

Welcome to the briefing launch of 'Earning while Learning: student employment'

We will start the webinar
shortly.



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The University of Manchester



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**

Earning while Learning: student employment

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Briefings



This **research briefing for the education sector** reports key findings from the study 'L-earning: rethinking young women's working lives'. The briefing reports data drawn from: a) analyses of national datasets of student employment; and b) focus group interviews with 83 young women about their experiences of engaging in paid work whilst studying ('Earning while Learning'). Participants were aged between 14-23 years old and attending schools, Further Education (FE) colleges, sixth forms, and universities across England. We refer to young people engaged in Earning while Learning as 'students' and 'student workers'. This briefing offers recommendations for educational institutions, student unions, policymakers and sector representatives for improving the experiences for student workers.



This **research briefing for employers** reports key findings from the study 'L-earning: rethinking young women's working lives'. The briefing reports data drawn from: a) analyses of national datasets of student employment; and b) focus group interviews with 83 young women about their experiences of engaging in paid work whilst studying ('Earning while Learning'). Participants were aged between 14-23 years old and attending schools, Further Education (FE) colleges, sixth forms, and universities across England. The briefing offers recommendations for employers, businesses and industry representatives to improve the experience of student workers.



This **research briefing for trade unions** reports key findings from the study 'L-earning: rethinking young women's working lives'. The briefing reports data drawn from: a) analyses of national datasets of student employment; and b) focus group interviews with 83 young women about their experiences of engaging in paid work whilst studying ('Earning while Learning'). Participants were aged between 14-23 years old and attending schools, Further Education (FE) colleges, sixth forms, and universities across England. The briefing offers recommendations for trade unions for engaging and supporting workers who are simultaneously in education.

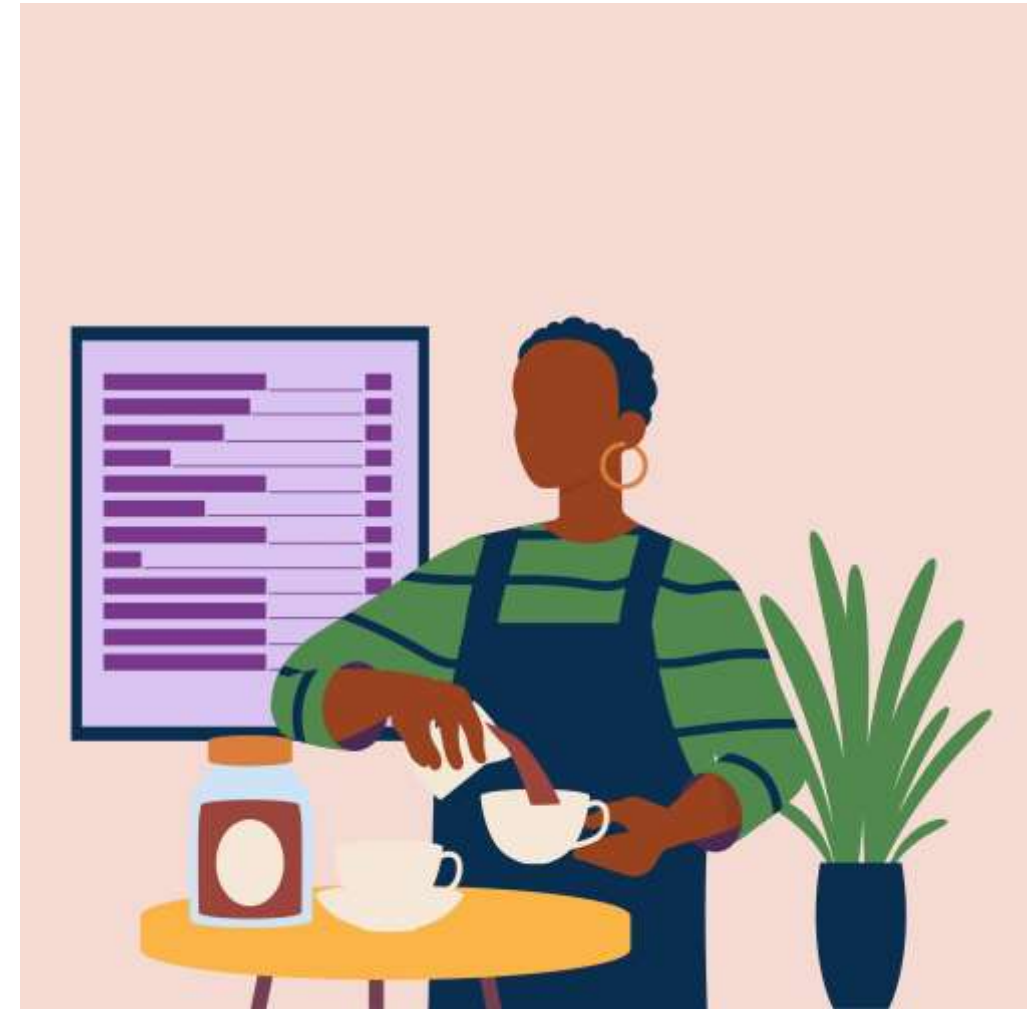


L-EARNING

Rethinking young women's working lives

Webinar overview

- 1) Why does Earning while Learning matter?**
- 2) Key findings**
- 3) Recommendations**
- 4) Q&A**



L-EARNING

Rethinking young women's working lives

Earning while Learning (EwL) – why it matters

- ‘Employability’ focus of educational institutions and national policy (Jones, Mann, and Morris 2016; Holdsworth 2017), typically focuses on internships or work-readiness for future careers.
- Yet, previous studies have shown that student work is commonplace in UK and globally **at all educational levels** (Beerkens et al., 2011; Mizen 2006; Lucas 1997; Hobbs et al. 2006; McCoy and Smyth 2007).
 - For example, the EUROSTUDENT study found that on average 59% of university students across Europe are in paid employment (Gwosc et al. 2021) and there is a clear increase in working students across most nations.
- Dual Cost of living / Cost of learning crisis – increased need for income.



Past thinking about Earning while Learning

- EwL often seen simply as either *facilitating* future careers and employability ('work experience') or as a *hindrance* to academic achievement.
- EwL understood by educational institutions, policymakers, employers as well as young workers as temporary, 'incidental', prior to 'real' jobs and future 'careers'. Bracketed off from 'labour market entry'
- The nature of EwL and lived experiences of undertaking EwL, rarely considered.
- But we argue that we **should understand EwL as part of our 'working life course'** and a potential site of (gendered) inequality - shaping future choices, values, understandings of and decisions about work.



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The research



UKRI-funded study, 2022-2025

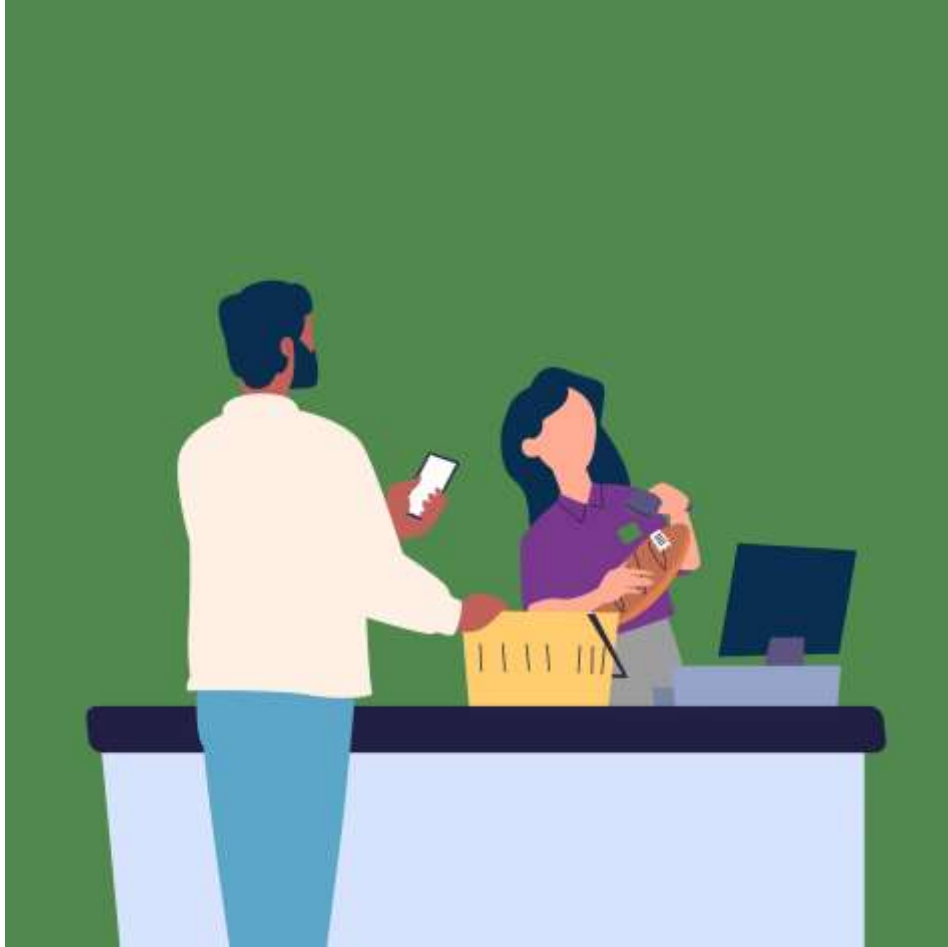
ESRC *Transforming Working Lives* scheme

- **WP1:** Analyses of high-quality national UK survey datasets: APS & Next Steps
- **WP2:** 16 focus groups with 83 women (aged 14-23) from 5 schools, 5 FE and 6 HE institutions across England (northern, southern, coastal, rural, suburban)
- **WP3:** 80 interviews with women 23-29 working in feminized sectors following education (ongoing)

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Findings quantitative research



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Earning while learning overview

The vast majority of young people in education engage in paid work before completing full-time study.

- Student workers are concentrated in a couple of key sectors: retail and hospitality. About 70% of all student workers.
- Students comprise 4% of overall labour force. But as much as 20% of all workers in specified occupations.
- Most students work relatively few hours (under 16), but for about half this is spread across 3 or more days a week.
- About 40% of student workers have been in their jobs at least a year.



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Gender and Earning while Learning

Young women are about **50% more likely to engage in paid work while studying** than young men.

Similar findings across age groups and datasets:

- 16-18 year-old students: 15.5% women, 9.9% of men, 17.3% non-binary working
(*COSMO 2021-22*)
- 16-22 year-old students: 31.4% women, 23.8% men
(*APS Jan 2021-Dec 2023*)



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Earning while Learning – poor pay for all

- Pay for student workers is low. Legal pay requirements are not consistently met, with student workers often paid below national minimum wage levels for their age and the large majority earning below the full adult minimum wage.
- No significant gender pay gap BUT not a ‘gender utopia’ - lack of pay gap due to concentration of student workers across gender and ages in relatively similar poorly paid roles.



Findings qualitative research



Poor pay and conditions

Poor pay

- Students report poor, and potentially illegal, treatment with regards to pay. Some participants reported not being paid, being paid late, as well as below-legal pay.
- It is not unusual for students to undertake more than one day of 'trial shifts' for which they receive no pay (contravening UK Government guidelines).

Bad conditions

- Sexual harassment at work is widespread for young women and comes from both co-workers and customers.
- Many student workers, especially young women, feel unsafe when traveling home from work late at night, on foot or via public transport.
- Many students reported stress, exhaustion and poor mental health resulting from paid work, including burnout and anxiety.



*"Tell me why my hourly wage was **less than one of their croissants?**" - Ariana*

*"My boss didn't tell me that minimum wage had gone up... I got **underpaid massively**.... it was like £70 odd quid that I was not paid". - Norah*

*"I've worked in a lot of bars and clubs, and I find that the **harassment is really, really, bad**, like people will touch you... They're very persistent... Sometimes **you just have to suck it up**" - Marina*

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Lack of Power to change conditions

Power, voice and rights at work

- Widespread lack of knowledge about leave entitlements and National Minimum Wage (or Living Wage) levels.
- Even when aware of their rights, student workers felt disposable, fearing they could be replaced. This undermined their willingness to raise concerns.
- Some felt that having explicit conversations with employers, particularly around pay, was 'impolite' and 'awkward'. Gendered norms and expectations appeared to make it harder for young women to raise issues

Flexibility for who?

- Student workers feel they have little choice over shift patterns, suggesting that flexibility works largely in favour of employers rather than students.
- Students found it hard to plan their time or financial situation, receiving rotas at the last minute, going long periods without shifts, or having shifts cancelled.
- Students reported that it was often difficult to balance work and study, causing stress and reduced mental wellbeing.

*"Especially in hospitality there is **always this entitlement to your time**. Last summer I got a position at a café through an agency... [and] there was some weeks when they would **cancel our shifts** and the moment we wanted a day off it was **almost like a sin**" - Sarah*

*"It's really difficult because a lot of **jobs you're getting quite exploited**, it's kind of difficult to try and get change or ... like say anything about it really, because **employers don't really care**" - Laura*



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The 'value' of student work

Valuable experiences for everyday lives and imagined futures

- Part-time work is valuable women students, providing important spaces for socialising, connections and broader life experiences.
- Many reflected positively on the skills and independence they were gaining through paid work, particularly as they accumulated experience across sectors.

Essential income in the context of diminishing value of student loans

- For many work provided essential income for students, and sometimes students' families.
- Despite valuing their work and enjoying new responsibilities, many women spoke of being de-valued as both workers and students.
- Many reflected on a lack of understanding from either education or employers of commitments to work/study and the impact on their wellbeing and financial sustainability.

*"We are all of the same age group, and **we tend to have a lot of fun....**it's a lot of music that we vibe to so we can work around and **vibe very well.**"- Yatika*

*"I think the best thing is **the skills you gain, it's very useful** actually."- Bushra*

*"I was doing so many hours because **rent is so expensive...** we all had to get several jobs as well as full time studying. Eventually I got signed off l because of anxiety and stress." - Maisie*



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Recommendations

Recommendations for the education sector



- Supporting student workers is an **equality issue** because earning while learning is much more common among young women.
- **Avoid policies restricting work** as these are unlikely to be effective & may alienate students.
- Focus on providing appropriate **support and guidance** regarding students' rights at work, legal protections, and how to navigate challenges in the workplace.
- Careers information, advice, and guidance (IAG) and Employability initiatives must include **all forms of workplace experience** – not simply focus on *future* career aspirations.
- Identify **spaces in the curriculum** (e.g. Citizenship Education or PSHE) within which to engage students in conversations about their *current* experiences of work.
- Create spaces that enable students to **identify sexual harassment** and report this as part of sector- and institution- wide initiatives addressing sexual violence and misconduct.
- **Collaborate with TUs** associated with the sectors in which students most often work (e.g. USDAW – retail; Unite – hospitality) to educate students about their rights at work.
- **Collaborate with employers** who offer the Living Wage and /or those recognised through 'Good Work' or 'Good Employment' charters or the 'Good Youth Employment Benchmark' (Youth Employment UK). Promote opportunities with these employers.

Recommendations for employers and industry

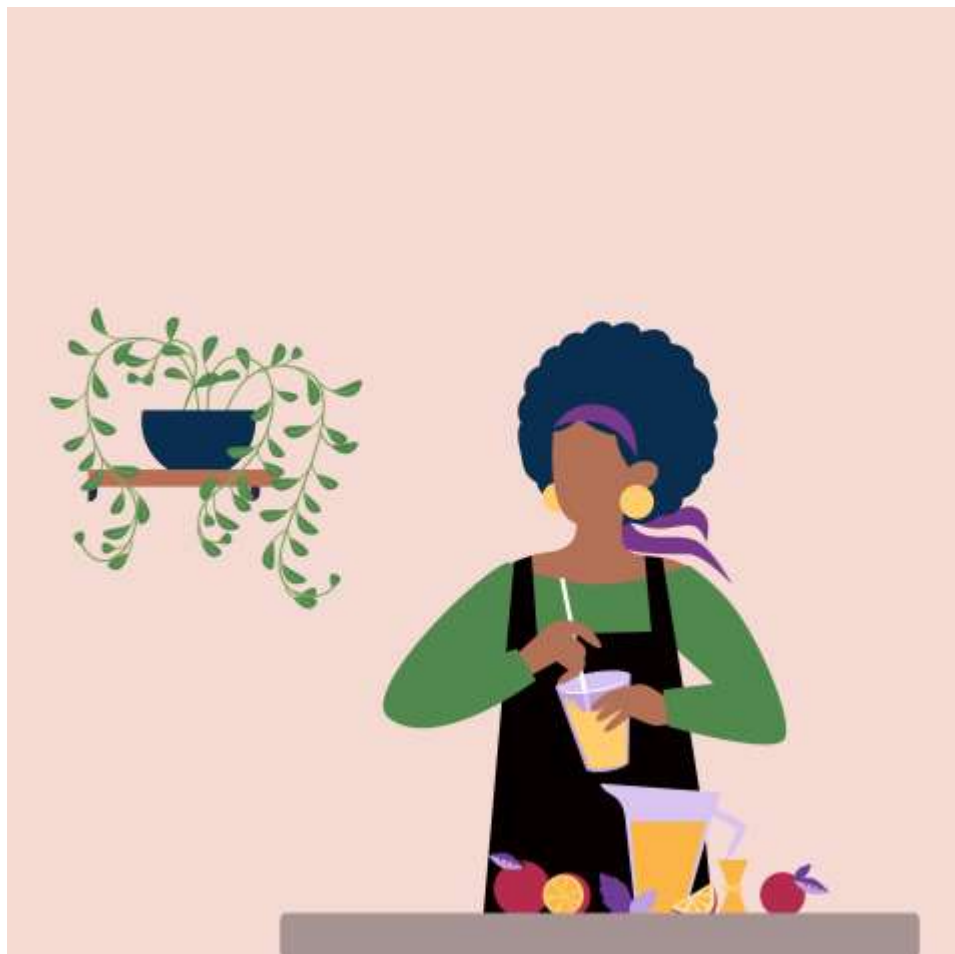


- **Pay the Real Living Wage** to workers, regardless of age.
- **End the use of ‘trial shifts’** for which workers receive no pay
- Understand that high turnover is not inherent to employing students. Students want stable jobs. But this can be undermined by lack of voice, control over work hours and schedule, pay levels, safety at work, and ability to combine work and study. **Improving working conditions and avenues for worker voice** is likely to reduce turnover.
- Develop robust **strategies for ensuring that sexism and sexual harassment are reduced** and effectively addressed when they do occur
- Proactively **engage with local and regional ‘Good Work’ or ‘Good Employment’ charters** and the ‘Good Youth Employment Benchmark’ (Youth Employment UK).

Recommendations for **trade unions**



- Recognise that workers still in education are an important and organisable section of the workforce. Gaining student worker members may have positive implications for union membership across the working life course. Trade unions should **consider a ‘student worker’ category with free or lower fees for membership.**
- Trade unions in sectors with high rates of student workers (e.g. USDAW – retail; Unite – hospitality) and the TUC should **work directly with schools, FE colleges and HEI institutions** to educate and support student workers.
- **Develop material** that fits within the curriculum (e.g. Citizenship Education or PSHE) to **engage students in conversations** about their experiences of work, including how to assert their rights at work.
- **Collaborate with the National Union of Students (NUS)** to advocate for better pay and conditions for working students.
- Recognise that TU campaigns around **sexism and sexual harassment** have specific relevance to student workers. **Create spaces aimed at student workers** that enable them to identify and report these issues.



Q&A