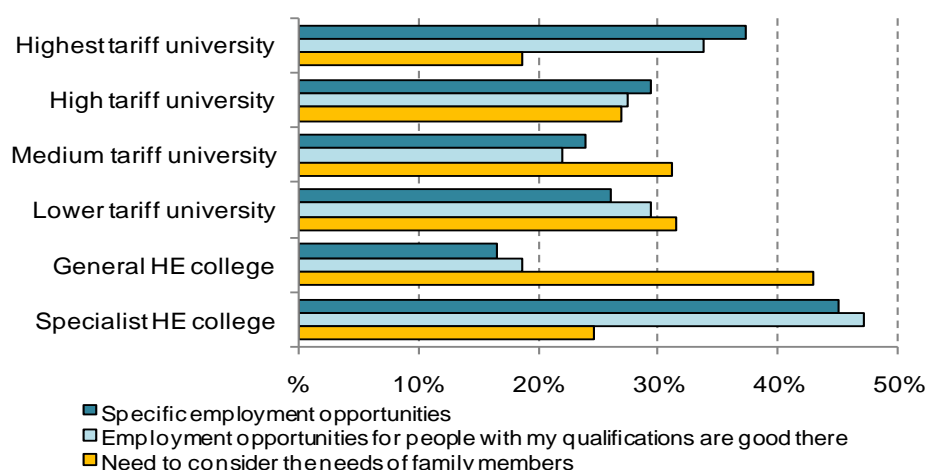
Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).



As Figure 21 shows, students who had looked for work or who were considering looking for work in the North East, Merseyside, Wales, Yorkshire and Humberside and North West England were more likely to say that the affordability of the cost of living was more important than either specific or general employment opportunities. These are all regions that are associated with a relatively low cost of living.

As Figure 22 shows, students at different types of university were also likely to give greater or lesser preference to different considerations. Students at both medium and low tariff universities were more likely to say that their location preferences were constrained by having to consider the needs of family members than they were to say that employment-related opportunities played a role in their preferences.

**Figure 22: Proportion of students at different types of HEI saying that their location preferences were based on the selected considerations**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

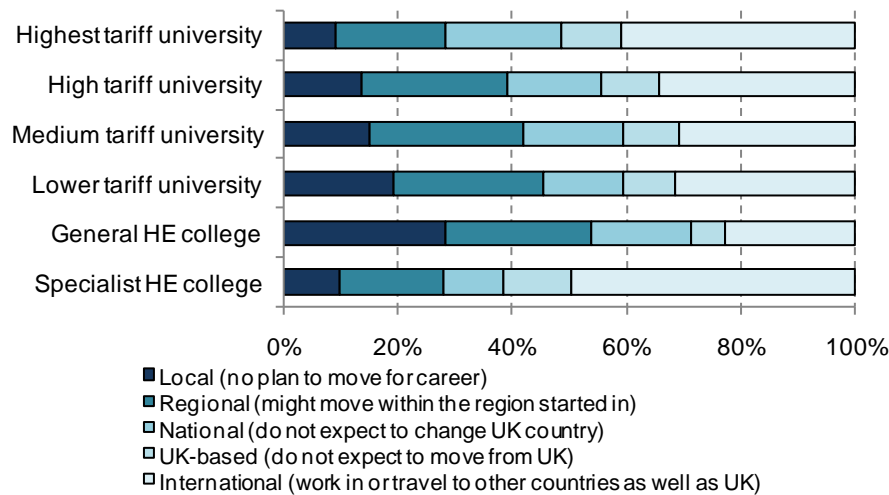
This different emphasis on factors such as affordability and the needs of family members illustrates how certain groups of students face particular constraints when looking for employment which over-ride pure employment-related factors. This echoes findings from Stage 1 of the research (see Purcell *et al*, 2008) which examined the constraints different groups faced in deciding where they would study. This illustrates how certain existing constraints and disadvantages can be carried through higher education and into employment, limiting the mediating effects of higher education itself.

Finally, respondents were asked on what scale they thought their job market would develop in the medium to long term. Overall, and surprisingly, the largest proportion of students thought that the job market they would work in would be international in that they would consider jobs that involved working in or travelling frequently to countries outside the UK. More than a third of respondents considered the boundaries of their job market to be international, although the extent to which they would consider moving abroad, rather than simply travelling abroad for work is not clear. Almost a quarter of respondents said that they might move within the region they started out in but did not consider moving further, 17 per cent said that they might move within the UK country they started out in but did not expect to change country, 14 per cent said that they expected their job market to be local and did not

plan to move location to develop their career, and ten per cent said that they might move among UK countries, but they would not anticipate moving away from the UK.

As Figure 23 shows, students at highest tariff universities and specialist colleges anticipated being most mobile. These students are the most likely to anticipate considering having an international career and the least likely to say that they thought their job market would be local.

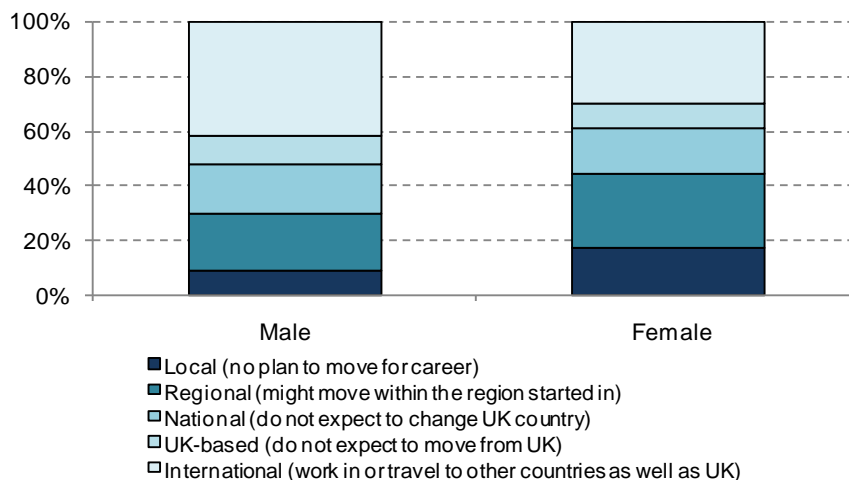
**Figure 23: Size of job-market expected in the medium to long term by type of HEI**



Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted).

Male students appear to see themselves as having a wider job market than female students, as Figure 24 shows. Almost twice the proportion of female students as male students said that they had no plan to move for their career, while, conversely, over 10 per cent more male students than female students said that they thought that they would work in or travel frequently to other countries as well as the UK.

**Figure 24: Size of job-market expected in the medium to long term by gender**

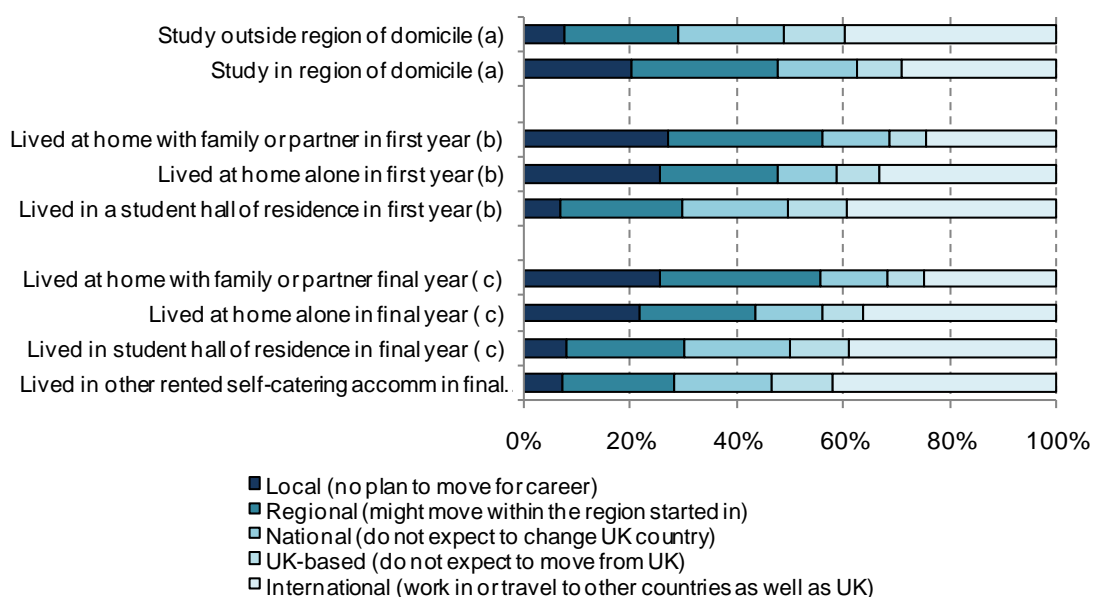


Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students (weighted)

Reflecting this, subjects that tend to have a higher proportion of female students also had a higher proportion of students who expected their job market to be local. Twenty-eight per cent of students studying Education expected their job market to be local (although this also reflects the ties between particular education courses and local schools), as did 21 per cent of students studying Subjects allied to Medicine and 19 per cent of students studying Social Sciences. Conversely, only 6 per cent of students studying Physical Sciences and 7 per cent of students studying Engineering and Technologies anticipated that they would not move for their career.

Finally, a previous propensity for mobility, for various reasons, appears to be related to plans for subsequent mobility. As Figure 25 shows, students who said in Stage 1 that they were studying outside the region they were living in before entering HE were more likely than those who said they were studying in their region of previous domicile to envisage working internationally, and much less likely to see themselves as not moving for their career. Similarly, students who lived at home during their course, either in the first or final year, were less likely to see themselves moving for their career. In some cases this reflects family commitments, but the group of students who lived at home also includes those students who were living at home with their parents, suggesting that there are other factors influencing the apparent lower mobility of these students.

**Figure 25: Size of job-market expected in the medium to long term by selected indicators of previous mobility**



Source: (a) Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students who responded to both Stages 1 and 3 (weighted). (b) Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students who responded to both Stages 2 and 3 (weighted). (c) Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK based final year students who responded Stage 3 (weighted).

## Summary

- Just over half of the final year Futuretrack students had started searching for employment at the time they completed the survey.
- Of those who had started looking for work, approximately half had applied for a job related to their long-term career plans and 18 per cent had applied for a job not related to their long-term career plans.
- Students at the highest tariff universities were the most likely to have started searching for employment and to have started applying for jobs related to their long-term career plans. Students at the lower tariff universities were more likely to have started looking for employment than those at high tariff universities, but they were less likely to have applied for a job.
- Male students, while no more likely to have started looking for employment than female students, were more likely to have actually applied for a job.
- Approximately a quarter of respondents who had applied for at least one job related to their long-term career plans had been offered a job they had accepted or planned to accept, compared to around a fifth of those who had applied for a job not related to their long-term career plans.
- The proportion of students expecting to get a first class degree who had been offered a job related to their long-term career plans was more than 10 per cent higher than the proportion of those who expected to achieve a 2:1 or 2:2.
- More than three quarters of respondents said that they would like to do unpaid work or an internship after they graduate to gain experience related to their career, but 38 per cent said that they could not, for which the most commonly given reason was not being able to afford to.
- Opportunities for promotion was the most important job attribute when students were considering what kind of job they would look for. Flexibility for work-life balance, long-term security and opportunities for further training were all more important to the Futuretrack students than a competitive salary.
- More than two thirds of respondents hoped to obtain a job related to the subject they had studied in the medium to long term, while just under a quarter said they had no preference and eight per cent said that they hoped to obtain a job not related to the subject of their course. Among students who had decided that they did not want to pursue a career related to the subject they had studied, the most common reason given was simply that they no longer enjoyed the subject. However, students who were studying more vocational subjects but who did not plan to find a job related to their subject were more likely to say this was a result of making the wrong decision in choosing the subject in the first place.

- When students were asked the geographical locations in which they would consider looking for employment, Greater London was the most popular, with 44 per cent of respondents saying they would consider work in this area. Northern Ireland and Scotland appeared to be the most successful in encouraging students to consider remaining in the area, while Eastern England may face particular problems in retaining graduates, both those who have studied in the region and those who were domiciled there before they entered HE. Further exploration of the HE structure in regions related to these responses needs to be undertaken.
- While the availability of employment was an important consideration for students when considering the locations where they might work, constraints such as needing to consider the needs of family members and the overall cost of living in an area placed particular constraints on certain groups within the Futuretrack cohort.
- More than a third of respondents thought that the job market in which they would develop their career would be international, and they would consider jobs that involved working in or travelling frequently to countries outside the UK. Conversely, 14 per cent of respondents said that they expected their job market to be local and did not envisage moving location to develop their career, and a further quarter of respondents said that they might move within their region but they did not see themselves moving further. Again, different groups of students experienced constraints in the choices available to them in terms of the location of their career, meaning that they might make decisions that were sub-optimal when considered purely from an economic perspective but which met other needs and preferences.

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