

people:skills:jobs:



Department for
**Employment
and Learning**
www.delni.gov.uk

FUTURETRACK

Northern Ireland's students: key findings from the Futuretrack survey of final year students on three year courses

Report prepared for the Department for Employment and
Learning (DELNI)

Gaby Atfield and Kate Purcell

April 2014

The Futuretrack longitudinal study of 2006 UK full-time applicants' undergraduate courses, tracking them from application in 2006 until 2011-12 is being undertaken on behalf of the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) in conjunction with the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). The analysis for this Northern Ireland specific report was sponsored by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in Northern Ireland.


HECSU

WARWICK INSTITUTE *for*
EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH



Table of contents

List of acronyms	i
Executive summary	ii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 <i>The Futuretrack sample</i>	2
2. Experiences of higher education	3
2.1 <i>Work experience</i>	4
2.2 <i>Skills development on undergraduate courses</i>	6
2.3 <i>Students' satisfaction with their experience of higher education</i>	13
3. Career plans and aspirations	19
3.1 <i>Post-graduation plans</i>	19
3.2 <i>Post-graduation courses</i>	21
3.3 <i>The impact of debt on post-graduation plans</i>	23
3.4 <i>Sources of careers advice</i>	27
3.5 <i>Job-seeking activities of final year students</i>	31
3.6 <i>Job search resources</i>	32
3.7 <i>Employment preferences</i>	33
4. Conclusion	37
Bibliography	41
Annex 1: Characteristics of the Futuretrack Sample	43
Annex 2: HESA data on Northern Ireland's students	46
Figures	
Figure 1: Paid work undertaken by students in their final year by subject type	5
Figure 2: Paid work undertaken by students in their final year by SES group	6
Figure 3: Proportion of students agreeing (selecting 1 to 3 on a 7 point scale) that their course had enabled them to develop each skill	7
Figure 4: Percentage of students rating their skills as excellent or very good	9
Figure 5: Skills students at NI HEIs were more likely to agree (selecting 1 to 3 on a 7 point scale) that their course had enabled to develop by subject type	10
Figure 6: Percentage of students agreeing (selecting 1 to 3 on a 7 point scale) that their course had enabled to develop particular skills by subject type	10
Figure 7: The skills I have developed on my course have made me more employable by subject type	11
Figure 8: Skills students think employers are looking for when recruiting for the kinds of jobs they want	12
Figure 9: Response to the statement "The university I attended is an advantage in looking for employment"	13
Figure 10: Whether students would choose the same course again by subject type	14

Figure 11: Agreement with the statement “The amount of work I had to complete on my course was excessive”	14
Figure 12: Agreement with the statement “The amount of work I had to complete on my course was excessive” by subject type	15
Figure 13: Responses to the statement “The experience of being a student has enhanced my social and intellectual capabilities more broadly”	16
Figure 14: Responses to the statement “Being a student at the university or college where I studied was a positive experience overall”	17
Figure 15: Responses to the statement “Being a student at the university or college where I studied was a positive experience overall” by subject type	17
Figure 16: Agreement (selected 1 to 3 on a 7 point scale) with the statement “my course is good value for money”	18
Figure 17: Response the statement “It is more difficult now for graduates to find suitable employment than it was in the past”	20
Figure 18: Whether students expected to apply for unpaid jobs or graduate internships to obtain experience	21
Figure 19: Proportion of students who had applied, or expected to apply, to do another course or vocational training in the year after graduation	21
Figure 20: Plans for the year after graduation (excluding vacation work between degrees) by subject type	22
Figure 21: Confidence about achieving hopes for the year after graduation	24
Figure 22: Expected personal repayable debt at graduation, excluding existing debt	25
Figure 23: Response to the statement “I am worried about prospect of having to repay loans and debts when I have completed my course”	25
Figure 24: Proportion of respondents who said their options would be limited by debts by SES group	26
Figure 25: Impact of debt on post-graduation options	26
Figure 26: Helpfulness of selected sources of careers advice	28
Figure 27: Current idea about occupation and required qualifications	29
Figure 28: Use of different types of careers advice by subject type	30
Figure 29: Types of careers advice provided by HEIs used by final year students	30
Figure 30: Medium to long-term career aspirations by subject type	32
Figure 31: Sources for finding employment	33
Figure 32: Regions where respondents would consider looking for employment	35
Figure 33: Job market expectation in the medium to long term by subject type	36
Figure 34: Importance of different job attributes by SES group	37
 Tables	
Table 1: Percentage of students rating their skills as excellent or very good	8
Table 2: Plans for the year after graduation (excluding vacation work between degrees)	19
Table 3: Reasons for location preferences	34
Annex Table 1	43
Annex Table 2	46

List of acronyms

CBI	Confederation of British Industry
DEL(NI)	Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland)
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
GB	Great Britain
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
NI	Northern Ireland
SES	Socio-Economic Status
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UUK	Universities UK

Executive Summary

This report uses Futuretrack data to examine the situation of final year students on three year undergraduate courses who had applied to enter higher education (HE) in 2005/6. The report focuses on students from Northern Ireland studying at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Northern Ireland, students from Northern Ireland studying at HEIs in Great Britain and students from Great Britain studying in Northern Ireland. It looks particularly at the experiences of students studying STEM subjects and those from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Northern Ireland labour market with respect to skills development

Respondents at NI HEIs were generally positive about the skills they had developed in HE and their overall skill levels. Students at NI HEIs rated their skills, whether developed on their course or elsewhere, uniformly more highly than students at GB institutions. The same pattern is seen when comparing NI-born students to GB-born students, but the difference between the two groups is smaller, suggesting that the NI HEIs are promoting the development of employability skills somewhat more successfully than the GB HEIs on average. Despite this, there is evidence that students at NI HEIs were slightly less likely than their GB counterparts to believe that this skills development will translate into positive labour market outcomes. They were less likely to believe that the skills they had developed on their courses had made them more employable, with students studying non-STEM subjects at NI HEIs being particularly likely to express this opinion. Respondents at NI HEIs were also less likely than those at GB HEIs to say that they thought they had all the skills employers were looking for when recruiting for the kinds of jobs they wanted. This is despite employers, overall, expressing satisfaction in the skills possessed by their graduate recruits, and respondents at NI HEIs, when listing the skills they thought employers were looking for, to name skills that they were likely to say they had developed on their courses. This is likely to reflect both the general situation in the graduate labour market as a whole, and particular issues in the Northern Ireland labour market, in which recession and economic downturn has had an effect on the jobs that are available and the level of competition which exists for these jobs.

Debt aversion

Overall, NI students, as a group, were happy with the choices they had made about their higher education experience, but were more concerned about the returns they will see on their investment than other GB students, given the current economic recession and the weakened labour market in NI. In general they were somewhat cautious and risk-averse, working hard and making careful, well-considered decisions about the careers they plan to pursue and the amount of debt they accrue in pursuing these ambitions.

The report shows that students from Northern Ireland appear to be more debt-averse than students from GB. Although they expected to have lower levels of debt on completing their undergraduate courses, they worried more about repaying this debt and about the impact it will have on their post-graduation plans. More than half of NI respondents said that their post-graduation options would be limited by debt. They

were more likely to undertake paid employment alongside their studies in their final year in HE and to live at home while studying.

Socio – Economic Status (SES)

In terms of skills development, a particular issue in relation to socio-economic status is highlighted. This is the extent to which students from lower socio-economic groups gained in self-confidence during their time in HE. The evidence presented in this report suggests that the gains made by NI students from routine and manual backgrounds were somewhat lower than for other groups, and, as they started at a lower baseline in terms of their perceptions of their self-confidence, it is suggested that time in HE may in fact entrench disadvantage in this respect compared to HE students from a more affluent background.

Workload and experience of Higher Education

While students at NI HEIs appeared to show greater skills development on their courses, they also appeared to struggle somewhat with the amount of work involved. Respondents at NI HEIs were more likely than those at GB HEIs to consider that the amount of work they had to complete on their courses had been excessive, and STEM students were more likely to hold this view than non-STEM students. Related to this, while non-STEM students at NI HEIs were most likely to say that they would definitely or probably study the same course again, respondents studying STEM subjects at NI HEIs were the least likely to reach this conclusion. Conversely STEM students were most likely to say that they would choose to study something completely different if they were starting HE again. They were also least likely to say that their time in HE had been a positive experience overall (although the overwhelming majority of respondents even in this group agreed that their experience of HE had been a positive one). This is a concern for those involved in skills development, as the Northern Ireland labour market is increasingly likely to demand STEM skills.

Location of employment once graduated

Students at NI HEIs were more likely than those at GB HEIs to believe that the HEI they attended was an advantage in looking for employment. A higher proportion of respondents attending NI HEIs were at an HEI that required high tariff points for entry and NI students were more likely than GB students to expect to seek employment in a relatively local labour market, where the reputation of their HEI may be better known. It is notable that despite perceptions of limited opportunities available to them in the NI labour market, NI students showed a preference, when asked why they were considering working in a particular area, for remaining in NI, where they had studied and/or grown up.

Value for money

Although respondents had a positive view of their time in HE and the skills they had developed there, agreement that their course had represented good value for money was relatively low. This is likely to reflect not just students' experiences while in HE, but also difficulties some students anticipated having in finding post-graduation employment and the impact they expected that having a degree would have on this. There was only one group - students from a routine and manual background at NI

HEIs - in which more than half of the respondents agreed that their course had been good value for money. Students at NI HEIs from a managerial and professional background were the least likely to say that their course had been good value for money, with only just over a third doing so.

Career plans

Less than half of respondents expect to enter employment related to their long-term career plans in the year after graduation. This figure is slightly higher for respondents from NI, and they were less likely than GB students to anticipate taking temporary employment while they considered their long-term plans. Respondents studying STEM subjects at NI HEIs were the only group where more than half anticipated obtaining employment in the year after they graduated that was related to their longer-term career plans. Overall, NI students appeared to be clearer about their career plans and aspirations than GB students, and students at NI HEIs were more likely to have sought careers advice from their HEI and other sources, and to have found the advice they received valuable.

It is also interesting to note that in all cases, students at NI HEIs were both more likely to use a particular source of careers advice and to rate it highly. This may be a reflection of the specific knowledge these sources have of the NI labour market, as well as the greater vocational orientation of the Northern Ireland students. Seventy-seven per cent of students at NI HEIs rated their careers clarity between 1 and 3 on a 7 point scale, where 1 meant that they had a clear idea and 7 meant that they had no idea. The figure for students at GB HEIs was 69 per cent. One area where respondents at NI HEIs appeared to be lacking in careers advice was in the extent to which they had attended events for a particular occupation or industry. This may have been because fewer of the big graduate recruiters include Northern Ireland in their 'milk round' and there are less opportunities to attend graduate fairs relatively easily.

Further study

Northern Ireland domiciled respondents were more likely than GB domiciled respondents to anticipate undertaking a full-time postgraduate degree course in the year after they completed their undergraduate studies, with non-STEM students at NI HEIs being the most likely to say that this is what they expected. Both undertaking temporary employment and continuing to study full-time appeared to be, for some graduates, short-term strategies developed in response to the current economic climate. Undertaking further study can be both a way to become more competitive for graduate jobs in a weak labour market but also a way to delay entry into the labour market in the hope that conditions may improve. Despite the relatively large proportion of NI respondents who anticipated undertaking further studies in the year after they completed their undergraduate course, for NI students graduating with debts, the clearest impact of these debts was on their ability to undertake postgraduate study. Both NI STEM and non-STEM students with debts were more likely than their GB counterparts to say that they would like to do a postgraduate course but that they did not want to add to their debts.

Final year students' aspirations for future careers and occupational outcomes

Overall, coming to the end of their final year in HE, the proportions of NI and GB students reporting that they were very or quite confident that they would achieve their hopes for the year after graduation were similar, at just over half, as were those that were not sure whether they would or not; at around a third, despite the seemingly more negative views held by NI students about the labour market facing them.

1. Introduction

The Futuretrack longitudinal project is a survey of 2005/6 higher education UCAS applicants who aspired to enter full-time undergraduate education in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Respondents were first surveyed in spring and summer 2006 prior to HE entry, again a little over a year later, and in the spring and summer as they approached the end of their three or four year undergraduate programmes, in 2009 or 2010. They were surveyed for a fourth and final sweep of the survey in autumn and winter 2011/12 and results for this, which were mainly UK based were published in 2013.

This short report prepared for the Department for Employment and Learning (NI) is concerned with the responses of final year undergraduates on three year courses prior to graduating in summer 2009, and focuses on Northern Ireland students and, primarily, on the experiences of students who studied in NI HEIs¹.

From September 2006 universities and colleges in Northern Ireland and GB could charge up to £3,000 a year for courses for new students at that time. Eligible students could then apply for a Tuition Fee Loan of up to £3,000 to cover the cost of their fees. Students would not have to begin repaying these loans until they had finished their course and are earning over £15,000 a year.

Eligible Northern Ireland students who started their course in 2006/07 could apply for a means-tested (non-repayable) Maintenance Grant up to a maximum of £3,200. Students who are entitled to receive a Maintenance Grant can also apply for a maintenance loan, however the maximum amount of loan they can receive would be reduced by £1,700 (£1,200 for English students). Northern Ireland students are also eligible to apply for a Maintenance Loan to help with living costs such as accommodation, travel, food, clothes, etc. It is important to take into consideration these fees and level of support available to students when looking at their views and experience of Higher Education.

DEL(NI) has an interest in three groups of students: Northern Ireland domiciled students who were studying at an HEI in Northern Ireland; Northern Ireland domiciled students who were studying at an HEI in Great Britain; and students from Great Britain who were studying at an HEI in Northern Ireland. Two of these groups, the students from NI studying outside NI and particularly the students from GB studying in NI, are small groups in the survey. We outline the main characteristics of the achieved sub-samples and discuss these relative to the main NI-domiciled and NI HEI samples, but for most of the subsequent analysis, it would be inappropriate, due to sample size, to disaggregate them further according to the relationships between attributes and responses. Consequently, most of the comparative analyses focus on similarities and differences between all students studying in NI and all students studying in GB and between all Northern Ireland-domiciled students and all Great

¹ A copy of the questionnaire used for this survey can be found at http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/futuretrack/what/stage_3.pdf

Britain-domiciled students. One of the strengths of the Futuretrack project is that it began as a census study, so we know a great deal about the population that the achieved sample was drawn from and have been able to weight the response data at each sweep of the survey to take account of the significant response biases that have been identified - gender and prior education and achievement. Table 1A is provided as an Annexe showing the weighted responses² for the Northern Ireland sub-samples, which shows their scales and why we have had to restrict analysis of the NI students studying at GB universities in relation to much of the analysis, and that any findings in relation to the GB students studying at NI HEIs can only raise questions for more qualitative follow-up.

In addition to examining the overall trends in students' experiences of HE and their aspirations for the future, and given DEL(NI)'s policy focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths³) and widening access, the report focuses on these issues in particular

1.1 The Futuretrack sample

An overview of the characteristics of the Futuretrack sample, the weighted numbers and percentages of respondents in the different subgroups are shown in Annex 1. Annex 2 shows the comparable HESA data.

The sample referred to in this report is composed of Futuretrack respondents who applied to enter HE in 2006 and completed a three year course in 2009. Overall, 62 per cent of the Futuretrack sample who were domiciled in NI prior to HE entry were studying in NI. This is a slightly smaller proportion than the 69 per cent shown in the HESA data for 2006/7 entrants.

In the Futuretrack sample, 50 per cent of all students who were Northern Ireland-domiciled prior to entering HE were studying a STEM subject, a considerably higher proportion than for the British-domiciled students (42 per cent). However, overall, forty-three per cent of students at NI HEIs were studying a STEM subject - the same proportion, when looking only at students on three year programmes, as at GB HEIs.

² The sample is weighted by gender and tariff score, to take account of under-representation of certain groups relative to their known proportions in the population of accepted students who applied to enter HE through UCAS in 2005/6.

³ Subjects were grouped into STEM and non-STEM by JACS code as follows:
STEM = A Medicine and Dentistry; B Subjects allied to Medicine; C Biological Sciences; D Veterinary Sciences, Agriculture and related subjects; F Physical Sciences; G Mathematical and Computer Sciences; H Engineering; J Technologies; K Architecture, Building and Planning; Interdisciplinary courses composed of two or more STEM subjects.
Non-STEM = L Social Studies; M Law; N Business and Administrative Studies; P Mass Communications and Documentation; Q Linguistics, Classics and related subjects; R European Languages, Literature and related subjects; T Eastern, Asiatic, African, American and Australasian Languages, Literature and related subjects; V Historical and Philosophical Studies; W Creative Arts and Design; X Education; Interdisciplinary courses composed of two or more non-STEM subjects.

Northern Ireland respondents in the Futuretrack sample, and respondents in the Futuretrack sample studying at an NI HEI, were somewhat less likely to come from a routine or manual background than British students and students at GB HEIs. Sixteen per cent of students at NI HEIs and 17 per cent of all NI students were from a routine or manual background, compared to a quarter of British students and students at GB HEIs. This figure is lower than in the first wave of the Futuretrack survey, as well as in the figures reported by HESA, which show the proportion of full-time first degree entrants in 2006/7 from NI who were from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 as 41 per cent, with the comparable figure for UK as a whole being 30 per cent. The lower proportion of NI respondents from a routine and manual background in Futuretrack Wave 3 appears to have been caused by over-representation of respondents from one NI HEI.

In the next section of the report, the students' experiences of HE are examined. The skills students have developed on their courses, either in the classroom or through work experience are considered and the impact that students think their higher education experience has had on their ability to find employment and their satisfaction overall with their time in HE are discussed. Section 3 investigates the process of finding employment, describing students' reported career plans and aspirations, and following this with an examination of how students sought and found work and what motivates them to seek particular types of employment.

2. Experiences of higher education

There are various ways in which students learn and acquire knowledge during the course of their HE experience and can develop the kinds of skills that are useful to them in finding and progressing in graduate employment. Focussing specifically on Northern Ireland, the Skills Monitoring Survey (2009:11) found that 82 per cent of employers who took on graduates stated that they were very well or well prepared for work, and large employers (those with at least 50 employees) were the least likely to be dissatisfied with the skills of their graduate recruits, with only five per cent expressing this opinion. Similarly, the majority of employers in a UK-wide Institute of Directors (IoD) study in 2007 were satisfied with the occupational and technical skills possessed by graduates. However, the IOD survey found that they were less satisfied with graduates' generic, employability skills, and this is a point that has been raised in most subsequent commentary by employers and representatives of employers' interest groups.

Experience of employment, whether this is through formal work experience programmes that are integral to a student's course or through undertaking paid or unpaid employment outside their studies, is valued by employers for its role in developing both job-specific and generic skills. Various authors (for example, Stewart and Knowles, 2000; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Mason, Williams and Cranmer, 2006) have examined the impact work experience has on students' employability, and have concluded that for work experience to facilitate the development of the kinds of skills graduate employers look for, it must be relevant and of a high quality. Relatively unskilled work that is unrelated to the student's career ambitions does not necessarily result in the development of the kinds of skills graduate employers look

for. However, previous research has established that in a substantial proportion of cases, when work experience is relevant to a student's career ambitions, it can lead directly to a graduate job with the employer. This 'employability' agenda has become increasingly prevalent in HE, and there has been a greater focus on the ways in which students can develop employability skills either as part of their course or through the provision of additional units aimed specifically at preparing students for graduate employment (DIUS, 2008; Cable, 2010). We consider the findings on work experience reported by the Futuretrack respondents below, before going on to report the extent to which students were satisfied with their experience of HE.

2.1 *Work experience*

Increased financial pressures and higher levels of debt, particularly since the changes in HE funding since the beginning of the 1990s, have been found to have increased the propensity of students to take paid employment, particularly during term time (see Humphrey, 2006; Callender and Wilkinson, 2003; Metcalf, 2003).

Students at NI HEIs were more likely than their counterparts at GB institutions to have undertaken work experience as a formal part of their course.

- Thirty-eight per cent of students born in NI and studying at an NI HEI had done some form of work placement as part of their course, and half of the students who came from outside NI to study at an NI HEI had also done so. This compares to 28 per cent for both GB students and Northern Ireland students studying at GB HEIs.
- More than half (53 per cent) of NI students at NI HEIs self-classified their course as 'vocational', i.e. designed to lead to a specific occupation, compared to 44 per cent of GB students at GB HEIs.

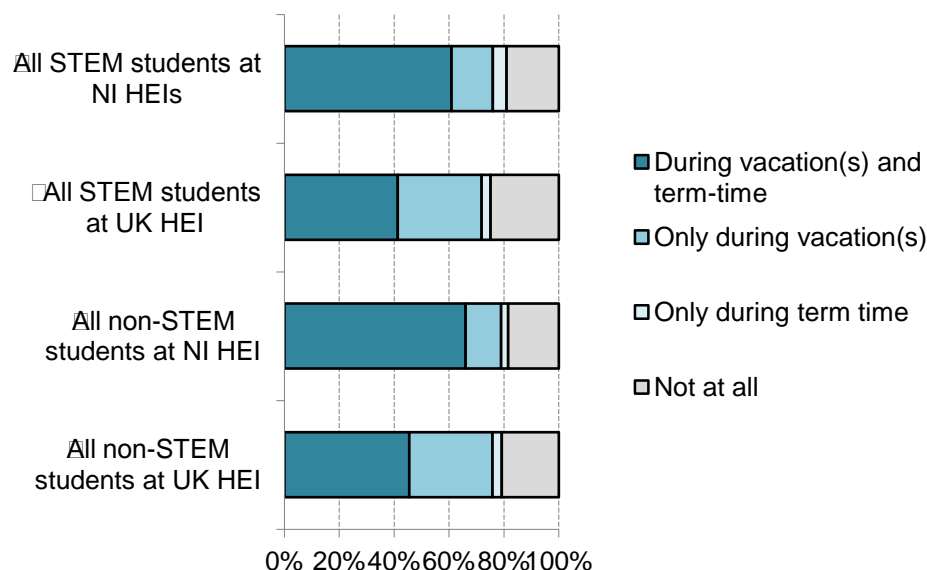
Students at NI HEIs who were from NI were more likely than any other group to have undertaken paid work during term time and were also slightly more likely than any other group to have done paid work at all during their final year in HE. In part this is likely to be because students at NI HEIs are more likely to be from the local area and continuing in jobs they had before they entered HE. Half of the NI students attending NI HEIs were living at home in their final year of HE, compared to 32 per cent of British students at GB HEIs. This raises the question of whether this work was relevant to their career ambitions and hence likely to be as beneficial to them in seeking graduate employment as other forms of employment.

Despite their higher levels of paid employment, and the longer hours worked by Northern Ireland students, as will be seen in subsequent sections, they were also more likely to say that they were very worried about debt, despite generally expecting to have lower levels of debt on graduation than GB students, which suggests that the Northern Ireland students, as a group, may be more debt-averse than other students, and consequently more likely to undertake paid work whenever possible. This is likely to be particularly the case for students whose parents have no experience of HE (a larger group among Northern Ireland than GB students) and consequently

more suspicious of the worth of HE, reliant on media reporting of the current value of a degree and the growth of HE related debt.

Figure 1 shows whether students studying STEM and non-STEM subjects undertook paid work in their final year in HE, and if they did, when they worked, comparing all students studying STEM and non-STEM subjects at NI HEIs with all students studying STEM and non-STEM subjects at GB HEIs.

Figure 1: Paid work undertaken by students in their final year by subject type



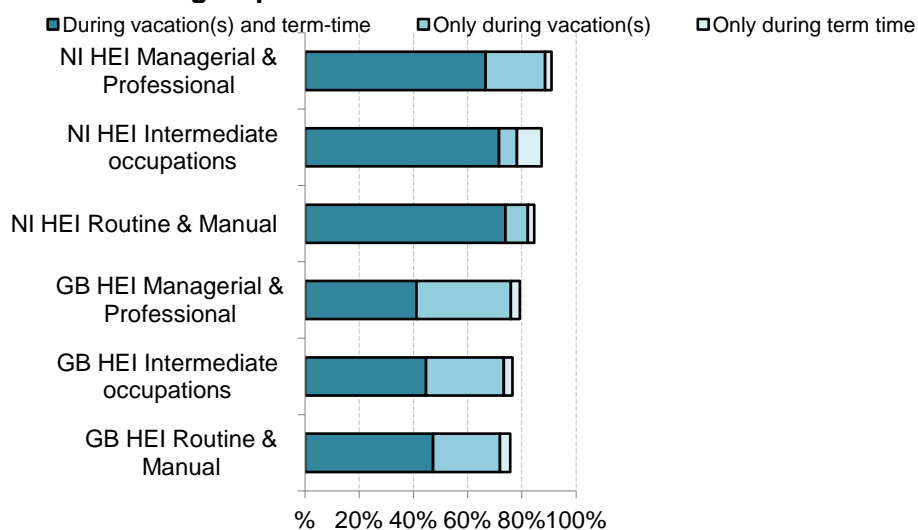
Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

As the Figure shows, although the different groups of students were as likely to have worked at some point in their final year, non-STEM students were more likely to work both in vacations and in term time than STEM students. The more pertinent finding is that students at NI HEIs were, regardless of whether they were studying a STEM or non-STEM subject, much more likely than GB students to have undertaken paid work in both term time and vacations.

As Figure 2 shows, students from a routine and manual background were most likely to work during both term time and vacations. On the other hand, those from a managerial or professional background were most likely to have done paid work at some point. It suggests that unlike in GB, socio-economic background did not appear to be closely related to propensity to have undertaken paid employment. The students from various socio-economic backgrounds at GB HEIs conformed to expected socio-stereotypical patterns in terms of propensity to live at home and to undertake paid employment while doing so, often in jobs they held before entering HE, with students from a higher occupational background least likely to do both. In NI, it was the students from an intermediate occupational background who were most likely to live at home in the final year (68 per cent), with students from a routine and manual background least likely to do so. This may reflect the particular characteristics of the different SES (Social Economic Status) groups in NI, for

example, the extent to which where they come from has an impact on how possible it is for certain groups to live at home while they study. However, it needs to be remembered that the numbers in this last category were small, and the respondents in question more likely to have characteristics associated with lower propensity to work during term (-attendance at high tariff HEI, studying STEM subjects).

Figure 2: Paid work undertaken by students in their final year by SES group



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

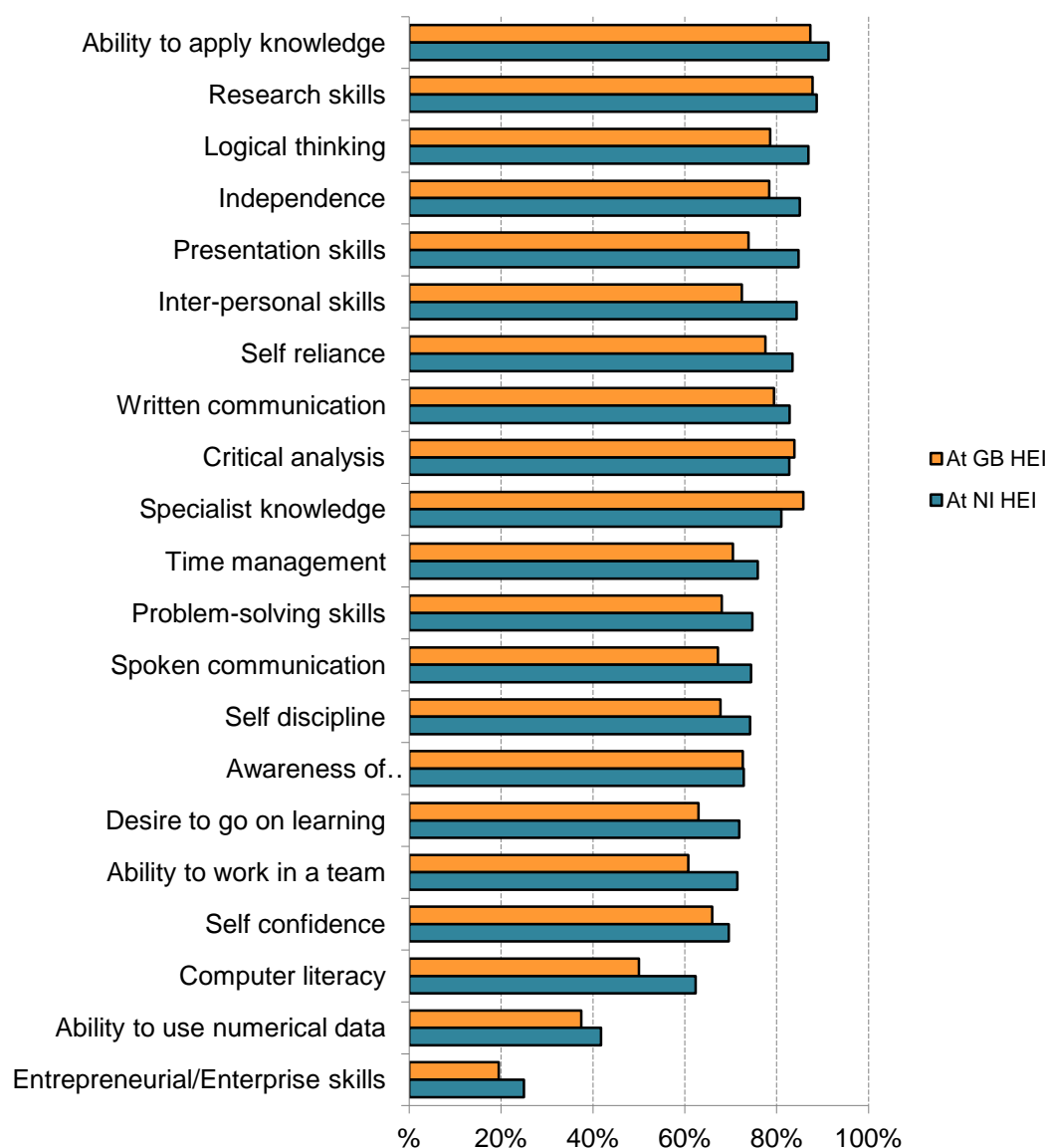
Virtually all the students from a routine and managerial background who did have paid employment were more likely to say that they worked, either in term time, vacations or both, to pay essential living expenses (93 per cent of these students for working during term-time, and 85 per cent for working during vacations). Given that these students stated that they were working to pay essential expenses, it is less likely that the jobs they were doing had been selected because they were particularly related to their long-term career aspirations and more likely that they are simply available jobs that will enable them to earn money. Students from an intermediate occupational background were as likely to say that they worked during term-time to pay essential living expenses (91 per cent) but less likely to give it as a reason for working during vacations (72 per cent). Students from a managerial and professional background were least likely to say that they were working during term-time to pay for essential living expenses (77 per cent), although 73 per cent said it was one of the reasons they worked during vacations.

2.2 Skills development on undergraduate courses

In a survey by the CBI and Universities UK (UUK), 16 per cent of HEIs reported significant problems in addressing employability issues among their students (CBI and UUK, 2009:20). HEIs have incorporated employability-related skills teaching into their curriculum in various ways, including making modifications and additions to existing courses, developing new courses at the department level and providing stand-alone courses either through individual departments or through university-wide services (Mason, Williams and Cranmer 2006: 4).

When comparing the responses of all students at NI HEIs with all those at GB ones, as Figure 3 shows, students at NI HEIs were more likely to say that they had developed almost all categories of skill. In Figure 3, skills are listed in order of the scale of difference between the responses given by students at NI HEIs and those at GB HEIs.

Figure 3: Proportion of students agreeing (selecting 1 to 3 on a 7 point scale) that their course had enabled them to develop each skill



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

The CBI and UUK (2009) found that two fifths of students believed that development of employability skills was primarily their own responsibility (although a large percentage believed HEIs also had an important role to play). Consequently, it is important when considering the overall employability of students in relation to the graduate labour market to consider the overall picture of how students rate their skill levels. Students at NI HEIs rated their skills, whether developed on their course or elsewhere, uniformly more highly than students at GB institutions. Table 1 shows the

proportion of students at NI and GB HEIs who rated their skills as either excellent or very good.

Table 1: Percentage of students rating their skills as excellent or very good

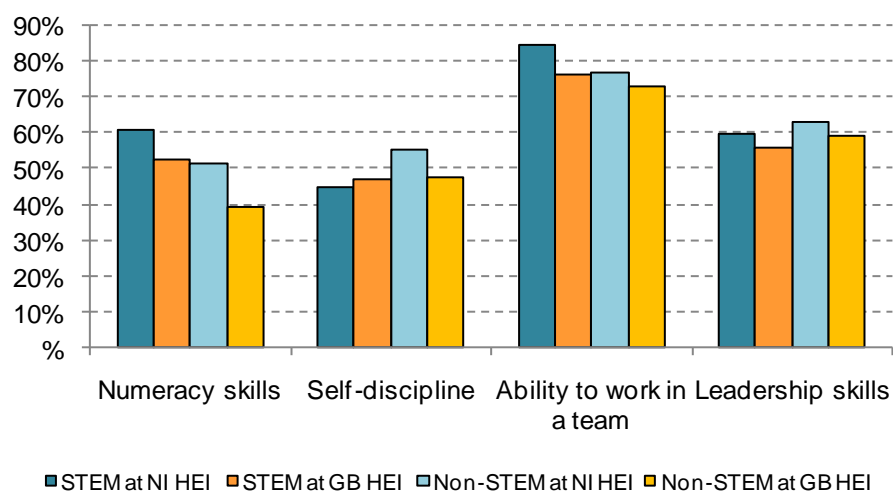
	Students at NI HEIs	Students at GB HEIs
Ability to work in a team	80.2	74.4
Written communication	79.8	74.2
Spoken communication	72.9	66.7
Computer literacy	70.6	67.0
Leadership skills	61.8	57.8
Creativity	59.6	56.9
Numeracy	55.7	45.1
Self-confidence	55.4	53.2
Self-discipline	51.0	47.4

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

The same pattern is seen when comparing NI-born students to GB-born students, but the difference between the two groups is smaller, suggesting that the NI HEIs are promoting the development of employability skills somewhat more successfully than the GB HEIs on average.

Figure 4 highlights some of the skills where there was a particular difference between the STEM and non-STEM groups. As would be expected, students studying a STEM subject were more likely than their non-STEM counterparts to rate their numeracy skills highly, but it is interesting to note that students studying a non-STEM subject at an NI HEI were almost as likely to rate their numeracy skills as excellent or very good as students at a GB HEI who were studying a STEM subject. The proportion of students at NI HEIs who rated their ability to work in a team and leadership skills compared highly to students at GB HEIs again shows the greater confidence the students at NI HEIs had in their ability to work and deal with other people. The lower proportions of students studying a STEM subject at an NI or GB HEI who rated their self-discipline as excellent or very good is somewhat surprising given the belief expressed by employers (see Purcell, Atfield and Ball, 2008) that studying a STEM subject is implicitly harder work than for many non-STEM subjects and requires a higher level of diligence.

Figure 4: Percentage of students rating their skills as excellent or very good

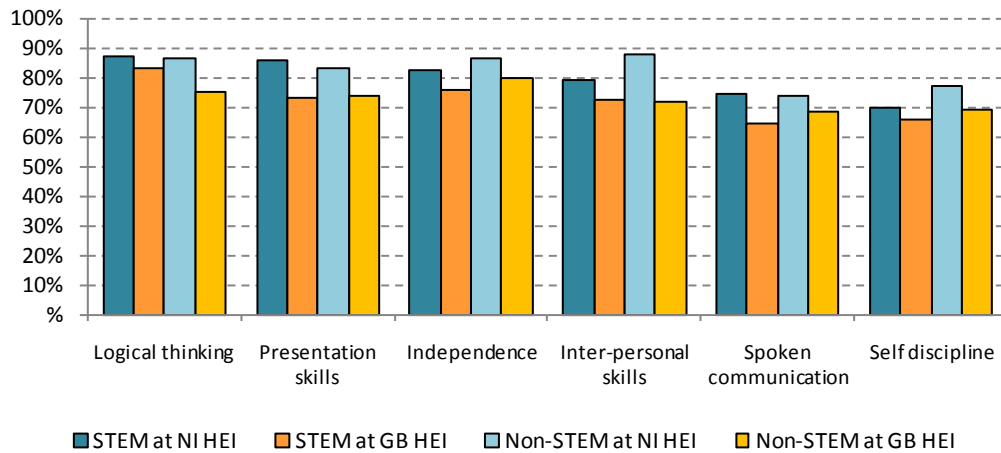


Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

Students from an intermediate occupational background were most likely to rate their skills highly, while on several measures, students from a routine and manual background were less likely to rate their skills as excellent or very good. This can particularly be seen when looking at the students' assessments of their self-confidence. Sixty per cent of students from a managerial or professional background rated their self-confidence as excellent or very good, as did 57 per cent of students from an intermediate occupational background, while only 40 per cent of routine and manual occupations do so. Students from a routine or manual background at NI HEIs were also least likely to say that the course had helped them to develop their self-confidence either very much or quite a lot (58 per cent, compared to figures of 60 per cent of students from a managerial or professional background and 73 per cent of students from an intermediate occupational background), suggesting that HE may not be equipping them with the confidence of their more socially-advantaged peers.

Figures 5 and 6 show the differences between students studying STEM and non-STEM subjects in NI and GB. Figure 5 suggests that differences between the responses of students at NI and GB institutions are not clearly attributable to the STEM/non-STEM balance in each group, as in relation to the five skills shown, not only do the NI STEM students rate their skills development more highly than their STEM counterparts in GB, but in each case both the STEM and non-STEM NI students rate their skills development more highly than either of the two GB groups.

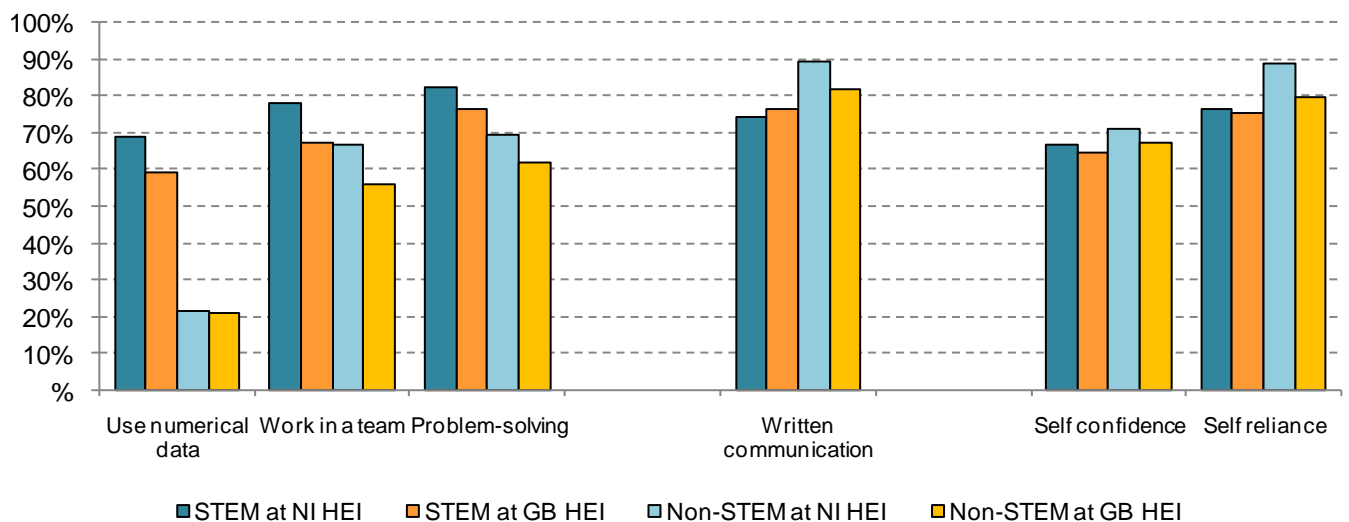
Figure 5: Skills students at NI HEIs were more likely to agree (selecting 1 to 3 on a 7 point scale) that their course had enabled to develop by subject type



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

The first group of skills in Figure 6 are those that STEM students, whether studying in NI or GB were particularly likely to agree that they had developed. The final two groups of skills in Figure 6 are those that show the opposite pattern - non-STEM students were more likely to agree that they had developed these skills than STEM students were. Written communication is interesting because it is the only skill that NI STEM students were less likely than GB STEM students to agree they had developed on their course.

Figure 6: Percentage of students agreeing (selecting 1 to 3 on a 7 point scale) that their course had enabled to develop particular skills by subject type

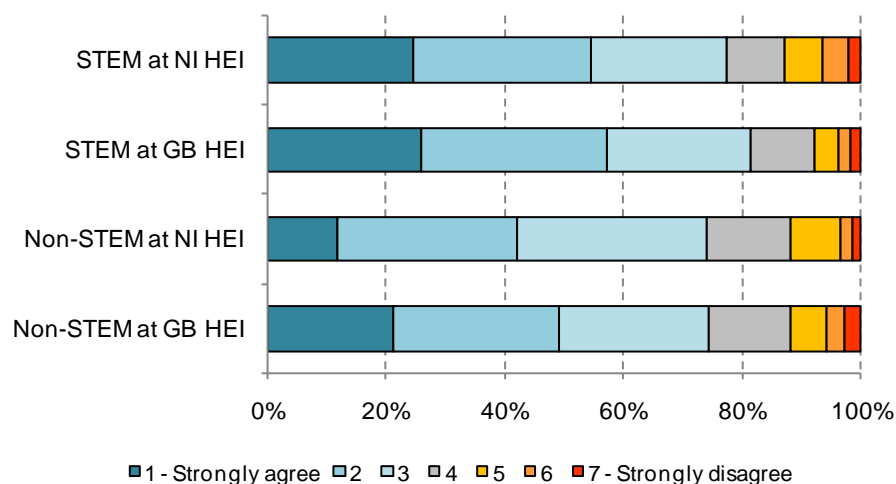


Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

It might be expected that the perception by students at NI HEIs that their courses enabled them to develop skills would translate into more positive views of their

employability, but this was not the case, as Figure 7 shows. As will be seen, this reflects their perception of the labour markets they expect to enter.

Figure 7: The skills I have developed on my course have made me more employable by subject type

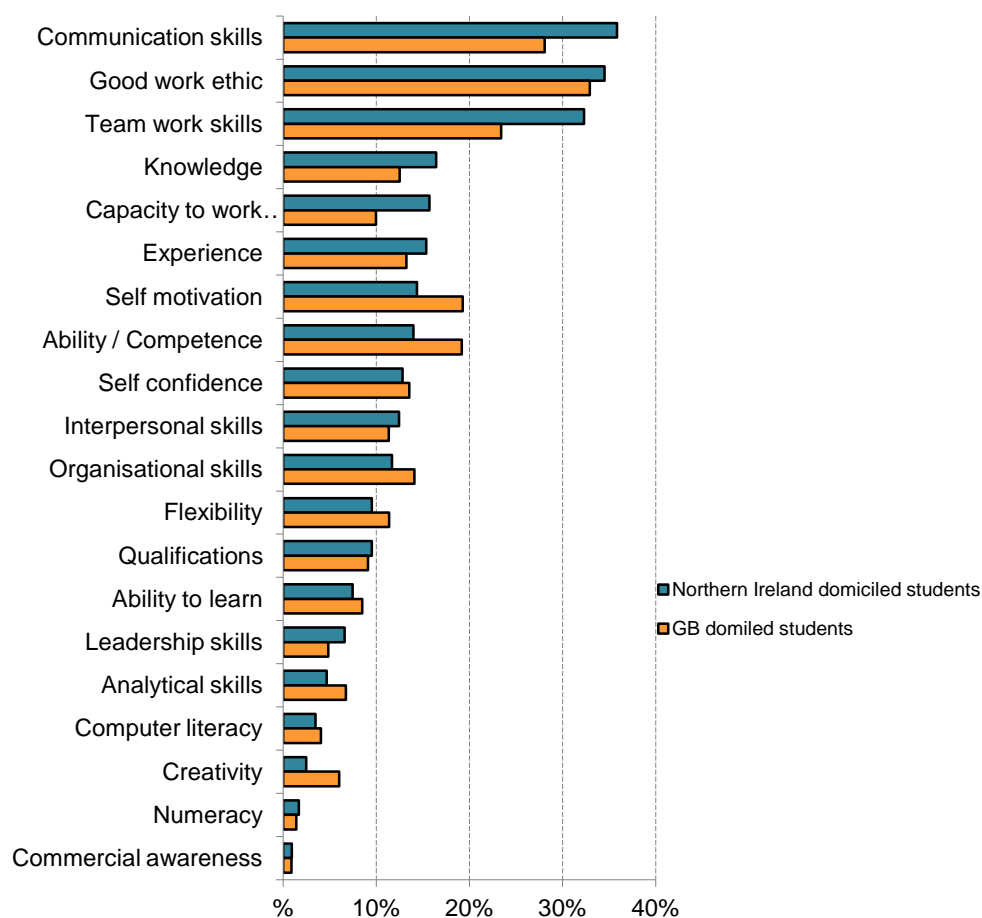


Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

The group that was most likely to agree (select 1 to 3 on a 7 point scale) that the skills they have developed on their course have made them more employable were students who were studying a STEM subject at a GB HEI (82 per cent). They are also the group that was most likely to strongly agree with the statement (26 per cent), while students studying a non-STEM subject at an NI HEI were least likely to strongly agree (12 per cent) or to agree at all (74 per cent). It is interesting to note that students studying a STEM subject at an NI HEI were most likely to disagree that the skills they had developed on their course had made them more employable, with 13 per cent doing so. This is likely to reflect opportunities, or perceptions of opportunities, in the NI labour market and the impact the current recession has had on the demand for particular STEM skills in NI.

As will be seen, students at NI HEIs were also less likely than their GB comparator group to say that they had all the skills employers were looking for when recruiting for the kinds of jobs the students wanted to apply for. This is somewhat surprising given, as Figure 8 shows, that when asked what skills they thought employers were looking for when recruiting for the kinds of jobs they wanted, NI students were more likely than GB ones to suggest the kinds of communication and team-working skills in which they had previously rated both their overall ability and their skills development on their courses highly. However, we did not ask whether or not they perceived that relevant vacancies were being advertised or were likely to become available, in other words, whether employers were recruiting at all and the level of competition that existed for graduate jobs in the locations where they were willing to work.

Figure 8: Skills students think employers are looking for when recruiting for the kinds of jobs they want

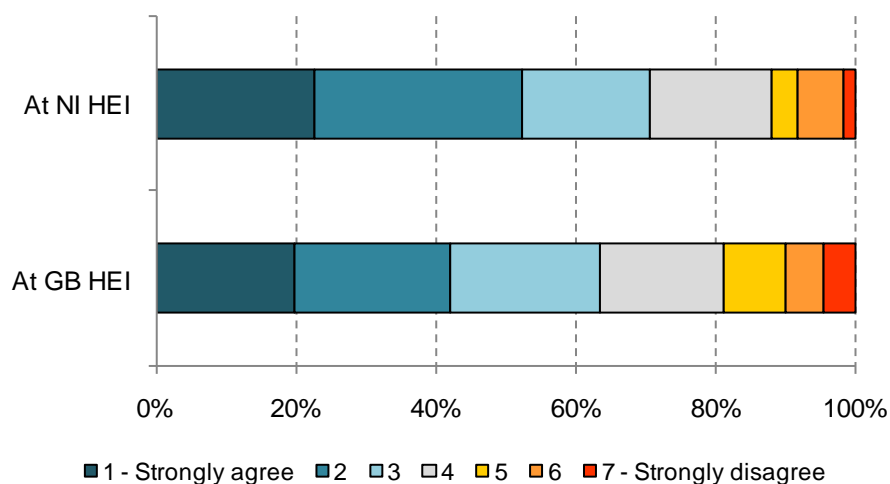


Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

As well as looking at whether the skills students developed on their course made them more employable, it is interesting to look at whether students believed that the HEI they attended conferred on them some kind of advantage in looking for employment, whether because the HEI is known to be prestigious, rigorous, turn out employable graduates or for other reasons. Archer and Davison (2008) found that 38 per cent of employers said that the reputation of the HEI a prospective employee attended was important, although degree class (60 per cent) was more important.

Figure 9 shows that students at NI HEIs were more likely than students at GB HEIs to agree both strongly (choose 1 on the 7 point scale) and to some extent (choose 1 to 3 on the 7 point scale) that “the university I attended is an advantage in looking for employment”. It has already been noted that a higher proportion of students attending NI HEIs attended a high tariff HEI, so it would be expected that they would assume that their HEI gave them some kind of benefit in the job market.

Figure 9: Response to the statement “The university I attended is an advantage in looking for employment”



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

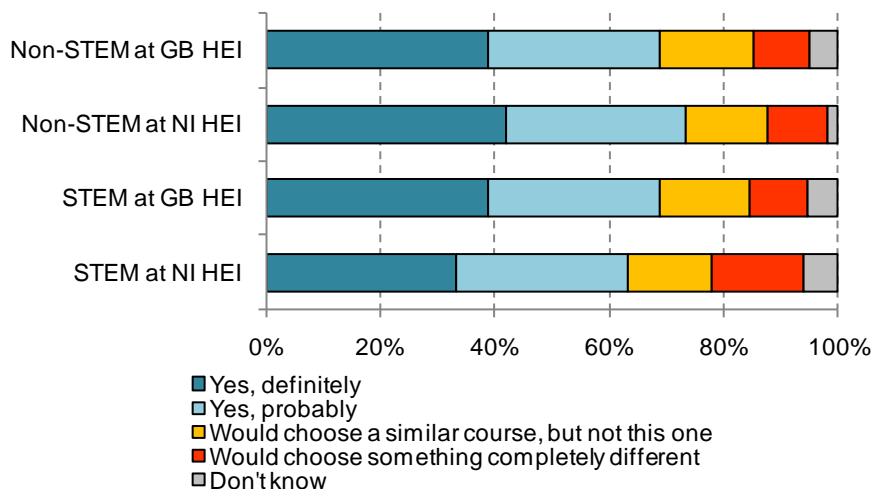
As has been seen, over a range of measures, students at NI HEIs were less likely than students at GB HEIs to believe that the skills they had developed in HE had made them more employable, despite rating their skills more highly. However, they were more likely to believe that the general experience of being a student had increased their employability. Their responses to the more all-encompassing statement “the experience of being a student has made me more employable” were only marginally more negative than those of the GB students. While students at NI HEIs were as likely as those at GB HEIs to strongly agree with the statement, they were slightly less likely to agree (choose 1 to 3 on the 7 point scale) overall, and somewhat more likely to disagree (choose 5 to 7) with the statement to some extent.

2.3 Students’ satisfaction with their experience of higher education

The above would suggest that, despite the skills development they have experienced on their course, students at NI HEIs would be less likely to choose the same course again, but there was no clear difference between the two groups: 38 per cent of students at NI HEIs said they would definitely choose the same course again and 31 per cent said they probably would, compared to figures of 39 per cent and 30 per cent of GB HEI students. However, the proportion of students at NI HEIs who said they would choose something completely different was slightly higher, 13 per cent compared to 10 per cent. Of our small sample of NI HEI students born outside NI, 29 per cent said that if they were starting again they would choose something completely different, and 25 per cent said that they would choose a similar course but not the one they had chosen, which suggests that further investigation of this group may be warranted.

Figure 10 shows the difference between students studying STEM and non-STEM subjects. It shows that nearly three quarters of students studying non-STEM subjects at NI HEIs said that they would definitely or probably choose the same course again (73 per cent), while, conversely, the students studying a STEM subject at an NI HEI were least likely to do so (63 per cent).

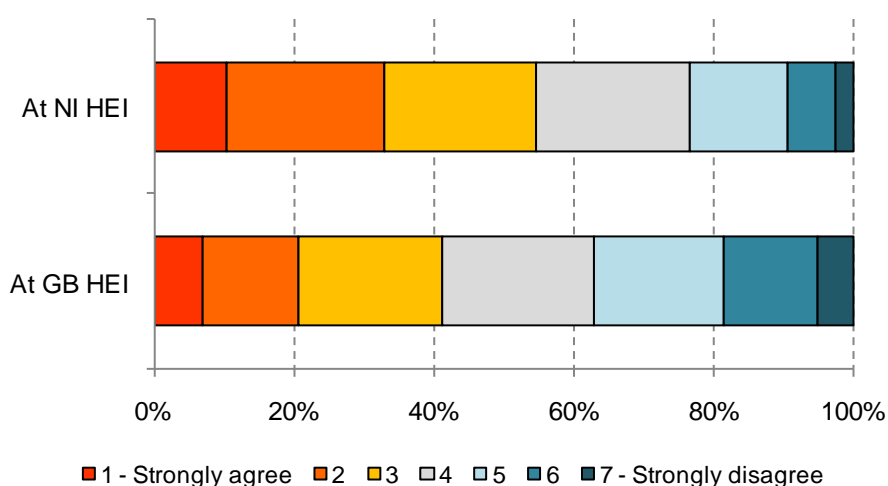
Figure 10: Whether students would choose the same course again by subject type



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

It has been noted that the non-STEM students at NI HEIs were least likely to believe that the skills they had developed on their course had made them more employable, but this difference cannot be solely attributed to the skills students thought they had developed on their course. Other factors, such as the amount of work they were expected to complete and their anticipated final degree classification also played a part in whether students would choose the same course again. Figure 11 shows whether students agreed that the amount of work they had to complete on their course was excessive.

Figure 11: Agreement with the statement “The amount of work I had to complete on my course was excessive”



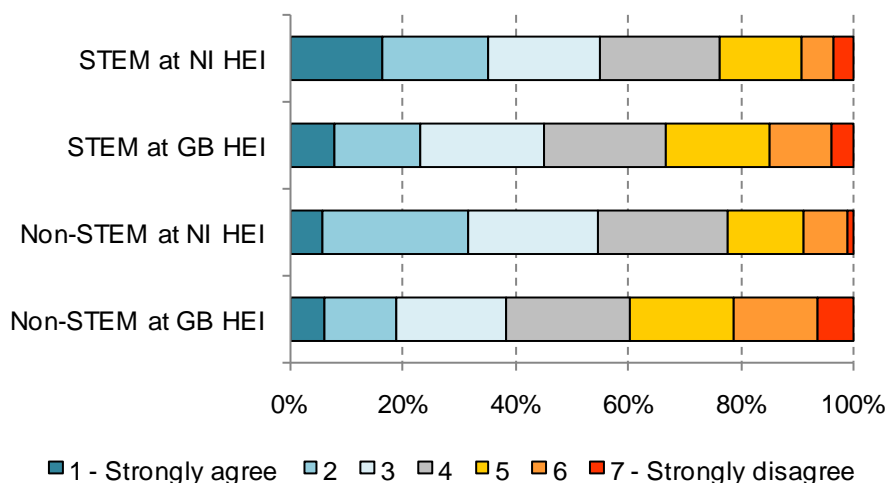
Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

The differences are significant. Students at NI HEIs were more likely to consider that they had too heavy a workload. Ten per cent of students studying at an NI HEI

strongly agreed that the amount of work they had to complete was excessive, compared to seven per cent of students at GB HEIs, and 55 per cent agreed somewhat (chose 1 to 3 on the 7 point scale), compared to only 41 per cent of students at GB HEIs. Analysis of Wave 2 data, collected when respondents were in their first year in HE suggests that students at NI HEIs spent slightly longer, on average, in timetabled lessons, tutorials and practical work and on coursework or study outside the classroom, but this difference in hours is not great enough to fully account for the difference in the proportion of respondents who thought the amount of work they had to complete on their course was excessive. Fifty six per cent of students who were born in NI and studied in NI agreed to some extent that the amount of work they had to complete on their course was excessive, as did 52 per cent of students who were born in NI and studied at a GB HEI. Conversely, only 41 per cent of GB-born students who were studying at a GB HEI and 31 per cent of GB-born students studying at an NI HEI did so. Does this imply that students who were domiciled in NI prior to entering HE, compared to the GB-domiciled population, (i.e. those who may be assumed to have completed their secondary schooling in NI rather than GB), may have been less well prepared for the amount of work that was expected of them?

Figure 12 suggests that this difference is unlikely to be attributable to the subject mix at institutions in NI and GB. As can be seen, students studying both STEM and non-STEM subjects at NI institutions were more likely to agree that the amount of work they had to complete on their course was excessive and were much less likely to disagree. It also suggests that employers may be correct in their assumption that STEM subjects tend to be more time-consuming than non-STEM subjects on average.

Figure 12: Agreement with the statement “The amount of work I had to complete on my course was excessive” by subject type



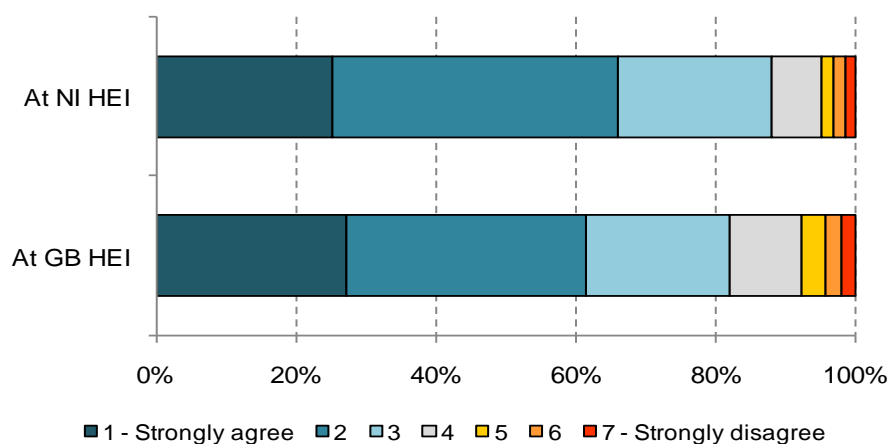
Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

Despite the increased likelihood that respondents at NI HEIs considered the amount of work they were expected to complete on their course excessive, respondents at NI HEIs were slightly less likely to expect to achieve a first class or upper second

degree. Sixty-nine per cent of students at NI HEIs expected to achieve either a 1st or a 2:1, compared to 73 per cent of students at GB HEIs. Students who were born in NI and studied in NI were least likely to expect to achieve a first class degree, but were only slightly less likely than GB students at GB HEIs to expect to achieve at least a 2:1. These figures are somewhat higher than the figures reported by HESA on the degree classifications of all first degree graduates in 2009/10 which show that, for those graduates whose classification is known, 66 per cent of graduates from NI HEIs received a 1st class or 2:1 degree, compared to 63 per cent of graduates from the UK as a whole. Students from NI studying in GB and those from GB studying in NI were more likely than either of the 'stayer' groups to say that they expected to achieve a first class degree, and also more likely to say that they did not expect to achieve at least a 2:1..

Despite their concerns about their employability and the amount of work they had to do, students at NI HEIs did not generally rate their experience of being a student significantly less highly than students at GB HEIs. Figure 13 shows the responses of students at NI and GB HEIs to the statement "The experience of being a student has enhanced my social and intellectual capabilities more broadly". While students at NI HEIs were slightly less likely to agree that there were excellent opportunities for extra-curricular activities on or around their campus (60 per cent compared to 65 per cent agreed to some extent), as the Figure shows, students at NI HEIs were more likely to agree that the experience of being a student had enhanced their social and intellectual capabilities more broadly, either strongly or at all.

Figure 13: Responses to the statement "The experience of being a student has enhanced my social and intellectual capabilities more broadly"

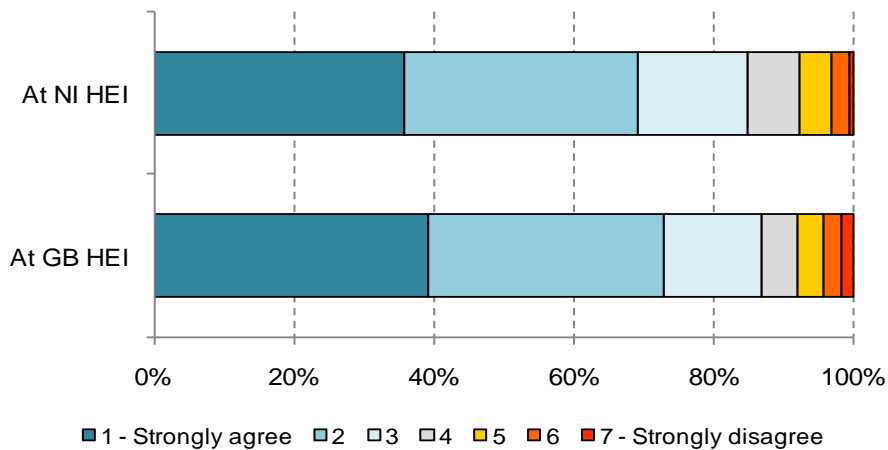


Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

Similarly, when asked whether, overall, their experience of being a student was a positive one, as Figure 14 shows, again students at NI HEIs were only slightly less positive than those at GB HEIs. However, as with the likelihood of choosing to do the same course again if choosing with hindsight, which itself shows a clear influence on whether students rated their HE experience as positive overall, there was a clear difference between the students who were born in NI and studied there and those

who had come from outside NI. The proportion of students who said that overall their experience had been positive was between 85 and 86 per cent for Northern Ireland students studying in NI, GB students studying in Britain and NI students studying in Britain, but the figure for British students studying in NI was significantly lower, at 68 per cent. The dissatisfied minority who did not agree was fifteen per cent of this group, compared to six to eight per cent for the other groups. This is a small group and strong ‘health warnings’ need to be borne in mind, but the differences found suggest the need for further exploration.

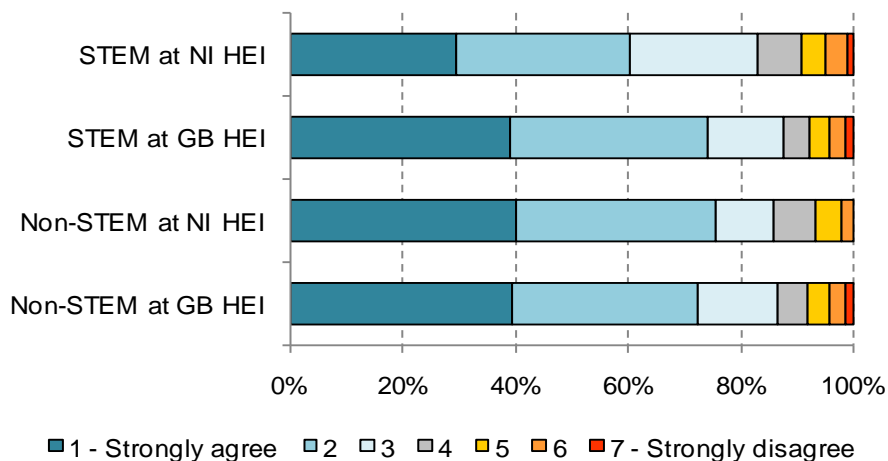
Figure 14: Responses to the statement “Being a student at the university or college where I studied was a positive experience overall”



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

Similarly, the students studying a STEM subject at an NI HEI stand out as being somewhat less satisfied with their experience, although, as Figure 15 shows, levels of satisfaction were generally positive, with more than four out of five students expressing satisfaction at least to some extent.

Figure 15: Responses to the statement “Being a student at the university or college where I studied was a positive experience overall” by subject type

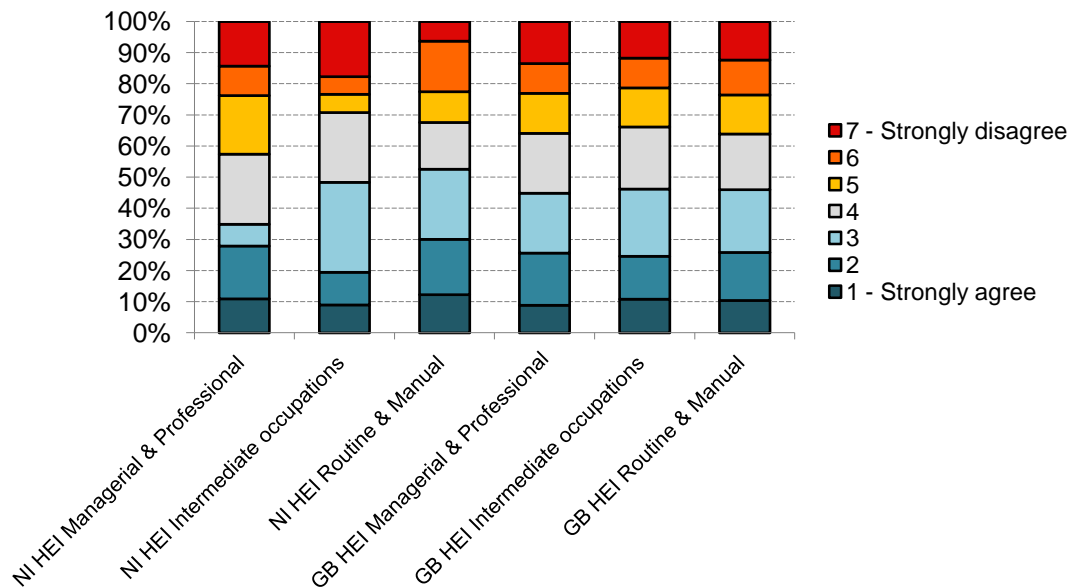


Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

Students from an intermediate occupational background at NI HEIs were least likely to agree that their experience had been positive overall (79 per cent compared to figures of 87 per cent for those from a managerial or professional background and 84 per cent for students from a routine or manual background), and to agree that being a student is hard work and disagree that it is fun. They appear to be more career-focussed than those from other SES groups, and were happier with many aspects of their skills development, while generally exhibiting a lower degree of satisfaction with their HE experience overall. In this respect, they have more similarities with the British students from routine and manual at GB HEIs than they do with the students from intermediate occupational backgrounds at these institutions.

Despite their high level of agreement that their experience of HE had been positive overall, students from managerial and professional background at NI HEIs were the least likely to say that their course had been good value for money. All of this reinforces previous findings that socially-advantaged students are more demanding or discerning consumers of HE.

Figure 16: Agreement (selected 1 to 3 on a 7 point scale) with the statement “my course is good value for money”



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

3. Career plans and aspirations

This section examines the preparations made by students in their final year for their careers after graduation. First, it looks at the plans students had for the year after graduation, their confidence in achieving these plans and the impact of debt on the options available to different groups of students. Second, it outlines the sources of careers advice and job search methods used by different students, and finally it investigates the characteristics students sought in their future employment.

3.1 Post-graduation plans

Table 3 shows the broad similarity in the plans of the students from the different groups for the year after their graduation: Slightly over half of each group anticipated finding employment. A higher proportion of British students expected that this type of employment would be temporary, while Northern Ireland students were more likely to anticipate undertaking further study. Both of these options may be largely short-term, satisficing strategies, likely, in part, to be reactions to the current economic climate, and students' lack of confidence in finding permanent employment related to their long-term career plans.

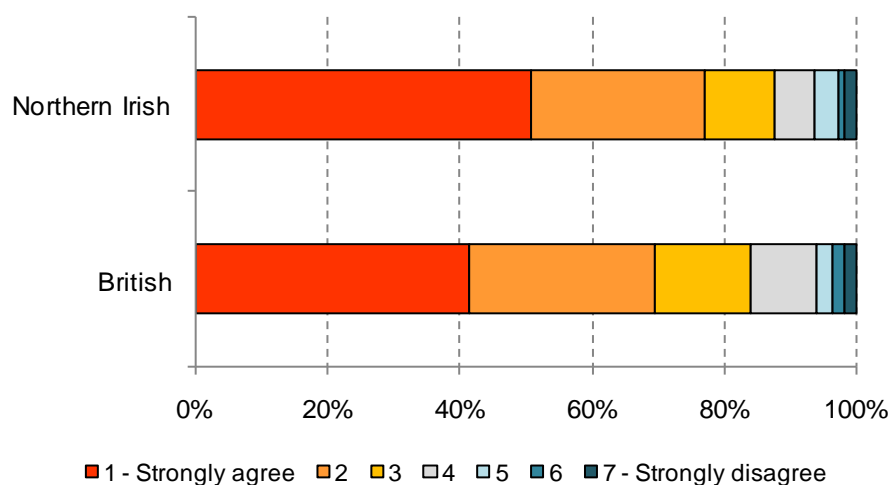
Table 2: Plans for the year after graduation (excluding vacation work between degrees)

	All Ireland (%)	Northern domiciled	All domiciled (%)	British
Obtain employment related to longer-term career plans	41.2		38.7	
Become self-employed	2.2		2.3	
Temporary employment while considering longer-term plans	13.3		17.4	
Temporary employment while paying off debt	1.0		2.2	
Full-time postgraduate degree course	22.8		18.1	
Undertake vocational training	2.4		3.7	
Travel or take time out	9.1		8.3	
Don't know	4.2		3.6	
Other	3.7		5.6	

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

The likely impact of graduating into a period of economic downturn is also seen in the high proportion of respondents who agree that "It is more difficult now for graduates to find suitable employment than it was in the past". Northern Ireland students were more likely than British students to agree, as Figure 17 shows. This is likely to reflect both the labour market they are most familiar with and the opportunities available in the areas where they are seeking employment.

Figure 17: Response the statement “It is more difficult now for graduates to find suitable employment than it was in the past”

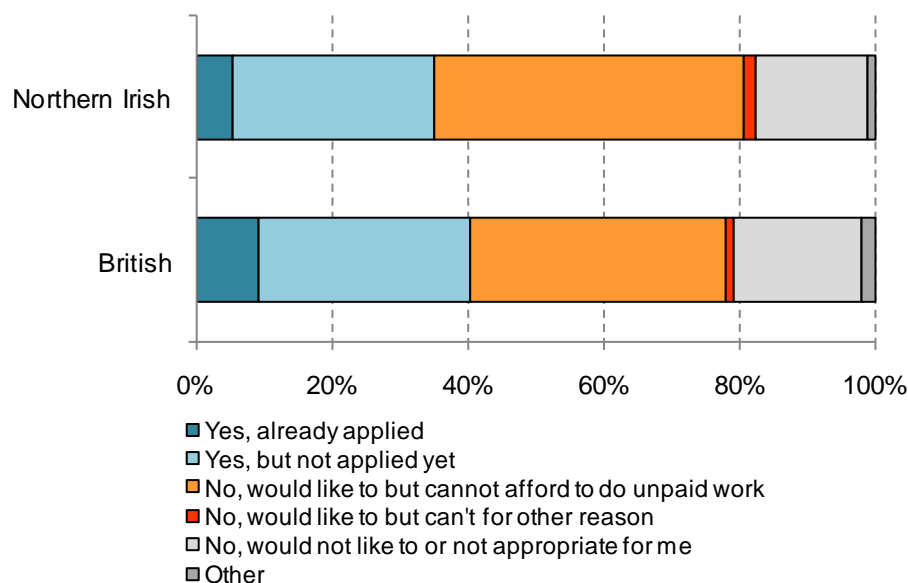


Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

Although it might have been expected, there was no significant difference between the proportions of STEM and non-STEM students who agreed that it is more difficult. Within the STEM subject group, there are some areas and specialisms for which there is a high demand for graduates and employment rates are high, while conversely, there are some areas where graduate unemployment is high. This difference between the different subject areas within the broader STEM subject category is likely to account for the broad similarities in STEM and non-STEM Futuretrack students’ responses. The Skills Strategy for NI, ‘Success through Skills – Transforming Futures’ (2011:20-21) notes that compared to the UK as a whole, NI has an above average concentration of people in employment with degrees in some STEM subject areas, namely medicine and dentistry, subjects allied to medicine, and veterinary science, agriculture and related subjects, but that STEM subject areas that have been forecast as being required to meet future demand for STEM skills are physical sciences, mathematical and computer science, and engineering and technologies, whilst subjects allied to medicine will see less demand.

Unpaid graduate jobs or internships are an increasingly common route into particular professions, including the arts, media and publishing (Cabinet Office, 2010). Respondents were asked whether they planned to apply for any unpaid jobs or graduate internships to gain experience. Figure 18 shows that around 40 per cent of British students and a slightly smaller proportion of Northern Ireland students expecting to do so. It is clear from the Figure that not being able to afford to do unpaid work is a greater barrier for Northern Ireland students.

Figure 18: Whether students expected to apply for unpaid jobs or graduate internships to obtain experience

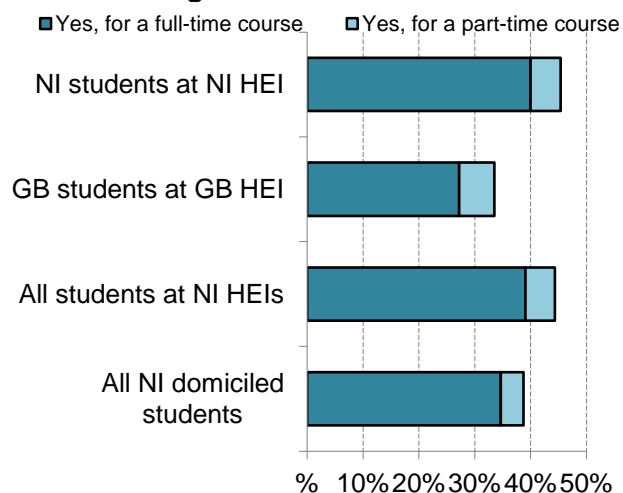


Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

3.2 Post-graduation courses

A significant proportion of students expected to undertake a full-time postgraduate degree course, and, as Figure 19 shows, an even higher proportion had or expected to apply for such a course. This may be because the full-time degree course represents a back-up plan in the event that the student does not find work, or that the student would like to do a postgraduate degree course but is unsure if they will be accepted or be able to afford it.

Figure 19: Proportion of students who had applied, or expected to apply, to do another course or vocational training in the year after graduation

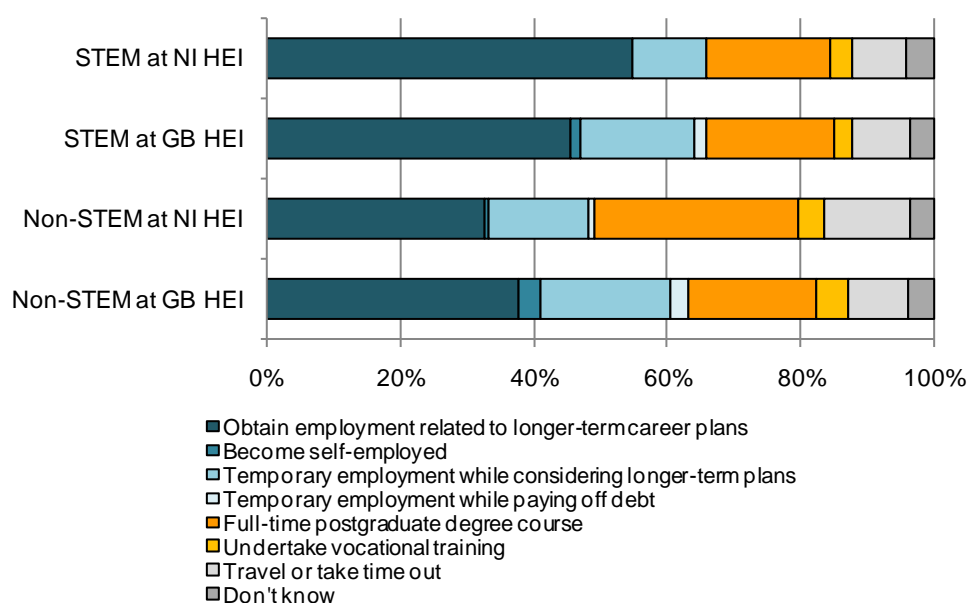


Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

As Figure 19 shows, students at NI HEIs were most likely to be planning to apply to do another course or vocational training, and it was the Northern Ireland students at these institutions who were slightly more likely to be planning further study. These students were more likely than the other groups to give broadly academic reasons for wanting to pursue further study. More than half (51 per cent) of Northern Ireland students at NI HEIs gave “interest in the course” as one of their reasons for applying or expecting to apply to do another course, and 44 per cent said that “wanting to study the subject at a higher level” was one of their reasons. Conversely, they were less likely than GB students at GB institutions to say that they wanted to take another course because it was “essential for their future career” (the most common reason for all groups, given by 61 per cent of NI students at NI HEIs, 65 per cent of GB students at GB HEIs). More than a third of Northern Ireland students at NI HEIs who were planning to do some form of further study said that they planned to study for a postgraduate teaching certificate, compared to 29 per cent of GB students at GB HEIs who were planning further study.

Almost half the students planning to apply for further study said they expected to apply for a taught Master’s degree (48 per cent of NI students at NI HEIs and 44 per cent of GB students at GB HEIs). Northern Ireland students at NI HEIs were also more likely than their GB counterparts to be planning to study for a PhD or other research degree. Twenty three per cent of NI students at NI HEIs said they planned to apply for this type of course, compared to 11 per cent of GB students at GB HEIs, and NI STEM students were slightly more likely than non-STEM students to plan to study for a PhD, while non-STEM students were significantly more likely than STEM students to be planning to take a taught Master’s degree. Students from a higher SES group were more likely than those from other groups to anticipate studying for a taught Masters degree or a PhD, which may reflect the cost of these options.

Figure 20: Plans for the year after graduation (excluding vacation work between degrees) by subject type



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

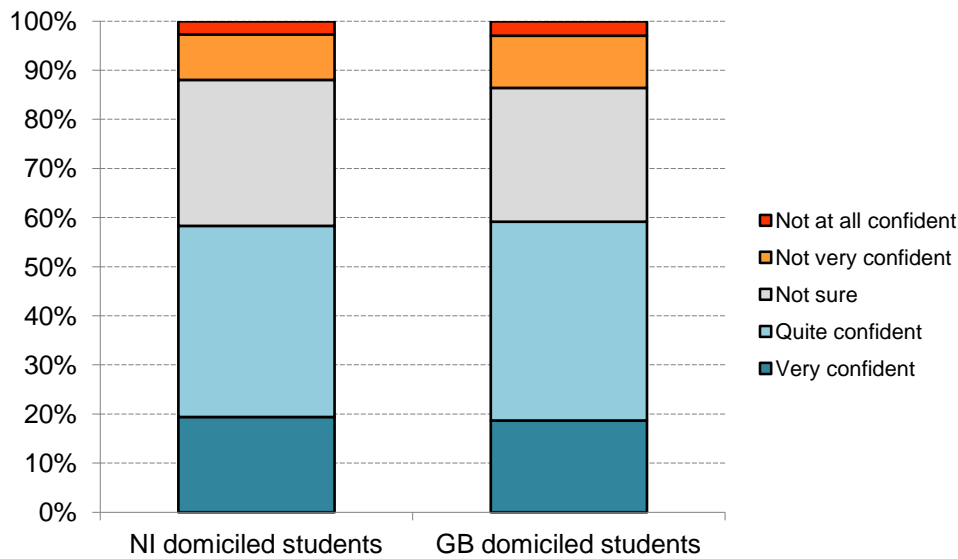
As Figure 20 shows, significant differences can be seen between the expectations of STEM and non-STEM students. STEM students were more likely than non-STEM students to expect to go into employment upon graduation, rather than continuing to study. This is not unexpected, as many STEM courses at GB HEIs have the option of completing a fourth year if students want to continue their studies, and the students in this survey had graduated after completing a three year course, meaning that a significant proportion of them will have had the option to continue studying and not taken it. This appears to be particularly the case with the STEM students at NI HEIs. Of those who were planning further study, just 24 per cent said that their reason for doing this was “to continue studying their subject at a higher level” and 37 per cent because they were “interested in the course”. The comparable figures for STEM students at GB HEIs were 41 and 52 per cent. Sixteen per cent of this group (STEM students at NI HEIs) said they wanted to go on to further study to “change direction”, a figure that is double that of the next highest group (STEM students at GB HEIs).

It is noticeable that even among the STEM students, whose courses are likely to have been more vocationally orientated, 11 per cent of those at NI HEIs and 16 per cent at GB HEIs expected to take temporary employment that was unrelated to their long-term career plans. This, as will be seen in subsequent sections, appears to reflect a lack of confidence in being able to find suitable employment in the graduate labour market given the current economic conditions.

3.3 *The impact of debt on post-graduation plans*

Uncertainty about opportunities in the labour market was reflected in the confidence students had in being able to achieve their aspirations for the year after they graduated. Only a few months prior to completing their courses, more than a quarter of respondents were not sure whether they would achieve their hopes for the year after graduation, and on average, 14 per cent of students were either not very confident or not confident at all. As Figure 21 shows, overall, Northern Ireland students were as likely as British students to say that they were very or quite confident they would achieve their hopes for the year after graduation (58 per cent of Northern Ireland students and 59 per cent of British students). It must be remembered less than half of the students surveyed said that they planned to find permanent employment related to their long-term career ambitions in the year after they graduated. Many students had already made adjustments to their hopes and plans for the year after they graduated to make them more realistic and achievable.

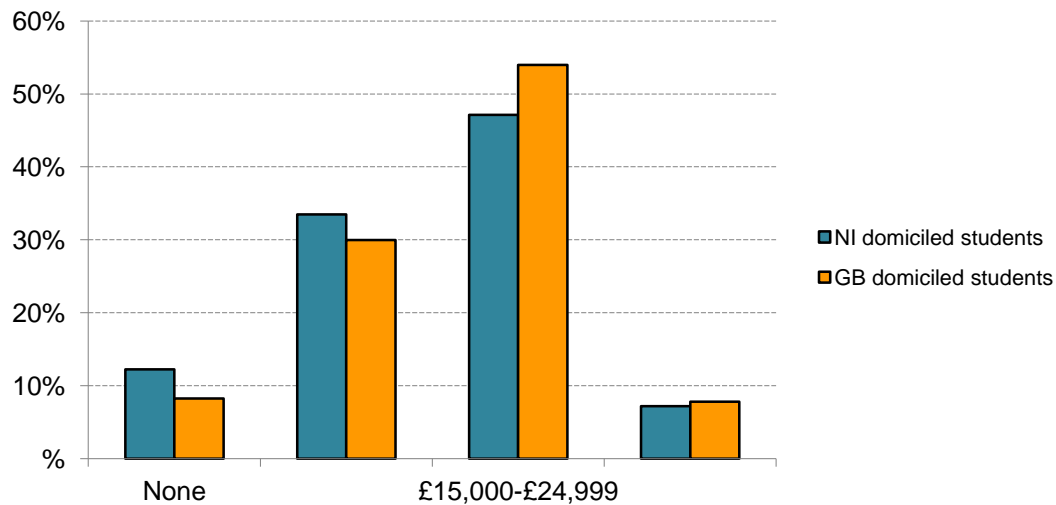
Figure 21: Confidence about achieving hopes for the year after graduation



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

It appears that while the labour market situation has had an impact on students' hopes of achieving their post-graduation plans, debt accrued during higher education has limited the plans some groups have been able to make. From September 2006 universities and colleges in Northern Ireland and GB could charge up to £3,000 a year for courses for new students at that time. Eligible students could then apply for a Tuition Fee Loan of up to £3,000 to cover the cost of their fees. Students would not have to begin repaying these loans until they had finished their course and are earning over £15,000 a year. Eligible Northern Ireland students could apply for a means-tested (non-repayable) Maintenance Grant up to a maximum of £3,200. Students who are entitled to receive a Maintenance Grant could also apply for a maintenance loan, however the maximum amount of loan they could receive would be reduced by £1,700. Figure 22 shows the expected personal repayable debt of Northern Ireland and British students. As can be seen, Northern Ireland students expected to have lower levels of repayable debt, which is likely to reflect their propensity to live at home and work during term time and in vacations.

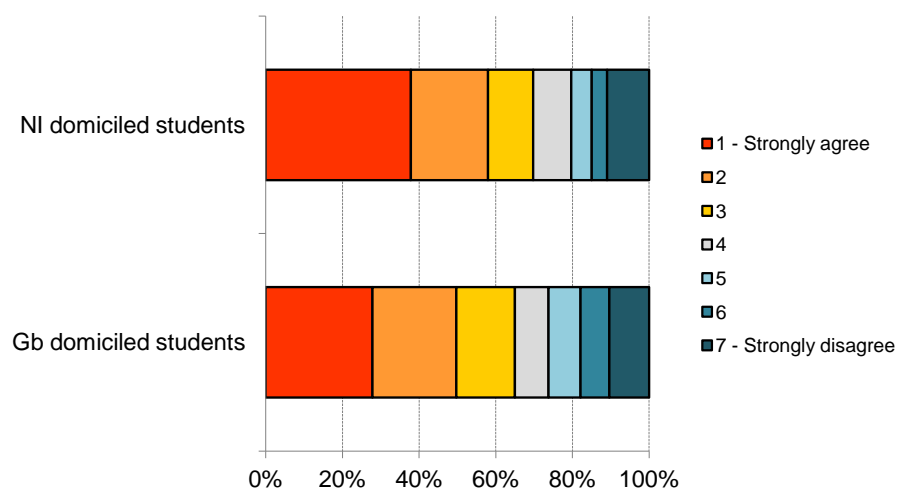
Figure 22: Expected personal repayable debt at graduation, excluding existing debt



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

Despite this, as Figure 23 shows, Northern Ireland students at NI HEIs were not significantly less likely than other groups to say that they were worried about the prospect of having to repay loans and debts when they had completed their course. Northern Ireland students as a whole were more likely than British students both to strongly agree that they were worried (38 per cent of Northern Ireland students compared to 28 per cent of British students) and to agree that they were worried to some extent (chose 1 to 3 on the 7 point scale) (70 per cent compared to 65 per cent). This is likely to reflect concerns Northern Ireland students have about finding well-paid employment in the Northern Ireland labour market.

Figure 23: Response to the statement “I am worried about prospect of having to repay loans and debts when I have completed my course”



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

Respondents who said that they had some repayable debt were asked what impact this had on their post-graduation options, and Northern Ireland students were more

likely to say that it would have some impact on their plans, as Figure 25 shows. The gap between the Northern Ireland students from a professional or managerial background is greater than that seen in GB.

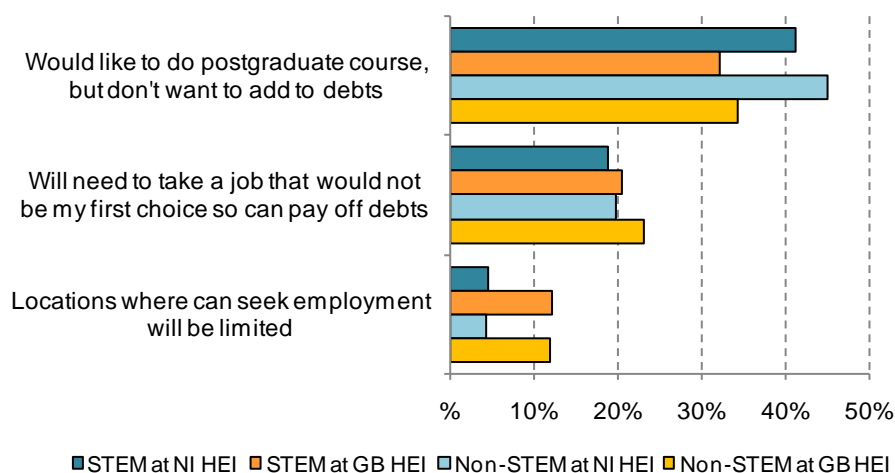
Figure 24: Proportion of respondents who said their options would be limited by debts by SES group



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

As Figure 25 shows, for those students who said that debt would have an impact on their post-graduation plans, the most common impact for all groups was that they would like to do a postgraduate course but did not want to add to their debts. It is also clear that this affects a larger proportion of the students at NI HEIs, in part because they were among those most likely to have wanted to do a postgraduate course.

Figure 25: Impact of debt on post-graduation options



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

Students at NI HEIs were less likely than students at GB HEIs to say that the locations where they would be able to seek employment will be limited, but, as will be seen, students from Northern Ireland tend to be less geographically mobile on graduation and express a preference for remaining in Northern Ireland.

There does appear to be a social class dimension in relation to concerns about debt. Three quarters of students from a routine and manual background at NI HEIs agreed to some extent that they were worried about the prospect of having to repay loans and debts, compared to 67 and 64 per cent of students from a managerial and professional and intermediate occupational background respectively.

The lower figure for students from an intermediate occupational background is somewhat surprising, given that they were the group that was least likely to anticipate having debts of under £15,000 when they graduated. Less than half (46 per cent) of this group anticipated having debt of less than £15,000, while the figures for the other two groups was 53 per cent. Furthermore, they are the group that was most likely to say that their options would be limited by debt.

Given their greater propensity to expect to go into work in the year after they graduated, and their willingness to go into a job that might not necessarily be their first choice (40 per cent of the students who said their options would be limited by debt said that they would need to take a job that would not be their first choice in order to pay off debts, compared to less than 15 per cent of the other two SES groups), it may be that the students from an intermediate occupational background expected to be able to pay off any debts they had relatively easily once they were in employment. As a group, the Northern Ireland students from an intermediate occupational background appear to be more vocationally orientated than the other SES groups, and to be happier with their skills development. They were the group that was most likely to agree that it will be easy for them to find the kind of job they want when they graduate (52 per cent, compared to a third of students from a professional and managerial background and 40 per cent of students from a routine and manual background).

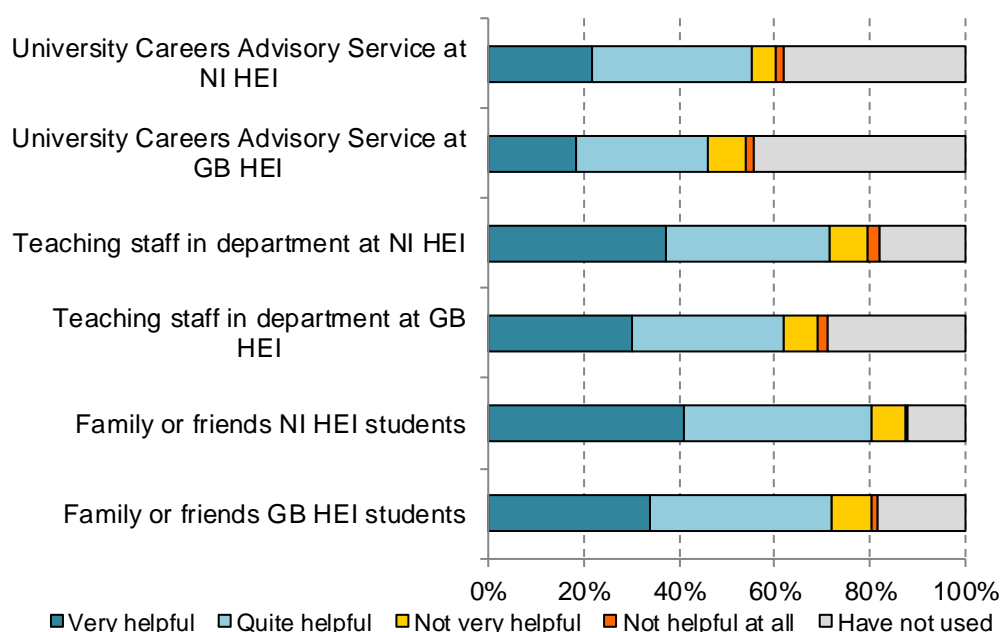
3.4 *Sources of careers advice*

Having looked at the plans students had for the year after graduation, it is useful to examine how they have arrived at these plans and the relationship they have with long-term career development. It has been noted that a significant proportion of final year students expected to delay embarking on what they expected to be their long-term career, either by taking temporary employment or continuing in education.

The careers advice students received in their final year came from a variety of sources, both within their HEI and outside. For all groups, the most commonly accessed sources of careers advice were: Friends and family (used by 82 per cent of respondents); Teaching staff in their academic department (71 per cent of respondents); the Careers Advisory Service at their HEI (56 per cent). The large proportion of students who had consulted friends and family for careers advice highlights the importance of these kinds of informal methods of careers planning even for groups that have relatively good access to more formal sources. It also

highlights the disadvantage experienced by students who do not have friends and family with appropriate knowledge to advise them. Just over three quarters (76 per cent) of students from a routine and manual background at NI HEIs had sought advice from their family or friends, compared to over 90 per cent of students from the other two SES groups. However, the different HE and labour market experiences of these groups mean they are more or less able to offer appropriate advice. For the Northern Ireland students, the low proportion of their parents who have experience of HE, and consequently seeking work as a graduate, might be expected to limit the advice they can provide. Although the advice offered by friends and family might be less specific than that provided by professionals in HEIs, Figure 26 shows that family and friends were rated as the most helpful sources of careers advice of the three main sources students had used.

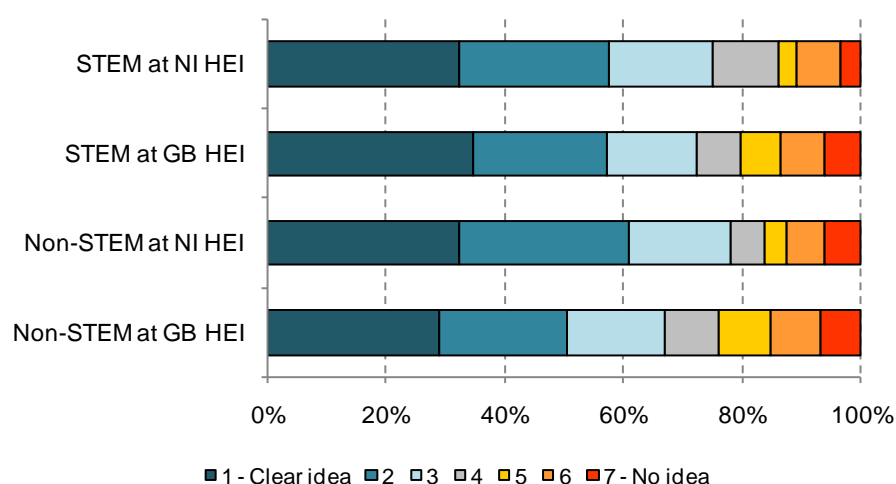
Figure 26: Helpfulness of selected sources of careers advice



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

Take-up of formal careers advice through the Careers Advisory Services of HEIs was perhaps lower than might be expected, given the formal role of the careers services in HEIs. The most common reason given by students at both NI and GB HEIs for not using the careers service at their HEI was that they already knew what to do in the future and how to do it. This was given as a reason for not using the Careers Service by 40 per cent of the students at NI HEIs who had not used the Careers Service and by 36 per cent of students at GB HEIs. This clarity about the careers they eventually wish to pursue is replicated when students were asked to rate their current ideas about the occupation they wanted to enter and the qualifications they would need to do so. Seventy-seven per cent of students at NI HEIs rated their careers clarity between 1 and 3 on a 7 point scale, where 1 meant that they had a clear idea and 7 meant that they had no idea. The figure for students at GB HEIs was 69 per cent.

Figure 27: Current idea about occupation and required qualifications



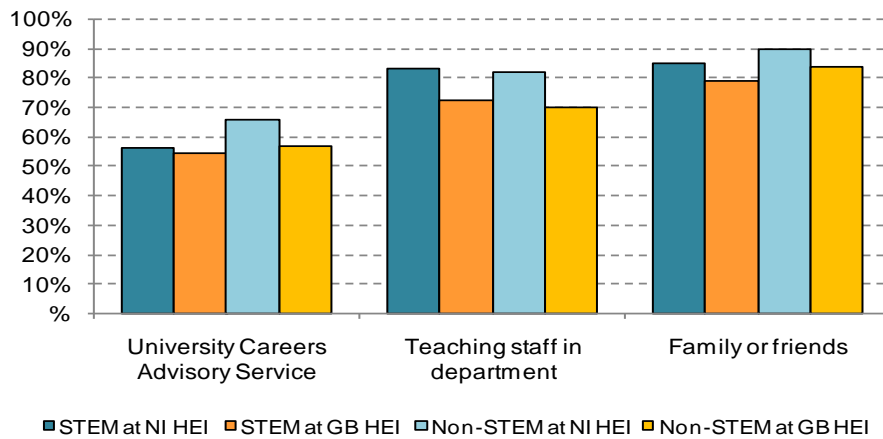
Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

Twenty-seven per cent of students at NI HEIs said that their HE experience had reinforced their original career plans, compared to 20 per cent of students at GB HEIs. This, in common with the higher proportions of students at NI HEIs who considered their courses vocational and who had undertaken some form of work experience while they were in HE, suggests that NI students were somewhat more focussed on careers development at an earlier stage in their HE careers than other students.

The hypothesis that the careers services at NI HEIs have particular specific knowledge that is useful to students studying at NI HEIs is borne out by the proportions of students who said they had not used the Careers Service because they “do not think the Careers Service offers the kind of information or advice I require”. Twenty-four per cent of students at GB HEIs who had not used their Careers Service gave this as a reason, compared to 14 per cent of students at NI HEIs.

As Figure 28 shows, not only were students at NI HEIs more likely to use the different sources of careers advice, but STEM students at these HEIs were more likely than non-STEM students to have used them, which is a rather different pattern to that shown by students at GB HEIs. In all cases, STEM students were more likely to rate the careers advice services they had used as ‘very helpful’.

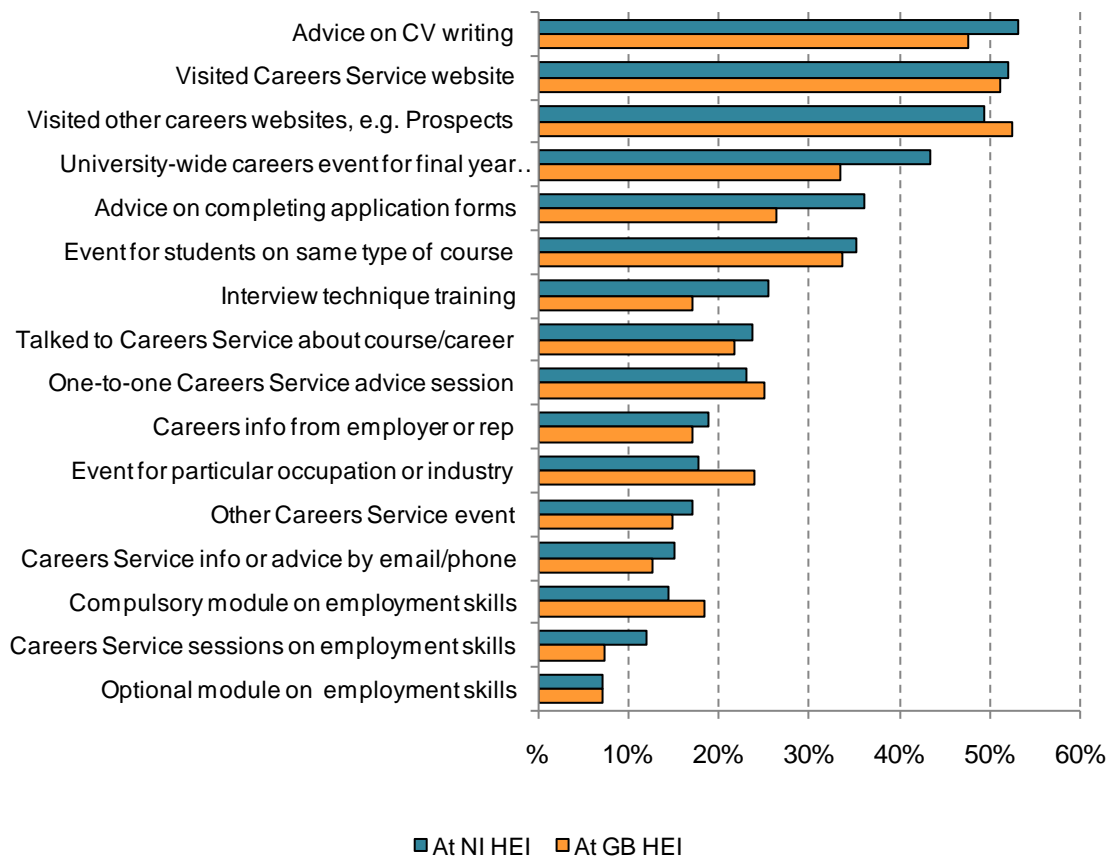
Figure 28: Use of different types of careers advice by subject type



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

Although take-up of careers advice through HEI Careers Advisory Services is somewhat lower than expected, it is clear that they offer a range of services that students find useful. Figure 30 shows that types of careers advice students accessed through their HEI in their final year.

Figure 29: Types of careers advice provided by HEIs used by final year students



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

The first thing to note is the higher take-up by students at NI HEIs of almost all careers services. However, there are some exceptions, most notably the lower proportion of NI HEI students who have attended an event for a particular occupation or industry. These events often involve guests from the occupation or industry itself, and the smaller numbers of students at NI HEIs who have attended these events may point to issues with encouraging such industry representatives to include NI HEIs in their schedules. It is also noticeable that there is a greater difference between the proportions of students at NI and GB HEIs taking up specific advice designed to help them in the application process itself, for example, advice completing application forms and interview training technique, than there is between the groups using advice designed to help them in determining the type of career they would like, for example careers talking generally to a Careers Service representative and one-on-one advice.

3.5 *Job-seeking activities of final year students*

Despite their clearer ideas about their career plans and increased use of careers advice resources, students at NI HEIs were slightly less likely to have started searching for post-graduation employment. Forty-seven per cent of students at NI HEIs had started their search, compared to 51 per cent of students at GB HEIs. In part this is likely to be attributable to the higher proportion of students at NI HEIs who plan to undertake postgraduate study rather than moving directly into employment. Of those who had started searching for employment, students at NI HEIs were as likely as those at GB HEIs to have applied for a job related to their long term career plans (53 per cent compared to 52 per cent) and those who had applied were as likely as students at GB HEIs to have been offered a job related to their long-term career plans (22 per cent compared to 23 per cent).

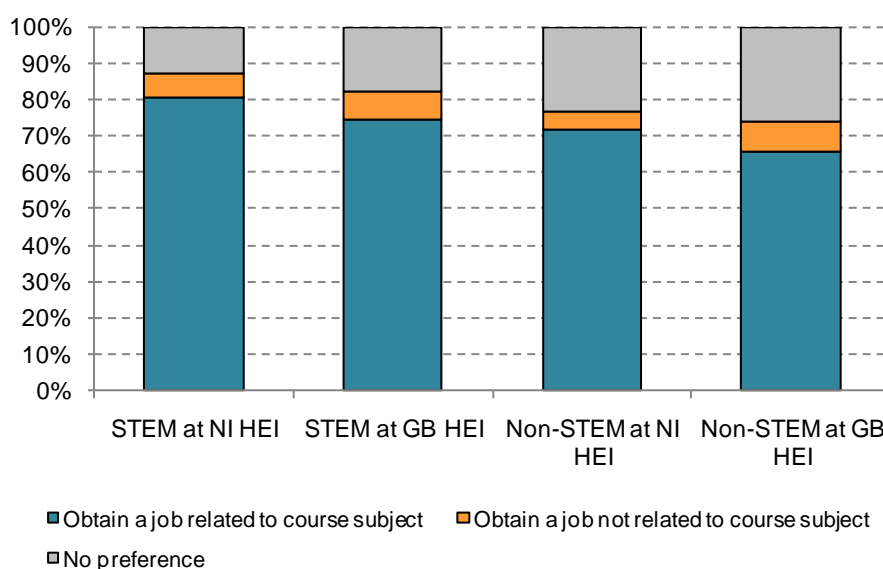
The students at NI HEIs are more likely in their propensity to apply for jobs not related to their long term career plans. Of the students who had started searching for employment, 30 per cent had applied for jobs not related to their long-term career plans (and 29 per cent of this group had been offered a job), compared to 18 per cent of the same group at GB HEIs (of whom 18 per cent had been offered a job), which may be indicative of the relative strength of the labour markets in NI and GB. There are many reasons why this is the case. Firstly, students at NI HEIs may be looking in a more restricted job market, due to their preference for remaining in NI. Secondly, these students may be planning to work temporarily to earn money for postgraduate study, which is a preferred option for many NI students. Finally, it may indicate a generally low level of confidence in their ability to find employment in the field in which they intend to develop their long-term careers and a general willingness or need to apply for any jobs in the short term in a situation of restricted opportunities. Despite this, Northern Ireland students are less likely than British students to expect that they will be in temporary employment in the year after they graduate, so it may be that these students are applying for temporary employment as a back-up plan if they are unable to achieve their primary goals.

The STEM students at NI HEIs show a slightly different pattern to the non-STEM students. Fifty-four per cent of STEM students at NI HEIs had begun searching for employment - the group with the largest proportion, while just 41 per cent of non-

STEM students had done so - the group with the smallest proportion, but also the group that was most likely to anticipate postgraduate studies. Although 51 per cent of STEM students at NI HEIs who had started searching for employment had applied for a job related to their long-term careers, only 19 per cent had been offered a job, compared to 24 per cent of STEM students at GB HEIs who had applied for a job.

STEM students at NI HEIs were almost twice as likely as STEM students at GB HEIs to have applied for jobs not related to their long-term career plans. Thirty per cent of STEM students at NI HEIs who had started searching for employment had applied for a job not related to their long-term career plans, compared to 16 per cent of STEM students at GB HEIs who had started searching for employment. These NI STEM students were also markedly more successful in being offered such a job. Of those who had applied for a job not related to their long-term career plans, 34 per cent had been offered a job, compared to 20 per cent of the equivalent GB group. It has also been noted that wanting to change direction was one of the reasons that was more likely to be given by NI STEM students for wanting to do further study. This suggests that there may be problems in retaining those who study STEM subjects at NI HEIs in the STEM professions, possibly due to lack of opportunities for such employment in NI. However, as Figure 30 shows, STEM students at NI HEIs were most likely to want to obtain a job related to their course subject in the medium to long term. Consequently, it is perhaps more likely that it is a lack of confidence in achieving their aim of immediately finding a job related to their long-term career aspirations that is causing more students studying STEM subjects to apply for temporary employment.

Figure 30: Medium to long-term career aspirations by subject type



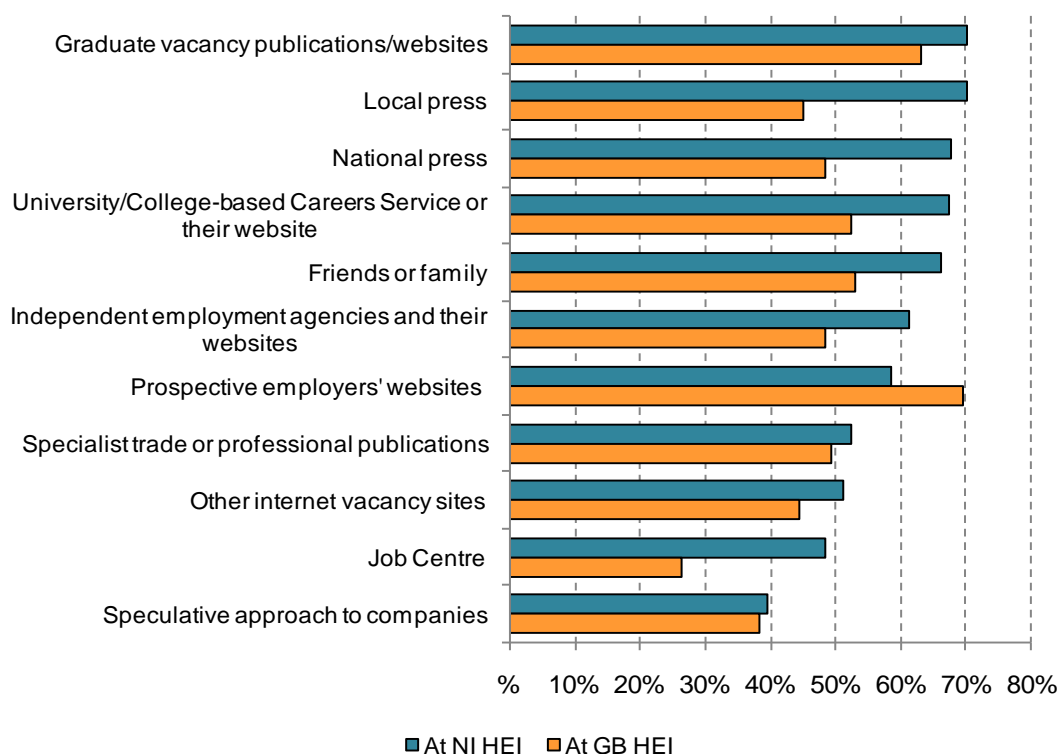
Source: Futuretrack 2006 combined dataset: UK final year students (weighted).

3.6 Job search resources

Graduates, as a group, have been found to be more likely to use formal methods of finding employment, such as responding to advertisements, rather than informal methods such as asking friends and family specifically to find them a job (as opposed to asking them for advice about job seeking) (see Mau and Kopischke, 2001, Try,

2005). Figure 31 shows the places where Futuretrack students had looked for employment.

Figure 31: Sources for finding employment



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

As can be seen, with the exception of prospective employers' websites, students at NI HEIs were more likely to use each type of resource. This suggests that although a slightly smaller proportion of students at NI HEIs had started searching for employment, those who had started searching were doing so more intensively than students at GB HEIs. However, despite their more intensive searching, the students at NI HEIs were no more likely to have found a job related to their long-term career plans that they wanted to apply for, or to have been offered a job related to these long-term career plans. This suggests that there may be a lack of opportunity in the labour markets where these students were looking for work, either because of the type of work they were looking for, or because of the locations in which they were willing to work.

3.7 Employment preferences

Northern Ireland is one of the regions of the UK that is most likely to retain both students who were born in the area and students who graduated from an NI HEI (Atfield and Purcell, 2010).

- Ninety-seven per cent of students who were born in NI and studied at an NI HEI said they would consider working in Northern Ireland, as did 80 per cent of students who had come from GB to study at an NI HEI.

- Overall, 96 per cent of students who had studied at an NI HEI said they would consider working in NI.
- Eighty-three per cent of students born in NI said that they would consider working there, including 61 per cent of students who had left NI to study in GB.

This greater likelihood that students at NI HEIs will remain in the area can clearly be seen in Table 3 and Figure 32. There were social class differences in this. Students from a routine or manual background were most likely to give reasons that suggest a lack of geographical mobility. More than a quarter of students from a routine and manual background said that being able to live with their parents was a consideration, as was the cost of living. They were also the group that was most likely to say that staying where they studied or where they were from was a consideration, and to envisage that they would work within the region where they were currently living in the medium to long-term.

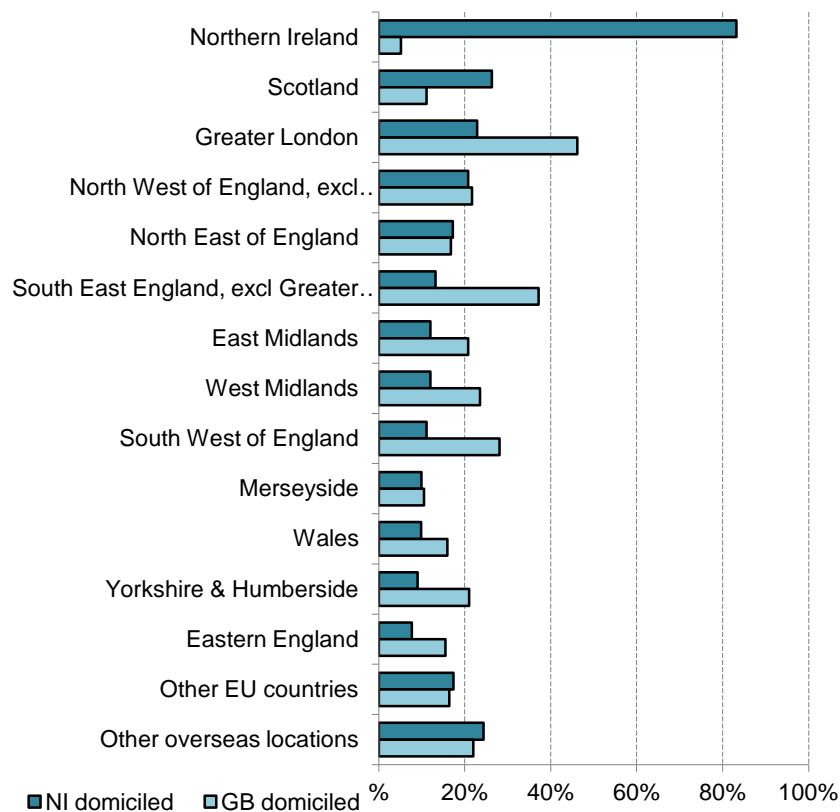
Table 3: Reasons for location preferences

	All Northern Ireland domiciled (%)	All British domiciled (%)
I come from there	70.2	66.9
Area where currently studying	62.5	52.4
Other personal reasons for wanting to live there	34.7	33.0
Specific employment opportunities	26.8	29.2
Need to consider the needs of family members	24.7	27.7
Cost of living is affordable there	23.2	22.1
Will be able to live with parents	19.3	25.3
Employment opportunities for people with my qualifications are good there	18.2	28.2
Other reasons	5.1	6.0

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

Figure 32 shows that beyond NI, Scotland is the second most popular region that Northern Ireland students would consider working in, although only just over a quarter (26 per cent) of Northern Ireland students would consider it. Scotland is the only region of the UK that is more attractive to Northern Ireland students than 'non-EU overseas locations' (Twenty-four per cent of Northern Ireland students said that they would consider working in overseas locations outside the EU) and it is one of only two non-NI UK regions (the other being North Eastern England, considered by 17 per cent of Northern Ireland students) that were more attractive to Northern Ireland students than they were to British students as a whole.

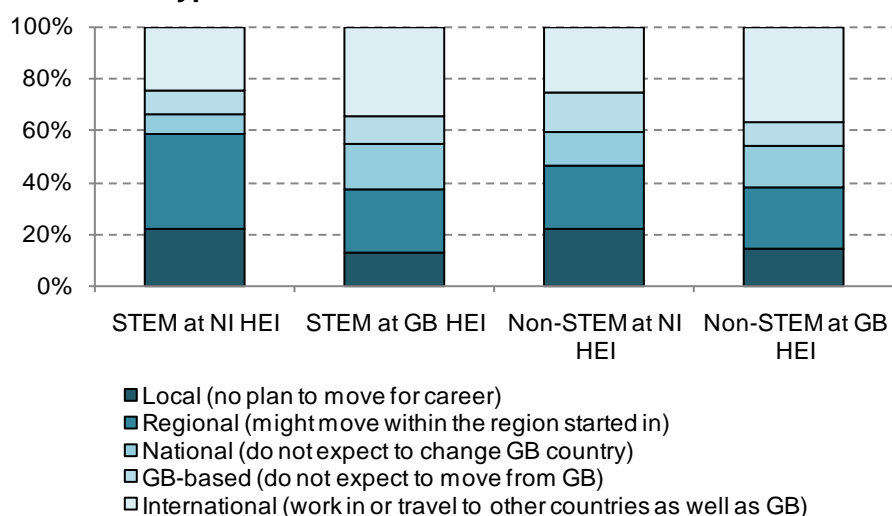
Figure 32: Regions where respondents would consider looking for employment



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

STEM and non-STEM students at NI HEIs show an equal propensity to say they would consider working in Northern Ireland, but non-STEM students were more likely than STEM students to also be considering working in other areas of the UK and overseas. This can also be seen in Figure 33. Students were asked where they considered their job market to be in the medium to long-term. As the Figure shows, an equal proportion of STEM and non-STEM students at NI HEIs expect that they will not move for their career, but STEM students were more likely to say that they might move within their region but do not expect to move outside it. Students at UK HEIs were more likely to expect to have an international career in which they work or travel to other countries, and they were much less likely to expect that they will not move at all for their career.

Figure 33: Job market expectation in the medium to long term by subject type



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

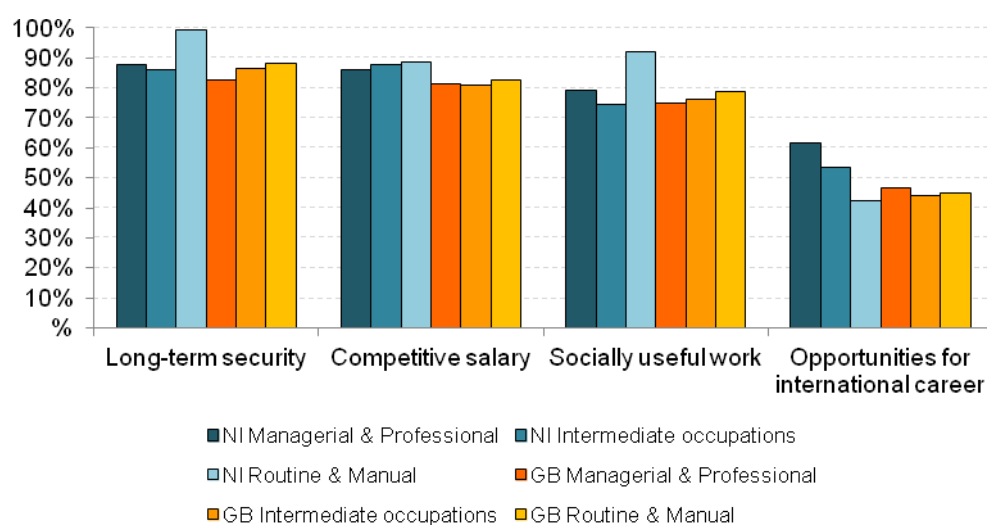
Of the Northern Ireland students, it is those who have shown least previous mobility - those who attended NI HEIs - who were most likely to expect to remain in the local job market. Twenty-two per cent of this group did not expect to move for career development, while only three per cent of the students who left NI to study in Great Britain and 11 per cent of the students who came from GB to study in NI responded similarly.

Finally in this section, we look at the job characteristics that were important to different groups of students. NI students were more likely than British students to rate all but one job attribute as important (1 to 3 on a 7 point scale).

- The attribute that was most likely to be rated as important by NI students was ‘long-term security’, with 91 per cent rating it as important. Long-term security was rated as important by 85 per cent of British students, making it the third most likely attribute to be rated as important by them.
- Similarly, a competitive salary was the third most likely to be rated as important by NI students, with 88 per cent rating it 1 to 3, while it was only the fifth most likely to be rated as important by British students, of whom 82 per cent rated it as important.

This supports the previous findings in this paper: that NI students tend to be somewhat more risk-averse than their British counterparts, and to worry somewhat more about money, with, as Figure 34 shows, the students from a routine and manual background most likely to exhibit these traits.

Figure 34: Importance of different job attributes by SES group



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

Figure 34 shows the broad similarities in the pattern of the sub-groups as a whole, but it is interesting to note the difference between the proportions of NI and GB students who rated ‘opportunities for an international career’ as important. Although Northern Ireland students were less likely to anticipate having an international career, for those who did, it was clearly an important consideration.

Comparing STEM and non-STEM students at NI HEIs, it appears that there were some job attributes that were more important to each group. Opportunities for promotion were rated as important by 95 per cent of STEM students at NI HEIs, compared to 91 per cent of non-STEM students, and a competitive salary was also more important to the STEM students, with 89 per cent rating it as important compared to 86 per cent of non-STEM students. These differences are likely to reflect the demography of the STEM and non-STEM students, in particular the gender profile of the two groups. Conversely, opportunities for further training were rated as important by 90 per cent of non-STEM students at NI HEIs compared to 87 per cent of STEM students, and this is one of the few attributes where the NI HEI students do not follow the same pattern as the GB HEI students - the proportion of STEM students at GB HEIs rating this attribute as important was five percentage points higher than the proportion of their non-STEM counterparts.

4. Conclusion

The overall picture presented in this report of final year Northern Ireland students studying on three year undergraduate programmes is one of a group who are largely risk averse and cautious in their HE choices and career aspirations. They are more likely than their British counterparts to:

- have chosen to study STEM subjects, which are usually regarded as more likely to lead to post-graduation employment, and generally be more likely to regard their courses as vocational;

- have undertaken paid employment during term time and vacations and have lower levels of debt than their British counterparts;
- worry about having to repay debts and feel that their options were limited by debt, despite these lower debt levels;
- have had clear idea about the career they want to go into and to have sought careers advice while in HE;
- have lived at home while in HE, and aspire to remain in the area where they studied or return to the area they were originally from.

This cautiousness may be attributed, in part, to the large proportion of Northern Ireland students who come from families where they are the first generation to go into higher education. The Northern Ireland respondents, although less likely to come from the kinds of routine and manual backgrounds most associated with a lack of higher education participation, were more likely than British students to be first generation university graduates. This has important implications for how they viewed both their experience of HE and their post-graduation aspirations. Crozier et al (2008) noted that for students with no experience of HE in their family, there is a danger that they will struggle to derive the most benefits from HE because they are unaware of how to do so.

“Getting students in and leaving them to it does not work for those who have no prior experience of university. Higher education not only needs to address the widening of access to university but it needs to get to grips with what goes on inside the hallowed grounds” (Crozier *et al*, 2008, p 176)

In many respects, the students from an intermediate occupational background in NI, by virtue of their first generation experience, shared many of the same attitudes and values as students from a routine and manual background in Britain. As a group, they were clearly vocationally focussed: they were the group that is most likely to want to find employment related to their degree subject; the most likely to have used the careers service at their HEI; and the most likely to have been confident about finding the kind of job they wanted when they graduate. However, they were also the group that was least likely to think that their overall experience of HE had been positive or fun. For these students, HE can be seen as a means to an end - they develop the kinds of skills they need to find employment, but they derive fewer personal and social benefits from the experience. In this, they very much fit the characterisation of non-traditional students provided by Reay et al (2009):

“They have had to focus so intently on achieving academic success in their chosen field that they have foregone wider cultural accomplishments and they are open about their efforts. What they do is work and work extremely hard” (Reay *et al*, 2009, pp 1109)

This issue of working hard, both in and out of the classroom to the exclusion of activities is relevant for all Northern Ireland students. As a group, they were more likely than their British counterparts to have undertaken paid work during term time, and to have worked longer hours, and to say that the amount of work they had to complete on their course was excessive.

With the increased emphasis placed by employers on the development of generic employability skills, the question for Northern Ireland students is whether the gains they may have experienced in these areas due to, for example, undertaking paid employment, often unrelated to their future career aspirations, is likely to have offset the loss of opportunity in other areas, such as engagement in extracurricular activities. This issue is compounded for students who live at home while they study and are limited in the extent to which they interact with students from different backgrounds. Students may be losing out on experiences that would be helpful to them not just socially or in terms of their personal development, but also in seeking graduate employment if they cannot afford or are too worried to work less, either in paid employment or on their academic work. In Northern Ireland, this appears to be a particular issue for students from an intermediate occupational background, who are extremely pragmatic in their approach to HE, but also for the Northern Ireland students from routine and manual backgrounds who, it is noted, were less likely than students from other groups to say that they had developed in self-confidence while in HE.

HEIs in Northern Ireland were nevertheless regarded positively by their students in terms of the role they played in developing skills and also in the provision of careers advice. They were more likely than students at GB HEIs to say that they had been enabled to develop virtually all the organisational and employability skills that employers seek, and tended to rate their skills highly, have undertaken work placements and have clear ideas about the kind of career they wanted to develop and how to do so. This suggests that the concerns expressed by students at NI HEIs about having the skills employers looked for and difficulties in finding work are, as might be expected, largely attributable to labour market conditions rather than poor preparation by NI HEIs. Similarly, short-term strategies, such as taking temporary employment or going on to further study, can be attributed to the negative perception students had about the opportunities available to them in the labour market. Northern Ireland students were less likely than GB students to have started looking for jobs before the end of their final year, which given other responses, may reflect fatalism in the face of shortage of obvious opportunities. It is notable that the one type of careers information that students at NI HEIs were less likely to use than students at GB HEIs was that provided by prospective employers, for example through prospective employers websites or careers events. It may be that this is due to the scarcity of prospective employers in NI or a lower propensity of employers outside NI to visit NI HEIs.

A higher proportion of NI than GB students had left secondary education feeling confident about their numeracy skills, whatever subjects they went on to study, and similarly, a higher proportion of NI survey respondents had gone on to study STEM subjects in higher education, but those opting for the latter route were disproportionately likely to leave NI to study. In this report, only students graduating from a three year undergraduate degree are considered, and further investigation of the career paths of those on four year and longer courses will be necessary to fully establish if this trend holds for STEM students as a whole.

The findings presented in this report suggest that there are further issues concerning the extent to which studying a STEM subject at an NI HEI is an enjoyable experience that students would repeat. This is particularly important, given that the Skills Strategy for NI, 'Success through Skills – Transforming Futures' (2011:21) highlights both the need for STEM skills in the NI economy now and in the future, While students on STEM courses at NI HEIs were most likely to think their course had enabled them to develop various kinds of skills, and to be optimistic about their careers, they generally had a more negative perception of their course, workload and time in HE. Although they were the most likely to say that in the medium to long term they hoped to find a job related to their degree subject, they were also the least likely of all students at NI and GB HEIs to say that they would choose to study the same course again, and significantly less likely than students who studied STEM subjects at GB HEIs.

There are further issues discussed in this report that would benefit from more detailed investigation, both of the existing data on students completing three year courses in 2009 and the composite dataset which also includes students who were completing four year undergraduate programmes in 2010. It will also be interesting to discover how the findings relate to the early career experiences of graduates from Northern Ireland and who studied at NI HEIs since graduation, currently being investigated in the fourth sweep of the Futuretrack survey.

Bibliography

- Atfield, G. and Purcell, K. (2010) *Job search strategies and employment preferences of higher education students*. Working Paper 2. Coventry: IER. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/glmf/futuretrack/ft3.1_wp2_job_search_and_motivations.pdf
- Brown, P. and Hesketh, A. (2004) *The Mismanagement of Talent – employability and jobs in the knowledge economy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cabinet Office (2010) *Unleashing aspiration: the final report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/21_07_09_fair_access.pdf
- Cable, V. (2010) 'Higher Education'. Speech given in his capacity as Secretary of State for Business and Skills, July 15th. <http://www.bis.gov.uk/news/speeches/vince-cable-higher-education>
- Callender, C. and Wilkinson, D. (2003) *2002/03 Student Income and Expenditure Survey: Students' Income, Expenditure and Debt in 2002/03 and Changes Since 1998/99*, Department for Education and Skills, <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR487.pdf>
- CBI and Universities UK (2009) *Future fit: Preparing graduates for the world of work* <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/FutureFit.pdf>
- Crozier, G., Reay, D., Clayton, J., Colliander, L. and Grinstead, J. (2008) 'Different strokes for different folks: diverse students in diverse institutions – experiences of higher education' in *Research Papers in Education* 23(2), pp 167-177.
- Department for Employment and Learning (2011) *Success through skills: Transforming futures. The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland*. <http://www.delni.gov.uk/success-through-skills-transforming-futures.pdf>
- Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) (2008) *Higher education at work: High skills, high value*. http://www.dius.gov.uk/consultations/documents/Higher_Education_at_Work.pdf
- Humphrey, R. (2006) 'Pulling structured inequality into higher education: the impact of part-time working on English university students', *Higher Education Quarterly*, 60:3, 270-286.
- Mason, G., Williams, G. and Cranmer, S. (2006) *Employability Skills Initiatives in Higher Education: What Effects Do They Have On Graduate Labour Market Outcomes?* London: National Institute of Economic and Social Research. http://www.niesr.ac.uk/pdf/061006_91251.pdf
- Mau, W.-C. and Kopischke, A. (2001) 'Job search methods, job search outcomes, and job satisfaction of college graduates: a comparison of race and sex' in *Journal of Employment Counselling* 38 (3), pp. 141–149.
- Metcalf, H. (2003) 'Increasing inequality in higher education: the role of term-time working', *Oxford Review of Education*, 29:3, 315-29.
- Purcell, K., Atfield, G. and Ball, C. with P. Elias (2008) *An investigation of the Factors Affecting the Post-University Employment of Chemical Science Graduates in the UK*. Report to the Royal Society of Chemistry. http://www.rsc.org/images/IERFullReport_tcm18-159366.pdf
- Reay, D., Crozier, G. and Clayton, J. (2009) 'Strangers in paradise'? Working-class students in elite universities' in *Sociology* 43(6), pp 1103-1121.

- Shury, J., Vivian, D and Davies, B. (2009) *The Northern Ireland Skills Monitoring Survey 2008 Main Report*.
http://www.delni.gov.uk/nisms08_final_main_report.pdf.pdf
- Stewart, J. and Knowles, V. (2000) 'Graduate recruitment and selection: implications for HE, graduates and small business recruiters', *Career Development International*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 65-80.
- Try, S. 2005. 'The use of job search strategies among university graduates' in *Journal of Socio-Economics* 34 (2), pp 223-243.

Annex 1: Characteristics of the Futuretrack Sample

Table 1: Weighted numbers and percentages of respondents in sub-samples discussed in this report

	NI at NI HEI	NI at GB HEI	GB at NI HEI	GB at GB HEI	All at NI HEI	All at GB HEI	All N.I.	All GB
Total number	2718	1675	157	213826	2875	215501	4393	213983
<i>Total %</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>.8</i>	<i>.1</i>	<i>97.9</i>	<i>1.3</i>	<i>98.7</i>	<i>2.0</i>	<i>98.0</i>
STEM	1162	1031	59	90100	1221	91131	2193	90159
Non-STEM	1539	620	98	122224	1637	122845	2159	122323
<i>STEM %</i>	<i>43.0</i>	<i>62.4</i>	<i>37.6</i>	<i>42.4</i>	<i>42.7</i>	<i>42.6</i>	<i>50.4</i>	<i>42.4</i>
<i>Non-STEM %</i>	<i>57.0</i>	<i>37.6</i>	<i>62.4</i>	<i>57.6</i>	<i>57.3</i>	<i>57.4</i>	<i>49.6</i>	<i>57.6</i>
Prof & Managerial	712	705	63	90015	775	90720	1417	90078
Intermediate	493	385	16	38418	510	38803	879	38434
Routine & Manual	253	211	0	43684	253	43895	464	43684
<i>Prof & Managerial %</i>	<i>48.8</i>	<i>54.2</i>	<i>79.7</i>	<i>52.3</i>	<i>50.4</i>	<i>52.3</i>	<i>51.3</i>	<i>52.3</i>
<i>Intermediate %</i>	<i>33.8</i>	<i>29.6</i>	<i>20.3</i>	<i>22.3</i>	<i>33.2</i>	<i>22.4</i>	<i>31.8</i>	<i>22.3</i>
<i>Routine & Manual %</i>	<i>17.4</i>	<i>16.2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>25.4</i>	<i>16.5</i>	<i>25.3</i>	<i>16.8</i>	<i>25.4</i>
Both parents have HE experience	170	282	39	33604	209	33886	452	33643
One parent has HE experience	208	392	27	39576	236	39968	600	39604
Neither parent has HE experience/not known	1171	681	22	93682	1193	94363	1852	93704
<i>Both parents have HE experience %</i>	<i>11.0</i>	<i>20.8</i>	<i>44.3</i>	<i>20.1</i>	<i>12.8</i>	<i>20.1</i>	<i>15.6</i>	<i>20.2</i>
<i>One parent has HE experience %</i>	<i>13.4</i>	<i>28.9</i>	<i>30.7</i>	<i>23.7</i>	<i>14.4</i>	<i>23.8</i>	<i>20.7</i>	<i>23.7</i>
<i>Neither parent has HE experience/not known %</i>	<i>75.6</i>	<i>50.3</i>	<i>25.0</i>	<i>56.1</i>	<i>72.8</i>	<i>56.1</i>	<i>63.8</i>	<i>56.1</i>

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

Where do NI students in the Futuretrack sample study?

- Overall, 62 per cent of the Futuretrack students who were domiciled in NI prior to entering HE were studying in NI, while a third were studying in England, four per cent in Scotland and two per cent in Wales.

The Futuretrack sample used in this paper contains only those students who completed a three year course in 2009. It is likely that the figure for Scotland, in particular, is somewhat higher when considering all students who applied to enter HE in 2005/6, given that Scottish degree courses more commonly last for four or more years. HESA data for 2006/7 entrants shows that 69 per cent of NI domiciled

full-time students were enrolled at HEIs in Northern Ireland, 21 per cent at HEIs in England, nine per cent in Scotland and 0.8 per cent in Wales.

- Sixty per cent of the students in the sample who were domiciled in NI prior to entering HE and who were studying in NI were at a high tariff HEI, with 35 per cent at a medium tariff HEI and five per cent at a specialist college. By comparison, of GB students studying in GB, the figure for those studying at a highest or high tariff HEI was 45 per cent. Seventy-five per cent of the small number of students not born in NI and studying at an NI HEI were studying at the NI high tariff HEI.
- Of the NI-born students in the sample who were studying outside NI, 47 per cent were studying at one of the GB HEIs that require the highest or high tariff points for entry.

This indicates that NI retains the majority of their best-qualified students and, in the small numbers that they do, attract well-qualified students from outside, but may be losing the highest-qualified applicants to the highest tariff GB HEIs and high tariff GB HEIs which offer more courses in subjects such as medicine and law.

Overall, of the respondents born in Northern Ireland, over half (55 per cent) were studying at a highest or high tariff university, a figure that is eight per cent higher than for British students.

Gender and age profile of Futuretrack respondents

- Northern Ireland respondents who had left Northern Ireland tended to be somewhat older than those who had remained in NI for higher education. Forty two per cent of the Northern Ireland students who were studying in NI were 18 or younger when they entered HE, compared to 29 per cent of those who left NI to study. Students coming to NI to study were most often in the youngest group.

Male students constituted a higher proportion of those who left NI than of those who remained, and the students who came from GB to study in NI were most often female.

Given that there was a greater propensity for male students to study STEM subjects, this exodus of males from NI may have implications when looking at the supply of STEM students in the NI labour market. However, given the small numbers who leave NI to study in GB, this alone does not account for the significant difference in the proportions of NI and GB three year undergraduate programme students studying STEM subjects.

What do NI students in the Futuretrack sample study?

- Overall, 50 per cent of all students who were Northern Ireland-domiciled prior to entering HE were studying a STEM subject, a considerably higher proportion than for the British-domiciled students (42 per cent). Some of this discrepancy may be attributable to the growth of four year STEM courses in Britain and the possibility

in many HEIs to transfer from a three to four year programme and gain a higher-level qualification subject to performance in the first three years. However, overall, forty-three per cent of students at NI HEIs were studying a STEM subject - the same proportion, when looking only at students on three year programmes, as at GB HEIs.

Students born in NI and studying at a GB HEI were more likely than average to be studying a STEM subject, with 62 per cent doing so, while students who had come to NI from GB to study were conversely less likely to be studying a STEM subject. The loss of STEM students from NI may be attributed to demand exceeding supply of STEM provision in some areas of study at NI HEIs, but we do not have sufficiently robust numbers by specific subject to enable us to conduct confident examination of how far this might be the case.

Socio-economic profile of Futuretrack respondents

- Northern Ireland respondents, and respondents studying at an NI HEI, were somewhat less likely to come from a routine or manual background than British students and students at GB HEIs. Sixteen per cent of students at NI HEIs and 17 per cent of all NI students were from a routine or manual background, compared to a quarter of British students and students at GB HEIs. This figure is lower than in the first wave of the Futuretrack survey, as well as in the figures reported by HESA, which show the proportion of full-time first degree entrants in 2006/7 from NI who were from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 as 41 per cent, with the comparable figure for UK as a whole being 30 per cent. The lower proportion of NI respondents from a routine and manual background in Futuretrack Wave 3 appears to have been caused by over-representation of respondents from one NI HEI.

While they make up a smaller proportion of respondents from NI HEIs, respondents from a routine and manual background who were at an NI HEI were more likely than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds to be at a high tariff institution. More than two thirds (67 per cent) of students from a routine and manual background at an NI HEI were at a high tariff institution, compared to less than half of the other two SES (Socio-Economic Status) groups (41 per cent of students from a professional and managerial background and 49 per cent of students from an intermediate occupational background. This is the opposite of the situation in GB, where students from the highest SES groups are consistently found to be most likely to attend a highest or high tariff HEI.

- Although Northern Ireland students are less likely to come from a routine or manual background, they are much more likely to come from families where neither parent had experience of HE. This is particularly the case for students from Northern Ireland who remained in Northern Ireland to study, of whom three quarters did not report parental HE experience. This has implications for the advice these students have been able to receive, both about entering and progressing in HE and about the graduate labour market.

Annex 2: HESA data on Northern Ireland's students

Table 2: First Year Full Time Undergraduate Enrolments – 2006/07

	NI at NI HEI	NI at GB HEI	GB at NI HEI	All at NI HEI	All N.I.
Total number	9,095	4,030	95	9,850	9,430
STEM	4,540	2,105	30	4,985	6,645
Non-STEM	4,558	1,925	65	4,865	6,485
<i>STEM %</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>52%</i>	<i>33%</i>	<i>51%</i>	<i>51%</i>
<i>Non-STEM %</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>48%</i>	<i>68%</i>	<i>49%</i>	<i>49%</i>
Prof & Managerial	2,545	1,515	50	2,600	4,060
Intermediate	2,060	920	10	2,075	2,975
Routine & Manual	1,710	685	15	1,725	2,395
<i>Prof & Managerial %</i>	<i>40%</i>	<i>49%</i>	<i>66%</i>	<i>41%</i>	<i>43%</i>
<i>Intermediate %</i>	<i>33%</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>32%</i>	<i>32%</i>
<i>Routine & Manual %</i>	<i>27%</i>	<i>22%</i>	<i>18%</i>	<i>27%</i>	<i>25%</i>

Source: HESA

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5. Due to rounding figures may not sum to totals
2. Percentages are calculated on the unrounded figures.
3. Socio Economic Classification percentages exclude unknowns and not classifieds.