Student diversity, extra-curricular activities and perceptions of graduate outcomes
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Executive summary

Background and rationale

The research was undertaken following a successful bid to the Higher Education Academy in 2007 to examine the role of extra-curricular activities on students and their futures. The definition of 'extra-curricular activities' (ECAs) was broad and included all activities beyond 'the classroom' such as involvement in university clubs and societies, paid and voluntary employment, family commitments, religious engagement and internet activities.

There is little research that examines the role of ECAs on student life and their future prospects in Britain, (Little, 2006). Research undertaken in the US on high school students suggests that engagement in ECAs that are social or cultural can have a positive impact on grades. There is also evidence that different social and cultural backgrounds can have a significant effect on participation and type of extra-curricular activities (Brown & Evans, 2002).

The research was therefore premised on a belief that students differ by background and experience; in particular in relation to their class, ethnicity, gender, disability and age. As well as recognising the possibility that activities outside of facilitated learning may differ according to students' social context and background, the research was interested to test if there were differences in participation in different types of institutions.

Methods

The research was designed to provide data of a quantitative and qualitative nature and was conducted over a one-year period. Full-time students in their second year were surveyed at four different institutions: a Russell Group institution in the North of England; two 1960s campus institutions, one in Scotland and one in the South of England; and a post-92 institution in the capital. Six hundred and thirty-one students

completed the survey and 33 participated in focus groups and interviews to explore students' views of ECAs in more depth.

Telephone interviews with alumni, from the 'class of 2001', at three of the four institutions (12 in total) were also conducted to test what impact ECAs had had on their careers. Telephone interviews were also conducted with employers of graduates from the selected institutions (nine in total) to test their perceptions of the value of ECAs in graduates.

Findings

Different student groups were involved in different types of activities. Young, White, middle-class students tended to be heavily engaged in activities offered by their university and students' union, as well as undertaking a reasonable amount of paid employment. Older students and those from ethnic minority backgrounds spent more time outside the university on family commitments, religious involvement, private study and paid employment, while those from lower socio-economic backgrounds spent more time in paid employment and less time studying and engaging in other activities. There were also differences related to discipline studied; for example, science students reported feeling excluded from the students' union.

Different institutions had different participation profiles. Those from the post-92 institution focused more on career-orientated activities, but felt dissatisfied with the lack of social interaction and choices of activities on offer. Involvement in certain activities also predicted the actual and expected grades that different students received for their course work and exams.

The differences in student experience suggest there is no one student experience, but rather there are many. There is a marked divide between students' activities in old and new universities.

Overall students seem to spend most time with friends and engaged in private study or web-based activities and less time on students' union activities and other traditional university activities such as course representation. This suggests that students are highly sociable and technologically adept, using new technologies such as Web 2.0 to stay in contact with friends, meet new friends and do business.

There are a number of groups of students who are not engaged in university activities, which co-relates with the categories often broadly defined as 'widening participation' students: working-class students, ethnic minority students and mature students. This is for a variety of reasons but all of which 'disadvantage' students in obtaining what is considered to be the traditional student experience. These widening participation students spend more time studying, are more involved in their families, whether they are mature or not, and are involved in more paid part-time work so unable to spend as much time at university.

A significant minority were deeply religious and spend time in praying. This was particularly noticeable in the post-92 institution, whereas the 1960s South of England institution had a strong secular feel.

Alumni were highly reflective about their engagement in extra-curricular activities and indicated that ECAs provided real opportunities to develop themselves and enhance their career prospects. In particular they highlighted the role of contacts and friendships that involvement in ECAs provided. The social capital gained was of central importance to their accounts of university progression and subsequent employment.

Employers interviewed tended to have a mixed view of the value of ECAs, each favouring a different set of experiences. Cultural fit with the company appeared to be very important, with employers seeking sociable, outgoing and extroverted graduates who would fit in well with colleagues and communicate effectively as part of a team. There was a general consensus that activities involving leadership or responsibility, long-term commitment and achievement were the most impressive for demonstrating

transferable skills for the workplace. They also emphasised the importance of graduates 'selling' their activities and making full use of their university careers services to do this.

Recommendations

For universities: There is evidence from this research that engagement in extra-curricular activities at university is particularly valuable for students feeling a part of the university. It is clear that only particular groups of students are participating in university-based activities, and universities need to pay attention to this unfortunate divide in the students' experience.

For students' unions: From this research there are indications that students' unions are only attracting certain types of students, which may be putting off other students. Being able to present themselves as unions for all students is an important issue if they are to ensure that the whole student population is able to benefit from activities.

For universities and students' unions: Work needs to be done to develop a broader base of experience for students with busy lives outside university who are currently missing out on traditional extra-curricular activities, especially as these students tend to be 'widening participation' students.

Given the high usage of technologies by students and with the likelihood of an increase in use, universities and students' unions should ensure they are using the most popular technological tools for engaging with students. While there is a debate about using social networking sites for teaching purposes, using them for extra-curricular activities should not be in question.

For curriculum leaders and teachers: As well as looking to broaden the experience provided to students in their courses, curriculum leaders should explicitly place value

on the whole lives of their students to help them see how their different experiences can contribute to future employment.

For university student services such as 'jobshops' and careers services: Many students spend large amounts of time in paid employment while studying, especially students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Universities should seek out part-time employment opportunities that will benefit students in their future careers by providing examples of the experience and characteristics valued by employers.

Employers felt that graduates did not make the most of their experiences in presenting themselves for employment. Further work with students to develop their CVs needs to be undertaken, and perhaps more innovative approaches to teach students to develop their career opportunities should be sought to ensure all students benefit from such advice.

For policy makers and university leaders: It is clear that there are very different student populations in different universities. It is likely that different students may well feel 'comfortable' in different HE environments. However, it is also the case that students are experiencing very different types of student experiences. University activities have significant benefits in developing confidence and a sense of belonging to the university, which impacts positively on outcomes and perhaps more intangibly on social networks, providing more useful opportunities for future attainment and progression. The fact that not all students are benefiting from such activities in these ways raises real questions about the differences in the student experience revealed in this study.

Part One – Introduction

Section 1: Background to the project

The present project was funded by the Higher Education Academy in 2007-08 through a competitive bidding process. The aim of this research was to examine what extra-curricular activities (ECAs) students participate in and whether different student groups engaged in different types of activities (i.e. are there patterns of participation in certain activities by certain groups of students?). If this was the case, what impact does this patterning have on their career opportunities? ECAs were broadly defined in this research, including a wide range of activities, such as part-time work, involvement in university students' union clubs and societies (and different types of clubs and societies, e.g. cultural, sporting and other), other university-related activities such as volunteering and class representation, involvement in other personal activities such as social networking sites, and other activities outside of university life, such as family commitments, religious involvement and community activities. In other words, ECAs were defined as activities outside of tutor-led learning time.

Rationale for the research

There is little research that has examined the impact of ECAs on graduate outcomes in the UK, and there is even less research that has examined the impact of ECAs on outcomes by student demographics (Tchibozo, 2007). Very few studies look at students activities beyond the classroom (Little, 2006). Some literature on the topic from the US at high school level indicates that students' engagement with ECAs varies across gender, social class and ethnic groups (Brown & Evans, 2002; Dimaggio, 1982; Dumais, 2002; Farkas, 1996; Flores-Gonzalez, 2000), as do the benefits of these activities for academic achievement and employment (Eide & Ronan, 2001). The project examined whether some of these differences highlighted in the literature have similar effects in the UK with university students, specifically focusing on whether these lifestyle experiences differ according to the students' class, ethnic group, disability and/or gender. More recent research in the UK (Blasko, 2002; Brennan & Shah, 2003) has shown that certain student groups

appear to be missing out on opportunities to develop and engage in social networks at university, affecting their intellectual and career development. The present research investigated the impact of issues such as friendship networks, social capital (Field, 2005), domicile residence, 'habitus' and belonging (Bourdieu, 1977; Reay, David & Ball, 2002) on students' ability and willingness to participate in ECAs. The perceived effects of ECAs on employment prospects and actual employment were also examined by interviewing employers and alumni regarding their attitudes and experience of the value of ECAs. The research therefore aimed to:

- identify any patterns in participation of ECAs by different student demographics (age, gender, class background, ethnicity, disability);
- identify activities that affect graduate outcomes;
- identify activities that affect graduate outcomes for specific student demographic groups;
- statistically predict which activities have significant impact on subjective and objective measures of graduate outcomes;
- evaluate employers', students' and past students' views of ECAs' value in gaining appropriate employment.

The current project was run over one academic year and data were gathered from four different institutions across the UK. Institution A was a city-based post-92 university in London, institution B was a campus-based 1960s university on the South coast of England, institution C was a campus-based 1960s university in Scotland and institution D was a Russell Group university in the North-East of England. Institutions were selected because they were diverse with regard to geography, type of institution and differing student populations, therefore offering outcomes that have wide applicability. The overall research approach was guided by the limited budget and timescale, but included a review of the relevant literature and a large-scale quantitative survey study, as well as three qualitative data collection activities. Data were collected and analysed to answer the questions set out above.

Intended audience

By placing students within the context of their social lives, backgrounds and 'biographies', this research aims to help students make the best of their time at university, both in and beyond the classroom.

The research will be of interest to both national and institutional policy makers and practitioners in higher education including students' unions and all those concerned with the student experience and involved in ensuring positive experiences and outcomes for all demographic student groups. It will have implications for the delivery of student support, flexible learning and resource allocation. It will also be of interest to careers services and HE managers involved in supporting and developing careers advice, and to employers concerned with matching their needs to the skills and experiences of graduate applicants.

Confines of the research

The research was conducted over a one-year period at four institutions across the UK. Considerable data were collected from a demographically diverse range of students, allowing for comparisons across demographic groups. However, the findings are based on the limitations that such a time- and financially limited project can offer. While some comparisons across institutions were possible, certain institutions were less represented than others. Due to unforeseen circumstances, researcher access to distribute the questionnaire at the two Northern UK locations could not be granted. A link to an electronic version of the questionnaire was instead emailed to students at these institutions, who emailed back the completed questionnaires. For this reason, less students from the Scottish 1960s and the Russell Group universities completed the questionnaire in phase 1 (n=56). Consequently, most of the comparative analyses presented below are conducted across different student demographic groups rather than across university location. Comparisons could also be made between 'old' and 'new' universities. The number of respondents from the post-92 and the Southern 1960s universities (n=344 and n=231 respectively) was sufficient to allow for some comparisons across different types of university sites.

As this topic is seriously under-researched in the UK, these exploratory findings will contribute much to our understanding of different student demographic groups' behaviour in relation to ECAs (in different university environments), and their perceived impact on employment opportunities.

Section 2: Review of the literature on student diversity, extra-curricular experiences and graduate outcomes

Diversity of student experience in a changing HE environment

Higher education (HE) participation is increasingly pervasive across the UK. Many more students are now part of the HE system as a proportion of the population than in previous generations and as a result the idea of 'the' student experience is under threat in a massified system (Scott, 1995).   It is the differences between students and their 'chosen' (or not chosen) lifestyles that could potentially reveal differences in the impact of ECAs on graduate outcomes. The idea of choice is of course problematic in a socially divided society, hence the view of the research team that lifestyle and activities are always constrained by level of income, background and so on.

Little (2006) points out that there is a real diversity of student experience developing in institutions for students from different backgrounds, which will create different employment outcomes, and Pearson (2006) highlights that there are no longer any 'typical' graduates, although employers still have a rather blinkered view of what a 'good graduate' is. Barber and Hill (2005) highlight that overemphasis on graduates who come from a small pool of universities with certain characteristics restricts choice and limits graduate opportunities.

There is little research that examines what students do beyond their 'classrooms' despite the recognition that any understanding of students must include a total experience (Harvey *et al.*, 1992). Given the variation in the student demography in HE, students will be engaged in a wide variety of activities including clubs and societies, sporting activities, volunteering, religious and cultural activities, as well as part-time work and caring responsibilities. Additionally, students are increasingly

engaged in a wide variety of activities that relate to the World Wide Web such as social networking.

The particular environment of the university undergraduate experience creates a specifically challenging milieu: for many it is the first time away from home; for others it is balancing attendance at and expectations from university while living at home with different commitments. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) highlights the notion of 'identity-threat' driving the need to reinforce self-esteem, via strong and positive 'in-group identification'. Therefore, developing a strong and positive affiliation with one's university and fellow peers could produce a positive 'sense of self' and increased self-esteem, but may also challenge other identities. These contradictions create tensions for new students that impact on the experience of different student groups. This need for positive identification may be particularly important for marginalised, stigmatised and minority groups who have limited affirmation in wider society (Brown, 2000).

Thus, the social context for learning is overlaid with different groups' process of identification, access to power and access to those taken-for-granted elements of society that define where different identities are located within the broader social structure. Each biography and its context will affect students' engagement with knowledge, and will shape how learning is understood and perceived. In other words, the context for learning today is shaped by power, socio-economic and cultural position, with differing effects for diverse student groups.

Field (2005) suggests a typology of learners in our society based on learning in a broad context including learning beyond 'classroom' learning. He suggested that there were permanent learners (who took on new activities and learning environments with pleasure throughout their lives), traditional learners (who would seek formal course learning), instrumental learners (who seek education to improve their own lives and career prospects) and non-learners (who for different reasons do not find learning as a positive experience and seek to avoid undertaking any study).

These 'types' relate to different groups' life experiences within their social and cultural positioning. This creates a particular environment in which students come to university, not as empty vessels to be filled but as real people with different experiences, identities and belonging/self-esteem needs and understandings in a fast-changing, risk-filled and fragile world (Beck, 1992). While all university students can be perceived to be 'successful learners' we would argue that their own life contexts create a propensity to engage in activities differently dependent on experience. It is with this background and set of theoretical perspectives that we undertook the research on ECAs. Engagement in activities beyond the classroom in HE using Field's typology will throw up all four categories of 'learner' in the informal and non-formal learning experiences that such activities provide. We were interested to see if these types of learners co-related to student background and experience.

It is essential therefore to take a broad approach to students' ECAs, rooted in the students' life history and its interpretation, their social and cultural background, attitudes to learning, the community context in which they live, their stage in personal development and the political and economic climate in which they are studying (Stuart, 2006). This framework recognises the difference between and within the student population in HE in the UK today. There are students with very different backgrounds, living in very different social circumstances with different life expectations, which can create a very different context for learning and teaching.

Student diversity and graduate outcomes

Graduate outcomes as regards students' degree attainment and progression, and their subsequent employment have been found to vary according to gender, ethnicity, age, socio-economic status and disability as described below.

Gender

Richardson (2008b) points out that the last 50 years has seen a marked shift in the proportion of female graduates. Women constituted only 30% of graduates in 1958, but they constituted 57% of graduates in 2005-06. During this time, the direction of gender differences in degree attainment has been reversed: women are now more

likely than their male peers to obtain a good degree (HESA, 2007; Richardson & Woodley, 2003; Rudd, 1984; Smith & Naylor, 2001). The gender gap in degree attainment varies by age (it is eliminated in graduates under 21 years or over 60 years old) and subject of study (Richardson & Woodley, 2003). Despite their poorer academic performance overall, males are more likely to obtain first class Honours degrees (Rudd, 1984), although this varies across institutions and subjects (Chapman,1994; Leman, 1999) and is likely to be an effect of the over-representation of males in 'first-rich' science subjects (Woodfield & Earl-Novell, 2006). In fact, when the effects of other demographic and institutional variables were statistically controlled for, females were found to be *more* likely than men to achieve a first class Honours degree (Richardson, 2008b). The tendency for females to perform better than males overall is also more pronounced for certain ethnic minority groups (Connor *et al.*, 2004; Naylor & Smith, 2004).

Female graduates were more likely than male graduates to have entered employment or further study six months after leaving UK HE (Connor *et al.*, 2004). For first-generation graduates, males reported less job satisfaction, whereas females were more likely to report that their qualification was unnecessary for their graduate job (Blasko, 2002). Regarding gender differences in graduate earnings, male UK graduates were found to be earning 12% more than their female counterparts (Chevalier, 2004). A large fraction of the gender pay gap in this study could be attributed to subject choice, job characteristics and gender-role expectations, the principal factor being employers' expectations about child rearing.

Ethnicity

Research spanning over a decade has consistently shown that despite their increasing participation levels in UK HE, ethnic minority students in UK HE are less likely to obtain a 'good' degree (2:1 or above) than their White counterparts (Broecke & Nicholls, 2007; Conner *et al.*, 1996, 2004; Elias & Jones, 2006; Leslie, 2005; Naylor & Smith, 2004; Owen *et al.*, 2000; Purcell *et al.*, 2005; Richardson, 2008).

Connor *et al.* (2004) found that six months after leaving UK HE in 2000, 94% of White students had obtained 'successful' graduate outcomes (success being defined as either entering employment or further study), closely followed by the Indian, Black Caribbean and Black Other groups (90-91% range); the Black African group had the lowest success rate (84%). Ethnic minority graduates were found to face greater difficulties in obtaining an initial job and were more likely than White graduates to take a longer period of time to obtain graduate-level positions (Blasko, 2002; Brennan *et al.*, 2003). Asian graduates were the most likely to be in professional or managerial positions, although these positive employment outcomes were not reflected in higher salaries or greater job satisfaction (Blasko, 2002). More ethnic minority graduates were in professional or managerial positions six months after graduation compared to the White group, perhaps driven by the high concentrations of ethnic minority students in Medicine, Law, IT and Business Studies (Connor *et al.*, 2004).

Age

Age of entry into HE does not seem to have any significant association with the class of degree earned (Blasko, 2002). However, mature students have poorer progression rates than their younger counterparts. Almost twice as many full-time mature students drop out of HE after their first year compared with younger entrants (Higher Education Statistics Authority, 2004). Interestingly, for students studying for a degree in Social Work, where mature students are more heavily represented than in HE as a whole, there is no such age gap in progression rates (Hussein, Moriarty & Manthorpe, 2007; Moriarty & Murray, 2005).

Mature students are generally less likely than younger students to enter university with A-level qualifications, which often has a separate negative effect on labour market opportunities (Blasko, 2002). Graduates who entered UK HE at the age of 26 to 29 years were 4% more likely than younger graduates to be working in a non-graduate job 18 months after graduation (DfES, 1999). Blasko (2002) also found that those who entered HE after the age of 24 were less likely to be in a graduate-level job and also had worse career prospects than younger graduates.

Socio-economic status

Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are under-represented in UK universities; those who have parents with skilled manual, semi-skilled or unskilled occupations make up only 25% of the average UK university's student body (Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2003). Graduates with better qualified parents are slightly more likely to obtain a first class Honours degree, but those with less qualified parents are more likely to hold an upper second class degree, leading to similar proportions of students with a good degree (2:1 or above) across socio-economic backgrounds (Blasko, 2002).

The Department for Education and skills reported that graduates with parents in partly skilled occupations were found to be 30% more likely than others to have a non-graduate job 18 months after graduation, and this risk increased to 80% for graduates who had no employed parents. Three and a half years after graduation, those from lower socio-economic groups were also earning between 6 and 10% less than those with parents in managerial and technical positions (DfES, 1999). Social class was found to similarly affect the likelihood of being in a graduate job six months after graduation (Smith, McKnight & Naylor, 2000). Graduates from higher socio-economic groups were also shown to move into occupations with salaries 1 to 3% higher than those from lower socio-economic groups (Smith & Naylor, 2001).

Disability

Disabled graduates are defined as those who identify themselves as having a disability or a specific learning need during their degree studies, and in 2004, 7% of full-time, first-degree students who graduated from UK universities identified themselves as having either a disability or a learning need such as dyslexia (Leacy, Tunnah & Christie, 2008).

Richardson and Wydell (2003) compared the degree results of all students in the UK during 1995-96, of which 0.42% had been diagnosed with dyslexia. Compared to students with no disability, dyslexic students were more likely to withdraw during

their first year of study and were less likely to complete their degree programmes. Dyslexic students were also less likely to receive first class Honours, upper second class Honours or unclassified degrees, but they were more likely to receive lower second class or third class Honours. Forty per cent of dyslexic students obtained first class or upper second class Honours degrees compared to 47% of students with no reported disability. However, the study found that with adequate institutional support and resources, the degree attainment of students with dyslexia was comparable to students with no disability. Leacy, Tunnah and Christie (2008) reported on the destinations of disabled students six months after graduation who had graduated from UK universities in 2004. Compared with non-disabled students, they found that disabled students as a whole experienced equality with regard to the quality of graduate opportunities and the type of industry sectors available to them, thus challenging some of the assumptions about disabled people in the labour market. However, disabled graduates as a whole were more likely to be unemployed than non-disabled graduates and were more likely to be found in part-time and voluntary work than their disabled peers. Regarding the effects of the type of disability on employment, graduates with dyslexia or an unseen disability such as mental health problems compared most favourably to non-disabled graduates. Of those with physical disabilities, graduates who were deaf or hearing impaired had the lowest unemployment rates, whereas wheelchair users and graduates with mobility difficulties had the highest unemployment rates.

Aspects of a 'successful' graduate outcome therefore vary according to gender, ethnicity, age, socio-economic status and disability. In addition to the impact of the degree subjects chosen by different students, variation in their graduate outcomes may reflect differences in job-seeking approaches or in perceptions of what constitutes a 'good' job and is an area that needs further exploration. Clearly there are inequalities both in degree attainment and employment opportunities across different demographic groups of students in UK HE, leading to considerable costs for certain groups of students when they enter the labour market. All these differences suggest that, in evaluating the impact of ECAs on graduate outcomes, it is vital to

examine different student groups and their different engagements with different activities.

Habitus as an issue for non-traditional students

In universities we generally acknowledge the extra-curricular, but we do not necessarily know how engaged our students are in such activities, and we may not connect it or relate it to the formal learning environment. One of the key reasons why informal learning is important is that it is often related to the concept of 'habitus' and the experience of 'cultural and social capital' (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984). An individual's habitus develops in response to the determining structures (e.g. family, class and education) and the external conditions or fields (e.g. sports, the arts and professional life) that they encounter, and it is a useful framework within which to examine the impact of ECAs on students' degree and employment outcomes. In other words 'informal' and 'non-formal' learning, like all learning, is not a passive process and is not context-neutral. Students engage in informal learning (or not) as a matter of 'taste', structured by prior background, cultural experiences and economic circumstances.

Several researchers have identified habitus as an issue for 'non-traditional' students (Reay, David & Ball, 2002). Studies have found that decisions of working-class students to attend university are largely based on the social, economic and cultural capital available to them, such as their knowledge and information about HE (Hutchings, 2003), access routes in to university (Leathwood & Hutchings, 2003), student funding (Hutchings, 2003b) and social identity concerns in relation to participation (Archer & Leathwood, 2003). The value of HE is differently structured across class, ethnicity and gender, and research shows there are greater risks and more uncertain rewards for working-class students. These students frame the value of HE in more ambiguous terms and in light of the low-status institutions accessible to them, the risk of non-completion and the limited types of graduate opportunities available to them (Archer, 2003). It is therefore vital to contextualise ECAs in relation to contextualised life histories, rooted in socio-economic, political and

cultural experiences. These experiences will impact not only on students' time at university, but beyond into the workplace and in wider society.

Social capital, attainment and progression

Social capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Coleman, 1988; Field, 2005) refers to a whole range of social connections and networks as a resource that can help people to advance their interests by co-operating with others. Stronger and more extensive social network ties help people create and exchange skills, knowledge and attitudes that in turn allow them to tap in to other benefits such as enjoying new perspectives and extending friendships (Field, 2005). Research suggests that strong social networks and educational achievement are mutually reinforcing. Social capital also operates in processes of innovation and knowledge exchange, patterns of job search and labour recruitment, and processes of workplace skill acquisition and improvement (Field 2003).

Social networks and resources are therefore a pertinent issue for many working-class and ethnic minority students who have to learn the 'rules' of HE while facing time and money issues and discriminatory practices (Bowl, 2002; Malach, 2003). Social activities with one's peers are essential for increasing social networks, and therefore group-based activities overall may be particularly essential for working-class and ethnic minority students. For first-generation HE students, friendships can play a crucial role in deciding to study in HE and being successful once at university. Within this context, networks of friendship become a form of social capital that can both reinforce and undermine the effect of certain privileged groups' increased levels of cultural and economic capital (Stuart, 2006). It is likely then that engagement with university-linked or campus-based activities will similarly affect friendship networks, links with the HEI and overall will increase cultural and social capital.

In HE, social capital not only involves students networking with fellow students and staff, but also interacting with others through 'university life' outside of learning and teaching activities. Little (2006) looked at the effect of competing demands on time

from study, family commitments, financial pressure and social needs. Many students in her study cited financial reasons for working, and said that their jobs undermined not only their study time but also other activities that give rise to socialising and developing networks. She noted that the increased need to work for low-income, ethnic minority and older students, as well as those living at home, could potentially widen the gap in social capital between those who are advantaged on entry and those who are less advantaged. This has serious implications for these students' attainment and progression. Interactions with peers and faculty have been found to greatly impact on learning, and social experiences at college are widely considered to be as important as cognitive ones for intellectual development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In this context, ECAs are seen less as an 'optional extra' and more as a means of acquiring vital social capital that will influence students' attainment, progression and future employment. This raises the question of how different student groups are engaging in ECAs in UK HE today.

Extra-curricular activities as access and inclusion

While there is little research that examines student differences and ECAs in HE in the UK (Tchibozo, 2007), there is some literature on the topic from the US, particularly at high school level. Dimaggio (1982) suggested that at high school, cultural activities are culturally prescribed for teenage girls, while for adolescent boys they are less strongly prescribed, perhaps even negatively sanctioned by peers. She found that pupils' interest and participation in 'high-brow' ECAs (e.g. involving the arts, classical music and literature) predicted their grades better than their measured ability did so. Girls were more interested and involved in these activities than boys were, and, furthermore, the greatest benefits of such engagement on grades were enjoyed by girls of higher socio-economic status (SES), as opposed to lower SES boys and lower SES pupils of either sex. Dumais (2002) also argued that traditional gender stereotypes play a role in the lack of cultural participation by male pupils, and that female pupils may be more encouraged to make use of their cultural capital to succeed in school. She similarly found stronger and more consistent benefits of engagement in cultural activities for girls than boys, and that higher SES female pupils were more likely to engage in cultural clubs and activities.

Research has found some ECAs to have a more beneficial effect on the student experience than others. Lamont, Kaufman and Moody (2000) highlight the connection between students' involvement in civic activities such as volunteering and success in their studies. They explain how the value placed on morality by the US high school system means that prize-winning students learn to emphasise on their applications the cultural repertoires made available by their life experiences that illustrate aspects of the ideal moral self. Geber (1996) found that the amount of participation in school-related ECAs was more positively related to academic achievement than participation in ECAs outside of school, and that this relationship was stronger for White students than for Black students.

Other types of ECA may have a less positive or even negative effect on students' attainment and progression. Certain types of term-time employment may enable students to accumulate substantial work experience that place students at an advantage on entering the workforce (Light, 2001). However, other evidence suggests a negative relationship between term-time working and degree attainment (Purcell *et al.*, 2005). Part-time work, debt and family commitments have a significant effect particularly on working-class and mature students' experiences of HE (Blasko, 2002; Brennan & Shah, 2003; Solomon & Woodfield, 2005). Flores-Gonzalez (2000) found that although Latino students did not participate in as many ECAs as other groups, they were keen to do so but found the way that such activities were organised conflicted with part-time work or family requirements. We would argue that this calls for a redefinition of the extra-curricular that is more inclusive and in line with the varied experiences of an increasingly diverse student body.

One way to frame extra-curricular activity is as a proxy for a students' sense of belonging at their institution. A sense of connection with or belonging to one's institution has been theorised by several traditions to be an important predictor of student behaviour and school success (Brown & Evans, 2002). A lack of a sense of belonging can lead adolescents to feel cut off from family, friends and school. When students are led to believe that no one is like them, or that they are not what others

want them to be, these feelings of alienation can prevent them from connecting meaningfully with other people (Brown, Higgins, Pierce, Hong & Thoma, 2003). Alienation can affect students' home and social life as well as their education and study, and has been associated with negative outcomes such as dropping out of high school, gang activity and poor peer, school-student and teacher-student relationships (Brown *et al.*, 2003; Calbrese & Poe, 1990). Farkas (1996) found that Black students were less likely to be absent and more likely to participate in activities if they had Black teachers, highlighting the importance of their 'belonging' and recognising themselves in the institution. Brown and Evans (2002) found that American high school pupils who participated in ECAs, regardless of ethnicity, had greater levels of school connection. However, European-American pupils were significantly more involved in these activities than their Hispanic counterparts, highlighting the importance of creating accessible and attractive extra-curricular activity opportunities for diverse students.

Issues around identity, belonging and social class are also central to the ways in which students negotiate HE in the UK. Notions of identity and belonging impact on working-class students' perceptions of HE routes as accessible, worthwhile and desirable, and on the guidance provided to these students by middle-class professionals (Archer & Leathwood, 2003). This brings us back to social identity theory (SIT) and the importance, especially for marginalised student groups, of a strong and positive identification with their university and fellow peers for their sense self-esteem (Brown, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT describes how 'identity threat' drives the need to reinforce self-esteem, via strong and positive 'in-group identification'. Engagement in ECAs therefore has potential consequences for the well-being of different student groups and ultimately for their attainment and progression at university.

Extra-curricular activities and future employment
ECAs can also help students progress through and beyond formal education and into the labour market, and researchers have theorised a number of different ways in which ECAs might benefit students. Kaufman and Gabler (2004) found that activities

such as music and dance, public service, interscholastic team sports and student government all improved US students' likelihood of getting into college. These activities provided hands-on skills and training, alongside opportunities to increase one's self-esteem and invest in school life. However, engagement in ECAs that were unusual or unexpected (e.g. a male student engaging in a female-dominated field) increased students' chances of entering an elite college. Such ECAs may benefit students by helping them to stand out, defy expectations and appear unique among their peers.

Eide and Ronan (2001) have shown that students' participation in varsity sports may have a positive effect on future earnings, although this differed according to students' ethnic background. They found that sports participation had a negative effect on the educational attainment of White male student athletes, a positive effect on the educational attainment and future earnings of Black male student athletes and a positive effect on the educational attainment of White female student athletes. Since differences in job prospects often relate to issues of confidence and self-belief (Brennan, 2004), sports participation may provide certain students with valuable skills and opportunities for attainment and job market progression.

Employers may be inclined to favour certain ECAs, such as those indicating responsibility, reliability and maturity, over other activities indicating extensive family, social or leisure commitments that could conflict with the job by increasing turn-over rates (Sattinger, 1998). Tchibozo (2005) found some evidence for this theory in his research with UK, French and Canadian students. ECAs could have positive or negative effects on the transition into work, depending on the nature of these experiences. Certain types of ECAs, practised with family and undertaken at leadership level, gave better access to large firms, job security and protection against unemployment. However, participation in solitary activities and in cultural, social sector or citizenship activities disadvantaged students' labour market entry, leading to more unemployment, less job security and lower occupational status. Other research on UK graduates seeking first jobs indicated that involvement in

ECAs generally increased access to occupational status, but lengthened their preceding period of unemployment. Temporary experience in citizenship activities or as leaders increased their access to managerial positions and large firms, but long-term participation in activities, such as committed campaigning and student activism lead to job insecurity, lower occupational status and high risk of unemployment (Tchibozo, 2007). These results highlight the strategic potential of ECAs for students with different priorities to achieve different employment objectives.

Other research suggests that participation in sports, clubs and societies has been found to benefit graduate employment prospects (Brown & Scase, 1994; Purcell & Hogarth, 1999). Taking part in ECAs did not seem to improve mature students' job prospects, but younger students who spent more than ten hours per week on ECAs were more likely to be successful in their subsequent employment (Blasko, 2002). However, many students appeared to be missing out on opportunities to develop and engage in social networks at university, affecting their intellectual and career development. Those studying HE courses at FE colleges in particular reported a poor choice of social activities to provide the career enhancing opportunities they wanted (Blasko, 2002; Brennan & Shah, 2003). Therefore, an investigation of students' social networks and capital may facilitate an understanding of the ways in which different students' experiences impact on their general learning, development and future employability.

However, in order to investigate the impact of these factors, we firstly need a greater understanding of engagement with the HE environment for students from a variety of different backgrounds and from various demographic groups. A broad and inclusive definition of ECAs is also required, in order to investigate thoroughly the type and frequency of engagement in different ECAs and their impact on degree attainment. Secondly we need a better understanding of the long-term impacts of extra-curricular activity in the UK. It is important to realise that for many graduates their initial jobs are of a temporary nature; some graduates postpone their careers to pursue further study or take gap years to travel. Others may enter low-level jobs while paying off debts or considering their career options, and many others may undertake underpaid

work experience in order to get a foot on the career ladder (Connor *et al.*, 2004; Pollard *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, the impact of ECAs on employment needs to be examined beyond the first few years after graduation in order to acquire a clearer understanding of different graduates' career trajectories.

The present research into student diversity, ECAs and graduate outcomes therefore attempted to address these issues, in the context of a rapidly changing HE environment.

Section 3: Methodology and approach

Design

This project utilised a mixed-method design, administering a large-scale survey study followed by qualitative focus groups and telephone interviews with students, as well as telephone interviews with alumni and potential employers. The quantitative data were analysed in SPSS, largely using Analysis of Variance to examine for demographic group differences, as well as regression techniques in order to develop predictive models for which individuals were engaged in which activities (Field, 2007). The qualitative data were transcribed and analysed in ATLAS.ti, using a basic coding framework, leading to the development of a more detailed thematic analysis to draw out emergent themes (Bryman, 2004).

Table 1. Phased procedure.

Phase	Activity	Participants	Completion
1	*Literature review*		*November*
2	*Quantitative survey study (& pilot)*	*n=631 (54)* *total=685*	*February*
3	*Student focus groups and interviews*	*n=33*	*May*
4	*Alumni interviews*	*n=12*	*June*
5	*Employer interviews*	*n=9*	*July*
6	*Follow-up questions/marks*	*n=33*	*August*

Phase 1 involved an in-depth literature review within the field. For the quantitative Phase 2 of the research (as stated) the panel of researchers devised, piloted, revised and delivered the large-scale quantitative survey across four universities. All questionnaires were delivered to second-year undergraduate students, across a variety of domains. At two of the universities collection took place in class, with the assistance of both a researcher and a lecturer present; at the other two institutions

the survey was accessed by students online. The data were then entered into and analysed using SPSS.   The quantitative data findings were used to devise the (Phase 3) focus group questions.

The research team proceeded to Phase 3 focus groups in order to gain more in-depth information from students about their activities and views of their employment opportunities. The students approached had already indicated a willingness to take part in the focus groups in the survey. The preliminary thematic findings from these focus groups were used by the researchers to devise questions for the Phase 4 alumni interviews.

The Phase 4 alumni interviews offered an opportunity for a more reflective account of the relevance of ECAs using graduates from the 'class of 2001'. In the interviews they were asked to assess their view of the importance of ECAs in obtaining employment. Finally, the data from this phase were used to devise and carry out the final Phase 5 interviews. Potential employers were identified by the relevant university careers services, and researchers approached these employers to take part in telephone interviews. The Phase 5 protocols were intended to cross-validate the importance employers put on various activities (and the HE experience), with the perceptions of current students and employed alumni.

The final phase of the project, Phase 6, consisted of the research team emailing all participants who had indicated they were willing to take part in future research, and used an anonymous identification number to include this information on the final database. Participants were asked to report their actual grades for the year to cross-refer to the predicted grades that participants had recorded when completing the survey.

Participants

Participants in the quantitative survey consisted of 631 students from the four different university locations, selected to represent key locations and university

'types' within the UK. Institution A is a large city-based post -92 institution with mostly young students, half of whom are White and half from ethnic minority backgrounds, largely doing vocationally focused programmes. Institution B is a 1960s campus-based university in the South of England and has predominantly young White students largely doing academically focused courses. Institution C is a 1960s campus-based university in Scotland with mostly White Scottish students and a substantial proportion of mature students, doing a mixture of vocational and academic degrees. Institution D is an old Russell Group university in the North of England with mostly young White students doing academically focused courses.

As will be addressed in the results, the students were selected to represent a diverse range of courses, but all were second-year students studying at undergraduate level. Further demographics factors will be presented in the results section; however, the sample was diverse with regard to age, ethnicity and religious practice, but not as diverse as regards SES (which perhaps reflects the homogeneity of the social class make-up of HEIs within the UK).

It should be noted that 54 students (from the university where the research project was based) took part in the pilot study for the questionnaire, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the instrument. These students were, therefore, not eligible to take part in the survey study.

For all of the surveys, participation was completely voluntary, and informed consent was given on the first sheet of the questionnaire. However, students were given the opportunity to include their email address in order to be entered into a prize draw and were asked to tick a box if they agreed to take part in future studies.

The student participants (n=33) who took part in the qualitative focus groups (four at two key university locations) were volunteers who had indicated a willingness to take part in our future survey. The potential participants were approached via email and took part in eight focus groups of three to eight students. The response rate from

students at the remaining two university locations was insufficient to conduct focus groups (n=6). Therefore, students from these institutions were interviewed (three telephone interviews at each university location). All students who participated in focus groups or in telephone interviews were given a £10 book token as a thank you for participating.

The alumni participants (n=12 alumni from three university locations) were selected on the basis of past research that indicates graduates are more likely to be in graduate jobs several years after completing their degrees rather than after the six-month period when the first destination survey is undertaken in HE (Pollard *et al.*, 2004), hence the participants were all members of the 'class of 2001' at each institution. Alumni were contacted via each university's alumni division and emailed in order to obtain consent for a phone interview. The interviews took approximately 20 minutes, and participants were assured of their ethical rights (to anonymity, confidentiality and withdrawal). Likewise, the employer phone interviews took place in a similar manner (n=9; three from three university locations), but were approached via each university's career development services. To encourage participation, employer interviews were restricted to ten minutes in length. More specific demographic information will be given in the relevant qualitative results section below. Questions were specific and targeted to ensure that the topics were fully covered in the short interview time.

Questionnaire measure

An extensive 15-page, colour-printed, booklet-style questionnaire was developed using both pre-existing validated quantitative measures, as well as the development of new measures, particularly those addressing involvement in various types of activities. Additionally some pre-existing measures were adapted in order better to assess the objectives of the project. For instance, overall well-being measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Pavot & Diener, 1993) and the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen *et al.*, 1983), was adapted with the additional instructions: "Take a moment to visualise your average day at university and think about how you normally feel." Similarly, Social Identification measures (i.e. Brown, Condor,

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Mathews, Wade & Williams, 1986) were adapted in order to form some items addressing the importance of participating in activities to one's sense of self. In this way, the questionnaire provides a balance of previously validated, adapted and newly developed questionnaire measures.

Questionnaire development

The initial questionnaire was developed by a group of four researchers, using previously validated, adapted and newly developed questionnaire measures, and measured nearly 20 pages in length (with tick boxes and five-point Likert scale, response items from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Focus groups were held with students at one of the participating institutions to pilot three versions of a questionnaire designed to collect information related to extra-curricular activities, demography and employment, in which identical questions were ordered differently. A total of 54 second-year students (Psychology and Business Studies) completed the questionnaire in two groups of 18.

Qualitative feedback from the pilot indicated that (perhaps predictably) all groups thought the questionnaire to be rather long, taking upwards of 35 to 45 minutes. However, they felt layout and design of the questionnaire made it relatively easy to complete. Some questions were deemed repetitive and therefore removed.

Some students asked that a 'not applicable' option be included for some questions, as well as instructions for redirection ('skip to question x'). Students also found it hard to calculate the number of hours they spent engaged in each activity, thus it was adjusted to number of days in which they undertook activities. This did not provide an exact indication of involvement, but it did provide a 'diary-graphical' picture of students' activities and how often they undertook them. Finally, they suggested that more blank spaces be included for activities not labelled. All suggestions were taken into account.

The questionnaire data itself were then subjected to statistical tests for reliability. Most scales yielded moderate to strong reliability scores (alphas from .68 to .85).

Questionnaire items that were found to be unreliable were removed or, in some instances, reworded. This provided us with a highly reliable measure, taking approximately 25 to 35 minutes to complete and addressing the following domains.

Demographic factors

The first three pages of the 'booklet' assessed demographic variables in-depth, including sex, age, nationality, ethnicity, religious beliefs, disability, student demographic factors, family's educational background and children's age (if any). Socio-economic status was measured firstly in line with Government recommendations (Rose & Pevalin, 2001), which included two pages of questions regarding the family's background and particularly their working background. Secondly, SES was measured by a simple self-report item devised by the research team (as self-perception of social class was deemed of vital importance). Interestingly, both measures indicated high reliability (r=.31, p<.01), indicating that self-reported social class may actually be a good proxy-measure for more in-depth Government-recommended guidelines.

As the demographic section was quite long, two versions were piloted, one with the demographics up front and one at the end, in order to assess a) fatigue and b) whether the personal information might lead to early withdrawal. However, both the qualitative and quantitative findings supported inclusion of the demographics up front (leading to statistically fewer unanswered questions, p<.05).

Activities outside the classroom

Twenty items were used to measure participation in a wide range of activities outside the classroom ranging from clubs, councils, sports, films and family commitments, ranging to artistic, religious and voluntary activities. Employment information was gathered separately. Each activity was assessed for number of days a week they took part in that activity (with a 'not applicable' option), as well as whether this activity took place at university or within the community or alone, and whether it was

undertaken for relaxation/enjoyment, religious reason or other reason. Three blank items were given for participants to write in their own activities.

Furthermore a tick list was given to assess how many days a week students spent: seeing friends, going to the library, studying, reading for fun, going to pubs/bars, visiting shops/cafes, visiting the students' union, using internet communities and following other hobbies. While this approach does not provide actual hours involved in activities in any week, it does provide a pattern of weekly activities; for example, "I go to the library four times a week" or "I see my friends on a daily basis". Four items were included on the subject of social networking and conducting business online, and the perceived relevance of this to their future working life.

Identification with activities and perceived importance to employment

Social identification measures were adapted in order to present approximately five items, these were adapted from Brown *et al.* (1986); for example, "My hobbies and social activities are an important part of who I am". Interspersed with the importance of these activities for one's identity were six questions regarding the perceived importance of these activities toward one's employment prospects (e.g. "Participating in university clubs and activities is beneficial to my future job prospects"), as well as six questions regarding the importance of these activities for their academic performance, such as: "My religion helps me in my learning" or "My religion sometimes conflicts with my learning".

Self-reported marks

A self-report measure of marks was devised using four items, where students were asked to estimate firstly their course work marks, then exams. Students were also asked to estimate the final degree mark that they anticipated as well as the mark they were aiming for. A follow-up survey was carried out to obtain information about the actual marks that students received for the year. Following advice from the project's ethics committee, rather than obtaining students' marks through their university student numbers, we contacted them directly and asked them to volunteer

their marks. All 631 students who participated in the questionnaire were contacted via email at the end of term and asked about their actual marks for their course work and exams, and their expected and aimed for degree result. Thirty-three students responded to the follow-up survey. Interestingly, like SES, the self-reported anticipated marks yielded high reliability with the follow-up 'actual' marks ($r=.46$, $p<.01$). This again supports the notion of self-report as reliable and questionnaires as producing valid and reliable data.

Consequences of paid employment

In addition to the impact social activities and hobbies might have on one's academic performance and future employment, it was key to assess any positive or negative impact employment might also have. Seven items were devised by the research team and delivered on a five-point Likert scale to assess the impact of employment; negative items included "My work commitments negatively impact on my university performance" and "I cannot engage in social activities without pay from my job", whereas positive items included "I believe employment is beneficial to my future job prospects" and "I have made good friends at work".

Concluding the questionnaire

Overall students completed the questionnaire in 25 to 35 minutes. The final page thanked the students for their participation, allowed them to be entered into a prize draw and again assured the participants of their ethical rights. It is worth noting that while the questionnaire was long, many students provided their email and agreed to take place in future research.

Qualitative question protocols

As stated in the Phased procedure section above, the research took place in an evolutionary fashion, with the results of each analysis informing the measures for the next phase. Please see below for examples of protocol questions at each phase of the research.

The focus group discussions focused on students' involvement in activities outside the classroom and how they think these will affect their career prospects. They were asked to consider the following points:

- How do you spend a typical day at university?
- What sort of things do you do when you're not in structured learning – i.e. the classroom?
- Could you describe what you get out of these activities (i.e. your paid work and/or your hobbies)?
- How important are ECAs and who participates in these with you?
- How well prepared do you feel for finding a job after university?
- How do you feel about your progress at university?

The alumni were asked to provide a brief account of their work history since graduation, and the extra-curricular activities they engaged in while at university. They were then asked various questions about the impact of their extra-curricular activities on their subsequent employment including:

- Have your activities and interests at university influenced your choice of career?
- Did you mention any extra-curricular activities on your CV or at an interview?
- Which aspect of university life prepared you most for the workplace?

Employers were asked to briefly describe the type of work their company did and the subject areas they recruited from. They were then asked various questions about the importance of extra-curricular activities on graduates' applications including:

- What's the first thing you look for when reading a graduate CV?
- What are the most important skills you are looking for in a graduate employee?
- Which types of extra-curricular activities look particularly impressive on a CV?

Ethical considerations

The research was approved by the Higher Education Academy, and the proposal ensured that the research was consistent with the British Psychological Society's ethical guidelines. Additionally, ethical approval was obtained by Kingston University's Ethics Committee. All participation was voluntary with informed consent, and the data remained anonymously identified and kept confidential to the research team. The final page of the questionnaire, where participants were allowed to give their email address for future research participation, was detached from the rest of the questionnaire and held separately. Each questionnaire was given a generic identification number that was used for our reference. All taped interviews will be destroyed following final approval of the report findings.

Part Two – What are students doing after 'class'?

Section 4: Quantitative findings – student diversity and extra-curricular activity

Six hundred and thirty-one students studying at four different UK HE institutions completed the questionnaire (Institutions A to D). Institution A is a large city-based post-92 institution with mostly young students, half of whom are White and half from ethnic minority backgrounds, largely doing vocationally focused programmes. Institution B is a 1960s campus-based university in the South of England and has predominantly young White students largely doing academically focused courses. Institution C is a 1960s campus-based university in Scotland with mostly White Scottish students and a substantial proportion of mature students, doing a mixture of vocational and academic degrees. Institution D is an older Russell Group university in the North of England with mostly young White students doing academically focused courses.

The demographic information for students sampled from these institutions is presented below. Overall students were sampled from a diverse range of ethnic and religious backgrounds, but this varies by institution. In order to create sufficiently strong data for analysis, ethnic categories were collapsed down to 'White', 'Black' 'Asian', 'Arab/Persian' and 'Mixed Race' groups. The sample is mostly middle-class and there is not that much social class variation by institution. This is of course in line with the overall profile of HE students across the country. Social class correlated significantly with having a bursary (r=.12) and prior family experience of HE (r=.23). The table below also illustrates that the student samples from each institution had different proportions of mature students and were differently focused on academic or vocational courses.

Table 2. Demographics by institution.

		Institution type and location							
		Post-92		1960s SE		1960s Scotland		Russell Group	
		count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%
Age:	≤ 21 years old	210	62	187	81	21	66	20	20
	Mature students	129	38	44	19	11	34	4	4
Gender:	Males	141	41	118	51	15	49	12	50
	Females	203	59	113	49	16	51	12	50
Disability:	Disabled	6	2	8	4	0	0	0	0
	Specific learning needs	16	5	19	8	7	22	0	0
Ethnicity:	White	148	43	190	83	30	94	23	96
	Black	62	18	2	1	0	0	0	0
	Asian	94	27	18	8	2	6	1	4
	Other	39	12	18	8	0	0	0	0
SES:	Unemployed	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	0
	Unskilled trade	7	2	6	3	2	7	2	8
	Skilled trade	58	19	35	16	2	7	3	12
	Support worker	11	4	4	2	1	3	0	0
	Modern prof.	46	15	45	21	1	3	0	0
	Public sector	27	9	26	12	7	24	4	17
	Professional	158	51	96	45	6	21	5	21
	1st generation HE	103	30	66	29	10	31	9	38
	Fees bursary	4	1	10	4	11	38	10	42
Courses:	Vocational	259	75	61	26	16	50	9	38
	Academic	85	25	170	74	16	50	15	63
Religion:	Not religious	103	31	140	61	20	63	19	79
	Christian	109	32	49	21	8	25	3	13
	Muslim	61	18	1	1	1	3	0	0
	Hindu	29	9	3	1	1	3	0	0
	n =	344		231		32		24	

Participation rates in different activities

Students were asked to indicate ('yes' or 'no') if they were engaged in different types of activities. Examination of the basic frequencies (see Tables 1 and 2 overleaf) revealed that almost all of these students are spending time seeing friends and almost all are spending time studying. The most popular pastimes are seeing friends (98%), private study (98%), watching films (92%), online social networking with existing friends (90%), visiting the library (88%) and using online communities (84%). This suggests that these students are highly sociable, media-focused and media-literate, and resonates with research on young people that suggests they use the media as a key resource to construct an autonomous yet securely anchored identity in an increasingly personally risky and fragile world (Miles, 2000). The activities engaged in by the least students are voluntary work (15%), attending councils and committees (13%) and course representation (10%). Certainly there are limited places for roles such as course reps, and this in itself will limit the participation in these activities.

Tables 3 and 4 below indicate that these activities described above generally remain the most and least popular across different demographic groups of students, although there are some notable exceptions. Engagement in certain online social networking activities seems to vary by age and ethnic group. Only 77% of mature students compared with 87% of younger students participate in internet communities, and only 77% of mature students compared to 96% of younger students are engaged in online social networking with existing friends. Compared to all other ethnic groups, less Black students (only 75%) are engaged in online social networking with existing friends, and less Black students (only 16%) are doing business online. However, many ethnic minority students are using online communities to make *new* friends. Compared to only 26% of White students, almost twice as many ethnic minority students are using online communities for this purpose (42%). Overall this suggests that social networking is a significant feature of young people's lives and takes up a considerable amount of their time. It is also interesting that while there is a significant difference between young and mature students in

participating in online activities, a substantial number of mature students are active in this area.

Although voluntary work and councils/committees are generally practised by the least amount of students, they are more popular with students from Arab and Persian backgrounds and those with disabilities. This may be because it is more difficult for disabled students to gain paid employment; 21% of disabled students have some paid employment compared to the overall employment rate of 49%. However, 36% of students with disabilities and 24% of those with learning needs are doing voluntary work, compared to the overall participation rate in voluntary work of just 15%. The fact that less disabled students are in paid work but more are doing voluntary work reflects previous findings in the employment patterns of disabled students six months after graduation (Leacy, Tunnah & Christie, 2008). It is also possible that disabled students were using the opportunities offered by these activities to gain support from the university or, with regard to voluntary work, engaging in activities that were more inclusive than some other environments.

Certain demographic groups of students are engaging less with the students' union than others. Visiting the students' union is the least practised activity among Arab and Persian students, those with disabilities and those with learning needs. Working-class students also seem to be less represented in the union than middle-class students. Only 28% of lower SES students are visiting the union compared to 39% of higher SES students, and only 4% of lower SES students are course representatives compared to 11% of higher SES students. This suggests that the traditional perception of the 'higher education experience' is still limited to particular social classes. It also suggests that certain types of activities valued by HEIs themselves and used to gain a sense of student opinion, through course representation and students' union involvement is less representative of the overall student body in certain institutions than the institutions (and the students' unions) may wish.

Table 3. Participation rates in different activities by students demographics.

	Overall		Males		Females		Young		Mature		Disabled		Learning needs		Religious		Not religious	
	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%
Seeing friends	615	98	278	97	336	98	433	99	177	94	14	100	40	95	320	97	291	98
Studying	613	98	274	96	338	98	422	96	187	100	13	93	41	98	323	98	285	96
Films	581	92	260	91	320	93	410	94	166	88	13	93	37	88	300	91	277	94
Existing friends online	567	90	259	91	307	90	421	96	144	77	11	79	38	91	285	86	277	94
Library	554	88	240	84	313	91	372	85	177	94	13	93	38	91	304	92	245	83
Online communities	530	84	238	83	291	85	382	87	144	77	13	93	34	81	267	81	258	87
Reading other books	517	82	227	79	289	84	355	81	158	84	7	50	28	67	262	79	251	85
Shops/Cafes	520	82	220	77	299	87	373	85	144	77	12	86	36	86	267	81	249	84
Sport	484	77	223	78	261	76	339	77	142	76	10	72	33	79	248	75	231	78
Pubs/Bars	469	74	222	78	246	72	354	81	113	60	8	57	30	71	209	63	256	87
Family commitments	428	68	185	65	242	70	286	65	138	73	9	64	24	57	249	76	177	60
Music	323	51	148	52	174	51	221	51	98	52	8	57	20	48	175	53	145	49
Employment	311	49	125	44	186	54	218	50	92	49	3	21	19	45	164	50	146	49
Clubs/Societies	288	46	137	48	151	44	198	45	86	46	11	79	33	55	162	49	122	41
Art	293	46	137	48	156	45	209	48	82	44	7	50	24	57	146	44	145	49
Business online	273	43	143	50	130	38	193	44	78	42	8	57	24	57	123	37	147	50
Students' union	230	37	118	41	111	32	183	42	46	25	3	21	17	41	112	34	116	39
Prayer	203	32	76	27	127	37	114	26	85	45	6	43	10	24	194	59	8	3
New friends online	202	32	86	30	116	34	141	32	60	32	5	36	13	31	123	37	76	26
Voluntary work	93	15	42	15	51	15	58	13	34	18	5	36	10	24	61	19	32	11
Councils/Committees	83	13	49	17	34	10	53	12	28	15	5	36	9	21	54	16	28	10
Course representation	60	10	31	11	29	8	37	8	23	12	1	7	6	14	38	12	22	7

Table 4. Participation rates in different activities by students demographics.

	Overall		White		Black		Asian		Arab/Persian		Lower SES*		Higher SES*	
	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%	count	%
Seeing friends	615	98	388	99	58	91	112	97	53	93	129	96	431	98
Studying	613	98	379	96	62	97	112	97	56	98	130	97	430	98
Films	581	92	361	92	60	94	106	92	51	90	124	93	402	91
Existing friends online	567	90	363	93	48	75	104	90	49	86	114	85	401	91
Library	554	88	325	83	62	97	108	94	55	97	122	91	383	87
Online communities	530	84	333	85	51	80	95	83	48	84	108	81	371	84
Reading other books	517	82	325	83	52	81	88	77	49	86	112	84	355	81
Shops/Cafes	520	82	329	84	44	69	96	84	49	86	111	83	360	82
Sport	484	77	295	75	53	83	88	77	47	83	104	78	335	76
Pubs/Bars	469	74	339	87	26	41	67	58	35	61	99	74	333	76
Family commitments	428	68	235	60	48	75	96	84	46	81	97	72	293	66
Music	323	51	202	52	37	58	53	46	31	54	70	52	226	51
Employment	311	49	184	47	40	63	59	51	26	46	81	60	200	45
Clubs/Societies	288	46	167	43	28	44	60	52	31	54	51	38	207	47
Art	293	46	193	49	23	36	46	40	29	51	60	45	207	47
Business online	273	43	202	52	10	16	37	32	22	39	62	46	192	44
Students' union	230	37	146	37	14	22	55	48	14	25	38	28	170	39
Prayer	203	32	51	13	49	77	71	62	31	54	38	28	140	32
New friends online	202	32	101	26	27	42	49	43	24	42	44	33	138	31
Voluntary work	93	15	46	12	12	19	20	17	15	26	13	10	69	16
Councils/Committees	83	13	45	12	8	13	22	19	7	12	13	10	57	13
Course representation	60	10	35	9	4	6	13	11	7	12	5	4	46	11

*Socio-economic groups (SEG) I - IV (Unemployed, Unskilled trade, Skilled trade, Support worker)
** SEG V - VII (Public sector, Modern professional, Professional)

University differences

Engagement with extra-curricular activities was also compared across university type. The three older universities (the two 1960s universities and the Russell Group university) were compared to the new post-92 university. The table below compares the demographic make-up of students sampled from the old and new universities.

Table 5. Demographics by institution 'type'.

|		Institution type			
		New		Old	
		count	%	count	%
Age:	≤ 21 years old	210	62	228	79
	Mature students	129	38	59	21
Gender:	Males	141	41	145	51
	Females	203	59	141	49
Disability:	Disabled	6	2	8	3
	Learning needs	16	5	26	9
Ethnicity:	White	148	43	243	86
	Ethnic minority	195	57	41	14
SES:	Class 3b-5*	77	25	57	21
	Class 1-3al**	231	75	210	79
Courses:	Vocational	259	75	86	30
	Academic	85	25	201	70
Religion:	No	114	33	182	64
	Yes	227	67	103	36
	n =	344		287	

*Socio-economic groups (SEG) I - IV (Unemployed, Unskilled trade, Skilled trade, Support worker)
** SEG V - VII (Public sector, Modern professional, Professional)

Compared to the old universities, there are significantly more students at the new university who are mature students (t_{623}=4.9, p<.001), from ethnic minority backgrounds (t_{611}=12.49, p<.001) and who are studying for a vocational degree (t_{594}=12.69, p<.01). These differences translated into significant differences between

students' engagement in ECAs between the old and new universities. Students at the new university spent significantly more time praying (p<.001), keeping family commitments (p<.001) and visiting the library (p<.001), and marginally more time doing musical activities (p<.06) and watching films (p<.07). Students at the old universities spend significantly more time seeing friends (p<.001), studying (p<.05), visiting pubs and bars (p<.001) and using internet communities (p<.001), and marginally more time playing sport (p<.06) and visiting shops and cafes (p<.08). These differences are presented in the graph below.

Figure 1. Engagement in ECAs at old and new universities.
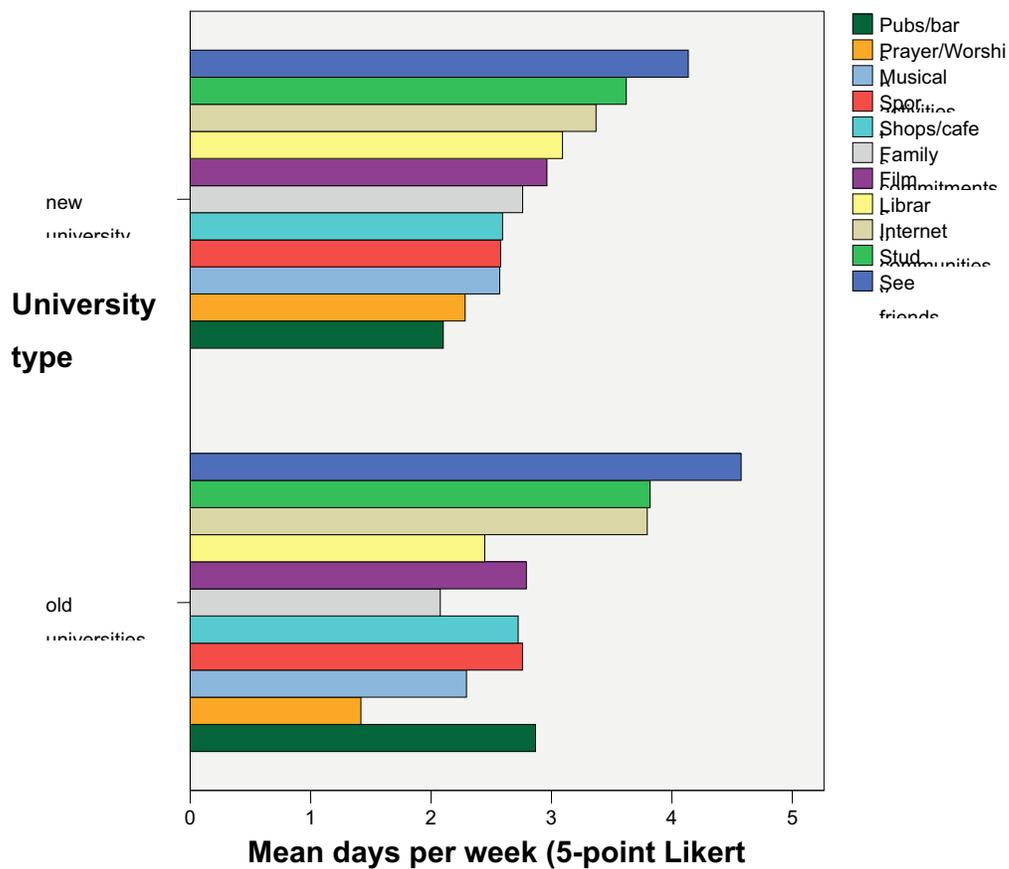
while new university students spend more time in the library than old university students, they are actually spending less time studying. This may be because the library is serving more of a social function at the new university, perhaps because for some ethnic minority students the library is a more acceptable social space than bars or pubs. However, it appears that ECAs engaged in at the old universities are offering more opportunities for social interaction. Students at the older universities, which are campus-based, do significantly more ECAs that are based around their

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university sites (p<.001), whereas those at the new university, which is spread around multiple city-based campuses, do significantly more solitary ECAs (p<.001). Furthermore, those studying at the new university are less likely to say that their commitments and activities provide them with a good support network of friends (p<.001) compared to those at the old universities.

Another interesting finding is that the students at the old universities spent more time using internet communities such as Facebook, MySpace, Bebo and eBay. There were further significant differences relating to these students' use of such online social networking sites. As shown above, students at the old universities spent significantly more time on social networking sites. These students were more likely to say that most of their existing friends used such sites as well (p<.001), suggesting that they use online social networking as a means of keeping in touch with friends. However, significantly more students at the new university said that they used online social networking for meeting *new* friends (p<.01), and for doing business over the internet (p<.01). Online social networking appears to be serving different social and practical functions for different groups of students.

There are also differences in the perceptions of different ECAs at the old and new universities. In addition to the finding described above that the new university students report less social benefits from their ECAs, these students also have different perceptions of the benefits of religious activities. Compared to students at the old universities, those at the new university identify more strongly with religious ECAs (p<.001), and they believe that religious activities will benefit their future career (p<.001) as well as their progression at university (p<.001).
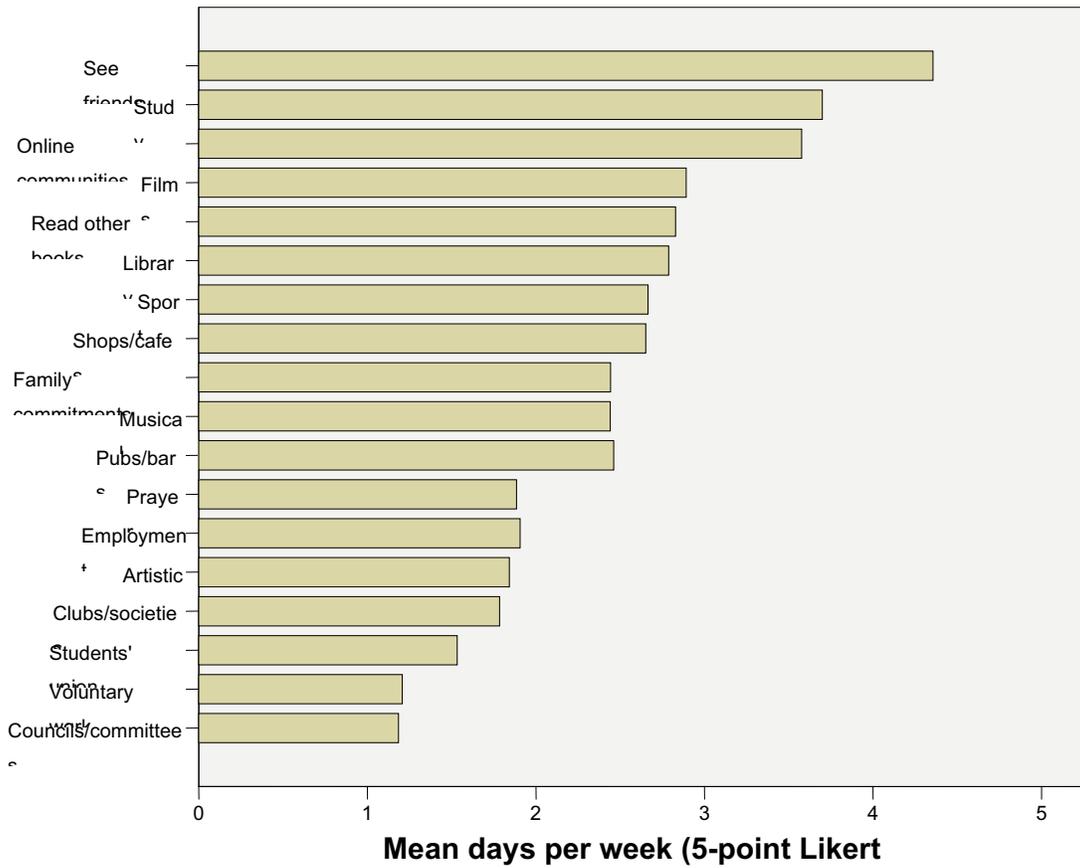
Time spent on different activities

Students were also asked how much time they spent in different activities. They indicated the number of days per week that they spent in each activity using a five-point scale (1=none, 2=once a week, 3=two to three times a week, 4=four to five times a week, 5=every day).

The graph below shows the average number of days per week (using the five-point Likert scale) that students spent overall on different activities. Overall, on average students see their friends four to five days per week, they undertake private study four to five days per week, they use online communities four to five days per week and they watch films two to three times per week. Students are therefore spending a substantial amount of their time on socialising and media-based activities. Students spend substantially less time on voluntary activities.

Tables 6 and 7 below show the average number of days per week (using the five-point Likert scale) that students spent on different activities by different student demographics. The amount of time students spend on these different activities varies across certain student demographic groups. For example, Black students and mature students spend less time seeing friends (although the standard deviations show that there is also more variation in the time these students spend with friends). On average, Black students see their friends two to three times per week compared to White students who see their friends four to five times per week. Ethnic minority students spend more time in the library than White students, with Black students spending the most time in the library (on average they visit the library every day). All significant differences in the time spend on different activities by different demographic groups of students are presented in a later section.

Figure 2. Average amount of time spent on different activities.

Mean days per week (5-point Likert scale)

Table 6. Average amount of time spent in different activities.

1 = none   2 = once a week   3 = 2/3 times a week   4 = 4/5 times a week   5 = every day

	Overall		Males		Females		Young		Mature		Disabled		Learning needs		Religious		Not religious	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Seeing friends	4.31	1.03	4.29	1.05	4.33	1.01	4.55	.80	3.74	1.25	4.50	.65	4.37	1.04	4.21	1.06	4.41	.98
Studying	3.74	.97	3.66	.98	3.80	.96	3.69	.98	3.82	.94	3.64	1.08	3.62	.96	3.73	.98	3.73	.96
Online communities	3.55	1.45	3.58	1.45	3.52	1.45	3.69	1.39	3.24	1.54	3.43	1.40	3.14	1.41	3.42	1.49	3.69	1.40
Films	2.88	1.01	2.89	1.04	2.88	1.00	2.92	1.01	2.81	1.04	2.57	.65	2.68	.96	2.87	1.05	2.90	.98
Reading other books	2.87	1.36	2.80	1.31	2.93	1.40	2.84	1.31	2.96	1.48	1.86	1.17	2.48	1.36	2.85	1.34	2.89	1.38
Library	2.84	1.10	2.79	1.16	2.88	1.05	2.74	1.12	3.05	1.03	2.93	.92	2.76	1.01	3.08	1.12	2.58	1.03
Sport	2.67	1.23	2.80	1.24	2.57	1.21	2.65	1.19	2.73	1.29	2.79	1.42	3.00	1.26	2.58	1.23	2.78	1.23
Shops/Cafes	2.65	1.09	2.47	1.10	2.80	1.07	2.72	1.07	2.52	1.14	2.86	1.10	2.81	1.15	2.64	1.11	2.66	1.08
Family commitments	2.49	1.38	2.30	1.28	2.66	1.45	2.31	1.28	2.90	1.50	2.43	1.22	2.17	1.29	2.90	1.49	2.06	1.10
Music	2.44	1.64	2.49	1.66	2.40	1.62	2.42	1.63	2.47	1.64	2.50	1.74	2.39	1.70	2.56	1.68	2.31	1.57
Pubs/bars	2.43	1.08	2.54	1.08	2.34	1.08	2.59	1.06	2.07	1.06	2.14	1.29	2.44	1.23	2.17	1.10	2.72	.99
Prayer	1.91	1.57	1.73	1.46	2.06	1.64	1.75	1.47	2.24	1.71	2.14	1.56	1.54	1.10	2.65	1.75	1.08	.68
Employment	1.89	1.01	1.79	1.02	1.98	1.00	1.88	.99	1.93	1.08	1.46	.97	1.83	1.08	1.89	1.02	1.89	1.01
Art	1.84	1.59	1.88	1.10	1.80	1.91	1.87	1.78	1.77	1.05	2.00	1.41	2.02	1.22	1.85	1.97	1.83	1.03
Clubs/Societies	1.78	1.08	1.85	1.06	1.74	1.09	1.81	1.13	1.71	.94	2.29	.91	1.98	1.05	1.82	1.02	1.74	1.15
Students' union	1.57	.89	1.65	.93	1.51	.86	1.66	.95	1.37	.72	1.50	1.16	1.76	1.17	1.52	.85	1.63	.93
Voluntary work	1.22	.60	1.22	.58	1.23	.61	1.21	.57	1.26	.65	1.43	.65	1.45	.99	1.28	.65	1.16	.53
Councils/Committees	1.20	.58	1.25	.61	1.17	.55	1.18	.55	1.24	.63	1.50	.76	1.34	.71	1.25	.62	1.15	.53

Table 7. Average amount of time spent in different activities.

1 = none   2 = once a week   3 = 2/3 times a week   4 = 4/5 times a week   5 = every day

	Overall		White		Black		Asian		Arab/Persian		Lower SES*		Higher SES*	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Seeing friends	4.31	1.03	4.43	.93	3.44	1.31	4.30	.98	4.46	.99	4.22	1.14	4.35	.98
Studying	3.74	.97	3.73	.96	3.70	1.06	3.81	.94	3.63	.99	3.66	.89	3.75	.98
Online communities	3.55	1.45	3.60	1.44	3.40	1.40	3.48	1.51	3.54	1.45	3.38	1.50	3.57	1.45
Films	2.88	1.01	2.80	.94	2.86	1.08	3.07	1.14	3.14	1.07	2.91	.96	2.89	1.06
Reading other books	2.87	1.36	2.87	1.38	2.84	1.27	2.85	1.37	3.09	1.28	2.93	1.38	2.82	1.37
Library	2.84	1.10	2.50	.98	3.65	.97	3.26	1.06	3.40	1.15	2.82	.99	2.82	1.13
Sport	2.67	1.23	2.65	1.21	2.78	1.24	2.61	1.25	2.86	1.25	2.63	1.21	2.67	1.23
Shops/Cafes	2.65	1.09	2.64	1.04	2.27	1.18	2.85	1.16	2.84	1.13	2.65	1.10	2.67	1.11
Family commitments	2.49	1.38	2.09	1.16	3.19	1.66	3.16	1.34	3.07	1.48	2.47	1.24	2.48	1.40
Music	2.44	1.64	2.42	1.62	2.79	1.74	2.36	1.64	2.47	1.63	2.46	1.65	2.42	1.62
Pubs/bars	2.43	1.08	2.71	.99	1.57	.72	2.02	1.09	2.24	1.22	2.52	1.18	2.43	1.05
Prayer	1.91	1.57	1.32	1.03	3.50	1.95	2.66	1.68	2.58	1.75	1.78	1.44	1.87	1.47
Employment	1.89	1.01	1.85	1.01	2.24	1.12	1.89	.97	1.82	.97	2.08	1.01	1.82	1.01
Art	1.84	1.59	1.94	1.87	1.60	.98	1.68	1.00	1.75	.86	1.77	1.02	1.86	1.78
Clubs/Societies	1.78	1.08	1.75	1.11	1.59	.77	1.90	1.08	1.95	1.14	1.58	.87	1.83	1.14
Students' union	1.57	.89	1.58	.89	1.35	.79	1.73	.91	1.40	.80	1.42	.75	1.59	.89
Voluntary work	1.22	.60	1.19	.58	1.23	.49	1.22	.51	1.45	.89	1.12	.40	1.24	.62
Councils/Committees	1.20	.58	1.17	.54	1.15	.40	1.32	.74	1.20	.55	1.10	.30	1.21	.60

*Socio-economic groups (SEG) I - IV (Unemployed, Unskilled trade, Skilled trade, Support worker)
** SEG V - VII (Public sector, Modern professional, Professional)

Overall perceptions of different activities

Students were asked to indicate their agreement with different statements relating to their identification with certain ECAs (e.g. "Participating in volunteering activities is a vital part of who I am"), the perceived impact of ECAs on university performance (e.g. "Being a course representative conflicts with students' studies") and the perceived impact of ECAs on employment prospects (e.g. "Participating in university clubs and societies is beneficial to my future job prospects"). Students responded on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Examination of the mean responses indicated that paid employment was the activity most strongly perceived to benefit job prospects (M=3.77, SD=1.10), followed by voluntary work (M=3.56, SD=1.06). Religious activities were perceived as the least beneficial to job prospects overall (M=2.11, SD=1.35), although certain demographic groups of students felt differently, as shown in the section below. Students identified most strongly with their hobbies and social activities (M=4.09, SD=1.54) and the least strongly with voluntary work (M=2.44, SD=1.24). Students thought that hobbies and social engagements were activities most beneficial to their university performance (M=3.27, SD=1.07) and that paid employment was the activity that was most damaging to their university performance (M=3.13, SD=1.26). However, the overall picture masks wide variation between different student groups.

Student diversity and extra-curricular activity

Analysis of Variance revealed that the amount of time students are spending on these activities varies according to their ethnicity, age, sex and social class, as do students' perceptions of certain ECAs. Significant differences between demographic groups of students are presented below.

Age differences

Time spent on activities: Compared to younger students, mature students spend more time with their families (p<.01), in prayer/worship (p<.01) and in the library (p<.05). They spend less time seeing friends (p<.01), in pubs and bars (p<.01), in

shops and cafes ($p<.08$), doing other hobbies ($p<.06$), visiting the students' union ($p<.01$) and in online communities ($p<.01$).

Mature students report doing a larger amount of their activities for religious reasons ($p<.05$), and a smaller amount of their activities are based at their university ($p<.01$). They are also less likely than younger students to have friends on social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Bebo ($p<.01$).

Figure 3. Mature students are spending less time in shops/cafes, pubs and the SU.
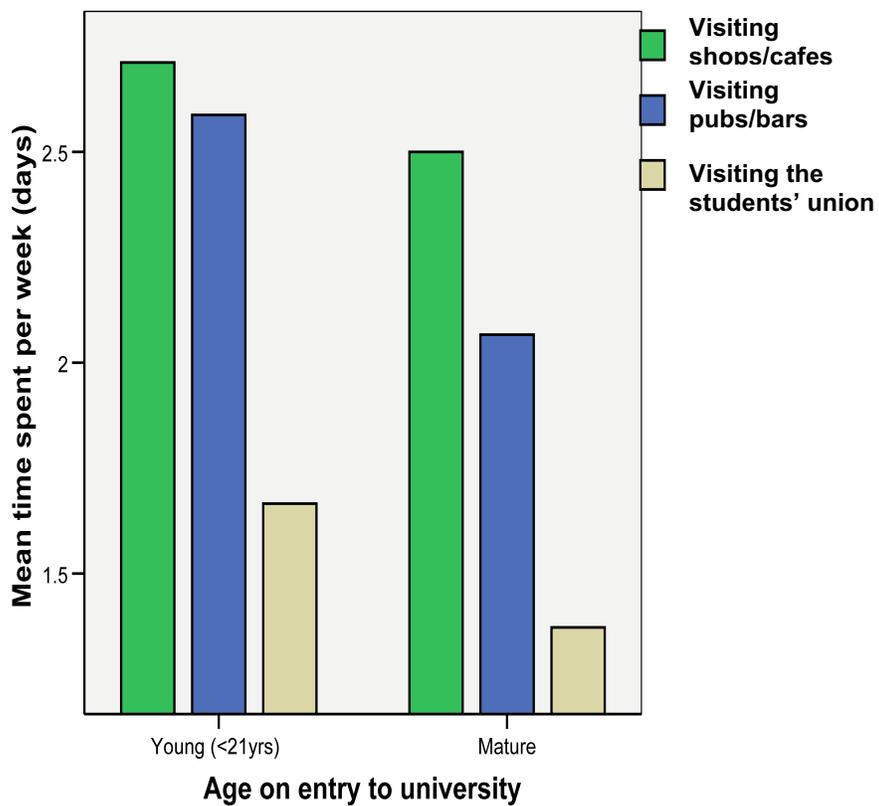
Figure 4. Mature students are spending more time in the library, with family and in prayer.
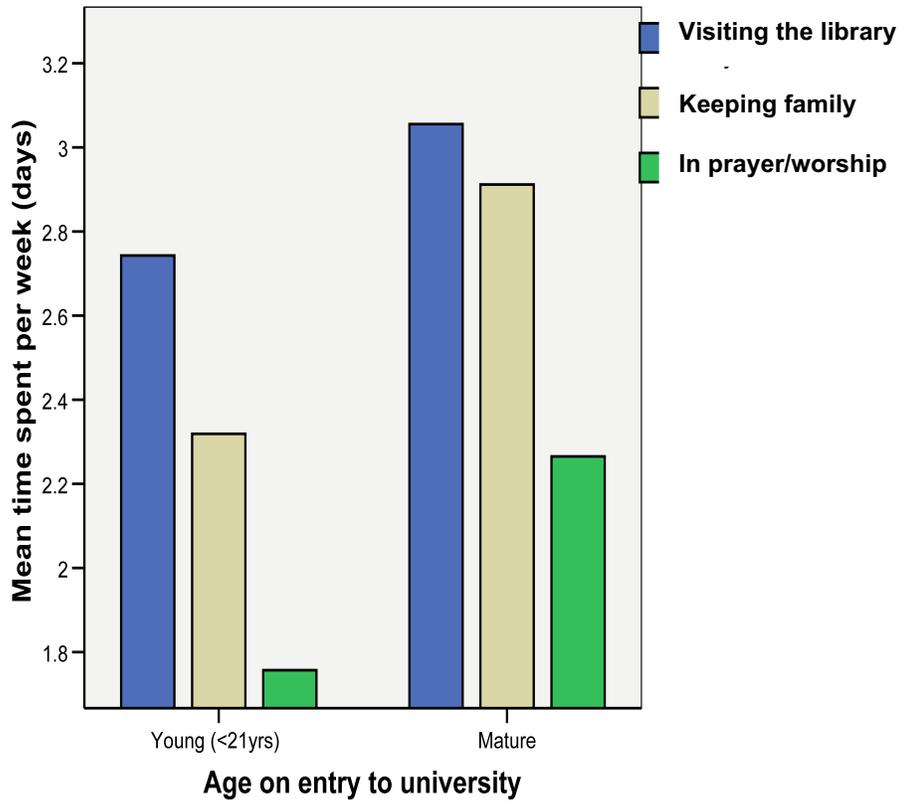
Perceptions of activities: Compared to younger students, mature students identified more strongly with religious activities ($p<.01$) and voluntary work ($p<.01$), and saw religion as more beneficial to their university performance ($p<.01$) and job prospects ($p<.01$). They were more likely to say their part-time work undermined their university performance ($p<.05$).

Sex differences

Time spent on activities: Compared to female students, males spend more time in pubs and bars ($p<.05$), doing sport ($p<.05$), on councils and committees ($p<.09$) and doing other hobbies ($p<.01$). They spend less time studying ($p<.09$), in shops and cafes ($p<.01$), in paid employment ($p<.05$) and with their families ($p<.05$).

A larger amount of males' activities are based at their university compared to females ($p<.05$), and males are less likely than females to regularly do business over the internet on sites such as eBay and MySpace ($p<.01$).

Figure 5. Women are spending more time in shops/cafes, with family, working and doing internet business.
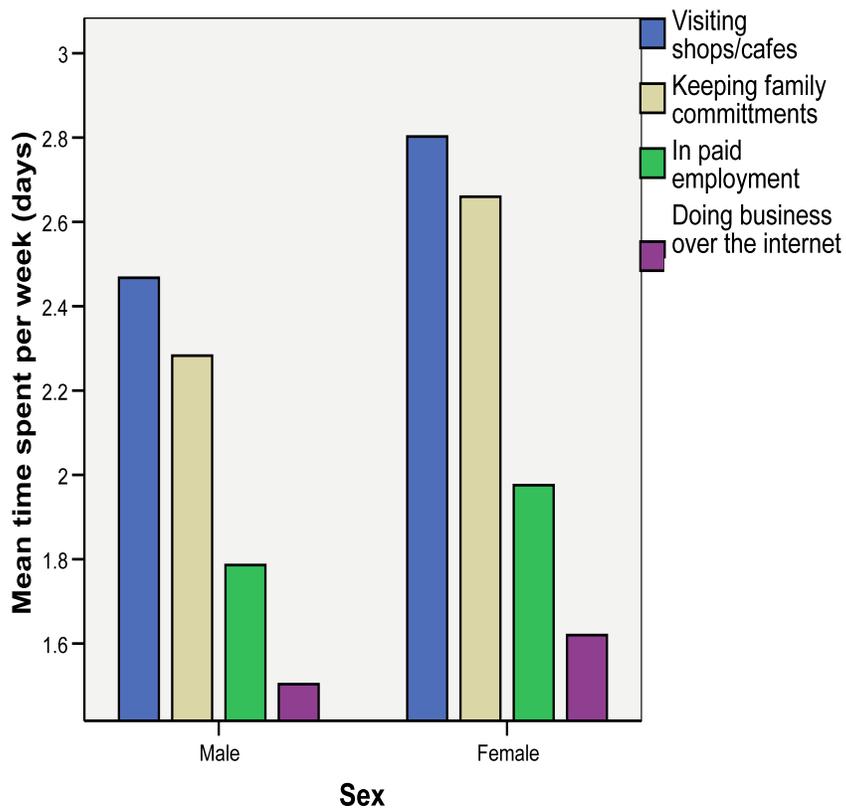
Figure 6. Men are spending more time playing sports, visiting pubs and other hobbies.
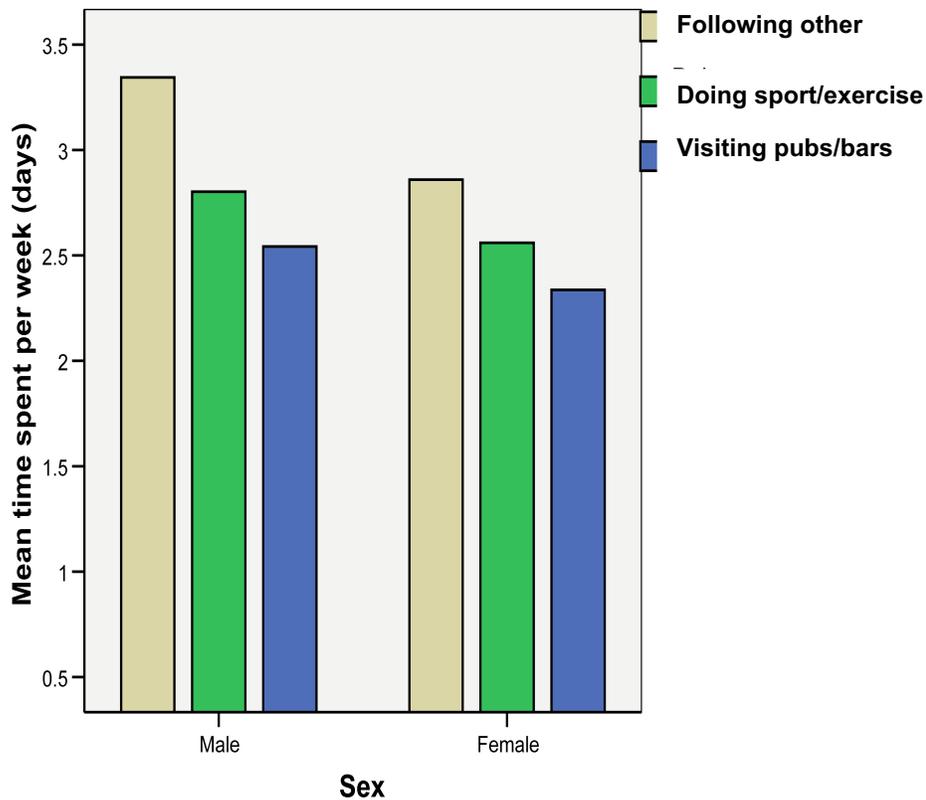
Perceptions of activities: Compared to female students, male students identify more strongly with their hobbies and social activities (*p*<.05) but less strongly with religious activities (*p*<.01), and they see voluntary work (*p*<.01) and religious activities (*p*<.01) as less beneficial to their job prospects. They're also more likely to say that their part-time work interferes with their university performance.

Students with disabilities

Time spent on activities: Compared to students without a disability, significantly more disabled students were participating in clubs/societies (*p*<.01) and councils/committees (*p*<.05), while significantly fewer were in paid employment (*p*<.05). However, the small amount of disabled students in the sample (*n*=14)

means that these results need to be treated with caution. There were no significant differences in perceptions of ECAs between students with and without a disability.

Students with specific learning needs

Time spent on activities: Students with specific learning needs (e.g. dyslexia) were less likely to say that they read books in their spare time ($p<.01$). They were also marginally more likely to say that they were engaged in artistic activities ($p<.09$) and other hobbies ($p<.08$), although this was only approaching significance. There were no significant differences in perceptions of ECAs between students with and without specific learning needs. Overall this is a small sample and further research would be required to see if these differences are replicated in a wider study.

Socio-economic group differences

Time spent on activities: Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (support worker, skilled trade, unskilled trade and unemployed) were compared to those from higher socio-economic backgrounds (professional, public sector and modern professional). Lower SES students spend more days per week and more hours per week in paid employment than higher SES students ($p<.01$). They spend less time studying ($p<.05$), in clubs/societies ($p<.01$), in councils/committees ($p<.05$), doing voluntary work ($p<.07$) and doing other hobbies ($p<.05$) than their higher SES peers. They are also more likely than higher SES students to have friends on social networking sites ($p<.05$).

The table below shows the frequencies of those employed and not employed within each SES group. Chi-squared analysis revealed that this difference is highly significant ($p<.002$).

Table 8. Frequencies of those employed and not employed within each SES group.

		Employed		Total
		no	yes	no
Class category:	Lower SES	39.1%	60.9%	100.0%
	Higher SES	54.4%	45.6%	100.0%
Total		50.9%	49.1%	100.0%

Perceptions of activities: Lower SES students identify less strongly with clubs and societies ($p<.08$), voluntary work ($p<.07$) and religious activities ($p<.01$) compared to higher SES students, and see voluntary work and religion as less beneficial to their job prospects. Lower SES students are less likely to say their employment helps their university performance, but more likely to say that it undermines their university performance ($p<.05$).

Ethnic group differences

White students

Time spent on activities: Compared to students from ethnic minority backgrounds, White students spend more time seeing friends ($p<.01$), in pubs/bars ($p<.01$), doing artistic activities ($p<.09$) and doing other hobbies ($p<.06$). They spend less time in the library ($p<.05$), in prayer/worship ($p<.01$), watching films ($p<.01$), with family ($p<.01$), in paid employment ($p<.01$) and doing voluntary work ($p<.01$).

White students report doing a larger number of university-based activities ($p<.05$), a smaller number of community-based activities ($p<.06$), and less of their activities are undertaken for religious reasons ($p<.01$). They are less likely than ethnic minority students to have friends on social networking sites ($p<.01$) and to regularly do business online ($p<.01$).

Perceptions of activities: White students identify less strongly with clubs and societies, religious activities and voluntary work than do students from ethnic minority backgrounds. They see artistic activities as significantly more beneficial to their job prospects ($p<.01$) and voluntary work and religion as significantly less beneficial to their job prospects ($p<.01$). They are more likely to say they have made

good friends through their hobbies (p<.05) or paid employment (p<.01) and are more likely to work in order to pay for their social activities.

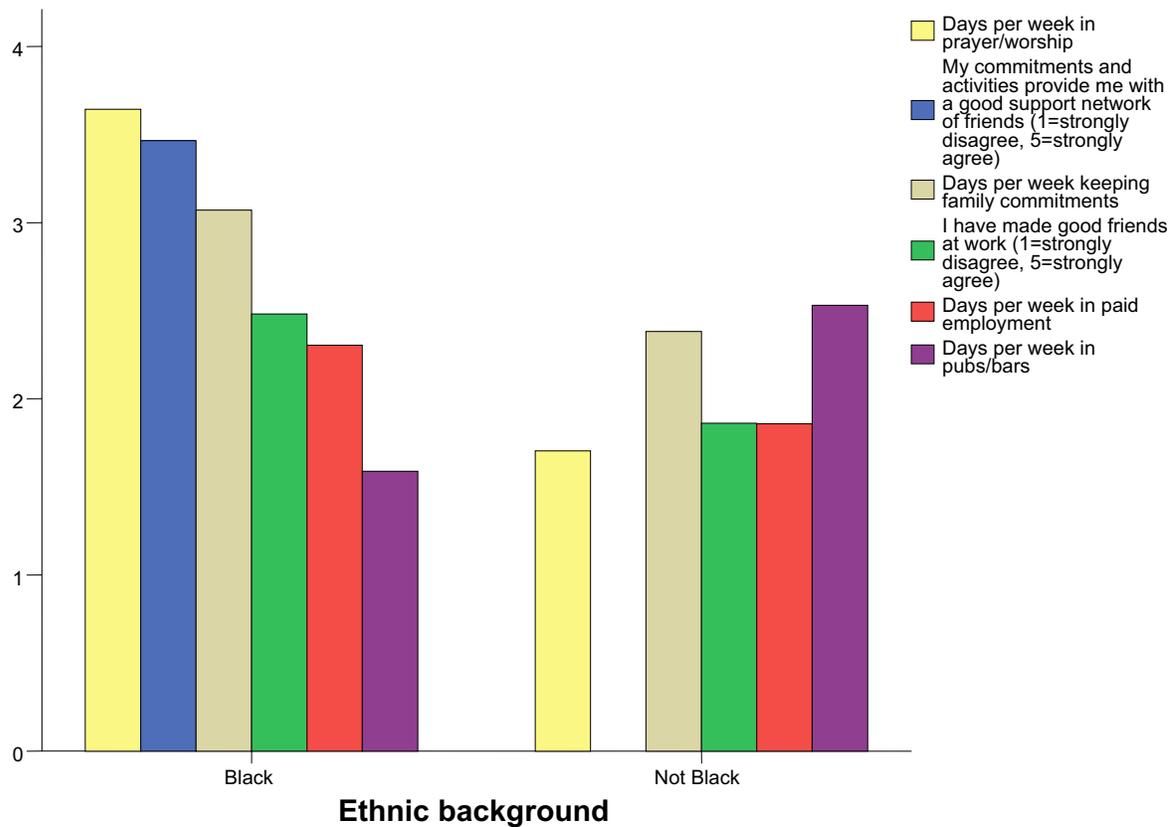**Black students**

Time spent on activities: Black students spend more time in the library (p<.01), in prayer/worship (p<.01), doing musical activities (p<.05), with their families (p<.01) and in paid employment (p<.01) compared to students from non-Black backgrounds. They also spend less time seeing friends (p<.01), in pubs/bars (p<.01), in shops/cafes (p<.01) and doing other hobbies (p<.01).

Black students report doing a larger number of religious (p<.01) and solitary (p<.01) activities, and a smaller number of university-based activities (p<.01). They are more likely than non-Black students to have friends on social networking sites (p<.01) and to regularly do business online (p<.01).

Figure 7. Black students' engagement in ECAs.

Perceptions of activities: Black students identify more strongly with religious activities (*p*<.01), see religion and voluntary work as more beneficial to their employment prospects (*p*<.01) and see their religion as more beneficial to their academic progress (*p*<.01) compared to non-Black students. They are less likely to say that have made good friends through their hobbies (*p*<.05), but are more likely to say that they have made good friends through their paid employment (p<.01). They see employment as less beneficial to their university performance (*p*<.09) and are less likely to work in order to pay for social activities (*p*<.09).

Asian students

Time spent on activities: Asian students spend more time in the library ($p<.01$), shops/cafes ($p<.01$), visiting the students' union ($p<.01$), on councils and committees ($p<.01$), in prayer/worship ($p<.01$), watching films ($p<.05$) and with their families ($p<.01$) compared to non-Asian students. They spend less time in pubs/bars than all other ethnic groups and are less likely than non-Asian students to have met new friends on social networking sites ($p<.01$).

Figure 8. Asian students' engagement in ECAs.

5-point Likert
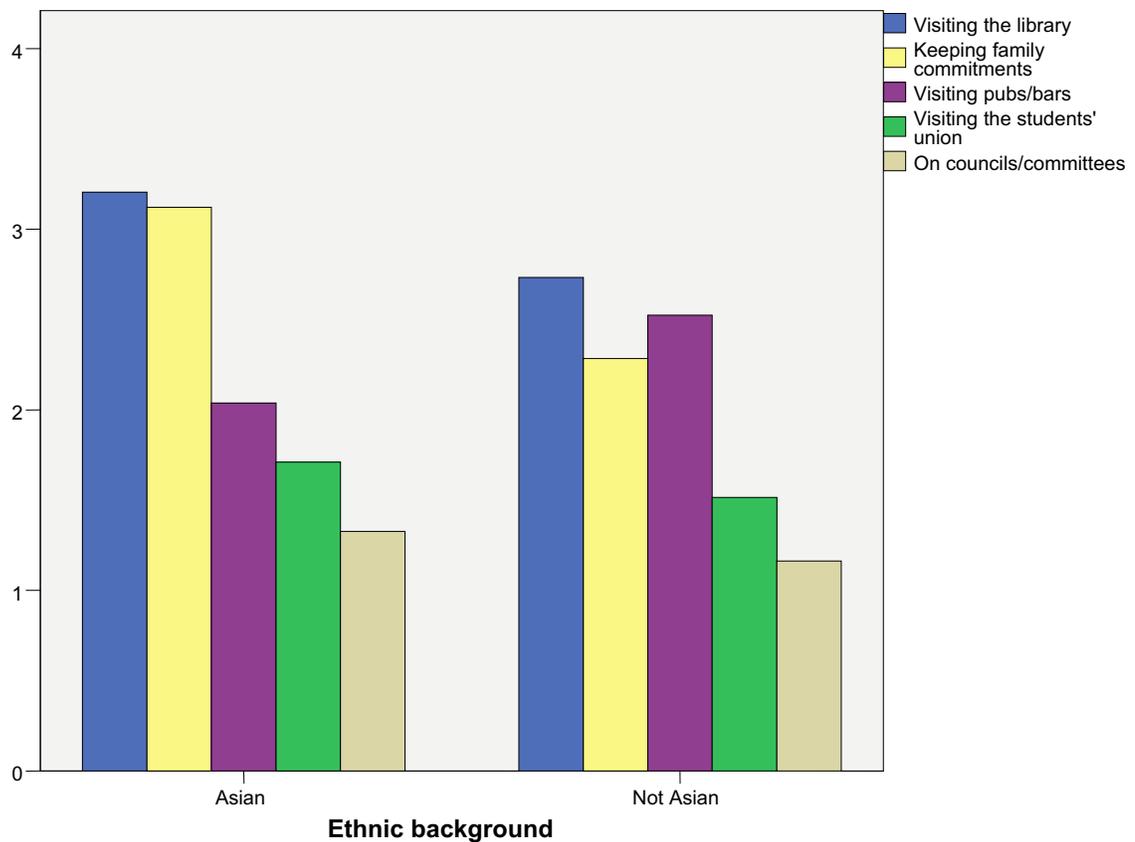
Perceptions Perception of activities: Asian students identify more strongly with clubs and societies, voluntary work and religious activities compared to non-Asian students ($p<.09$). They are more likely to say their religion will help their employment

prospects and academic progress ($p<.01$), and see being a course representative as more beneficial to their job prospects ($p<.01$). They see their part-time work as more beneficial to their university performance ($p<.05$) but less beneficial to their social life ($p<.01$), and they are less likely to work in order to pay for social activities ($p<.05$).

Arab and Persian students

Time spent on activities: Arab and Persian students spend more time in the library ($p<.01$), in prayer/worship ($p<.01$), watching films ($p<.05$), with their families ($p<.05$) and doing voluntary work ($p<.09$) compared to non-Arab/Persian students. They spend less hours per week in paid employment than all other ethnic groups ($p<.09$) and report doing a larger number of solitary activities ($p<.06$).

Perceptions of activities: Arab and Persian students identify more strongly with religion and voluntary work than non-Arab/Persian students and see their religion as less beneficial to their university performance.

Activities that predict student outcomes for different student groups

Regression analyses were undertaken in order to assess the relative impact of different activities on three student outcomes: self-reported marks, time spent studying and involvement in university-based activities. Regression models were compared across three demographic student groupings for which the cell sizes permitted regression analysis: age, gender and ethnic background.
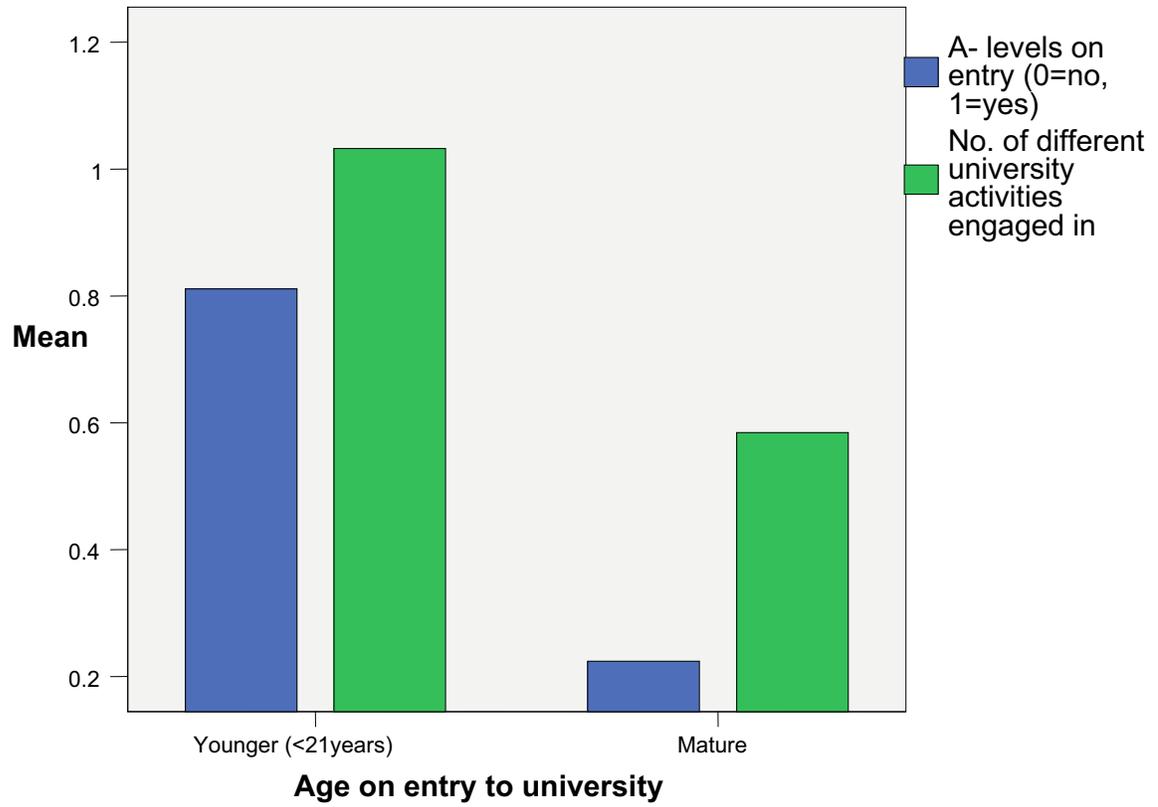
Self-reported marks

This was measured by four items (Cronbach's alpha=.79) asking students to report their average course work marks, average exam marks, the final degree result they expected and the final degree result they were aiming for (ranging from 1 (fail) to 5 (1st)). Highly significant regression models were obtained that explained up to 11% of the variance in the self-reported marks of different student groups. These regression models are compared below.

Age: The table below shows regression models that predict the self-reported marks of younger and mature students. Studying and doing more university activities positively predict younger students' marks, whereas activities that undermine university performance appear to be more of an issue for mature students. For younger students, self-reported marks are higher for those who spend more time studying, do not have specific learning needs, have A-levels on entry to university and do more university-based activities. For mature students, self-reported marks are higher for those who do not have friends who use social networking sites, believe less strongly that their activities undermine their university performance and have no specific learning needs. While mature students are less likely than younger students to have friends that use social networking sites, the ones that do report lower grades.

Table 9. Regression models predicting young and mature students' self-reported marks.

Predictors of self-reported marks	Standardised Beta values	
	Young students	Mature students
Friends who use social networking sites		-.18*
Believe that ECAs undermine university performance		-.23**
Time spent studying	.17***	
Specific learning needs e.g. dyslexia	-.15**	-.17*
A-levels on entry	.14**	
Number of university-based ECAs engaged in	.12**	
Variance in reported marks explained	10%	10%
Adjusted R^2	.09	.09
Model fit	F(4, 414) =10.83, p<.001	F(3, 172) =6.61, p<.001

Figure 9. Mature students are less likely to enter via the A-level pathway, and are less engaged with university activities overall.

Gender: The table below shows regression models that predict the self-reported marks of male and female students. For girls, engaging in more university activities is associated with higher marks. For boys, spending time in the pub is associated with lower marks, but spending time with family is associated with higher marks. Therefore the gender differences in these activities described above could be affecting students' marks.

Table 10. Regression models predicting male and female students' self-reported marks.

Predictors of self-reported marks	Standardised Beta values	
	Male students	Female students
A-levels on entry	.22**	
Specific learning needs e.g. dyslexia	.14*	.14*
Time spent in pubs/bars	-.12*	
Time spent with family	.12*	
Time spent studying		.24***
Number of university-based activities engaged in		.15**
Variance in reported marks explained	10%	11%
Adjusted R^2	.08	.10
Model fit	$F_{(4, 259)}$ =6.78, p<.001	$F_{(3, 236)}$ =13.47, p<.001

Ethnic background: The table below shows regression models that predict the self-reported marks of White and ethnic minority students. For White students, self-reported marks are higher for those who have A-levels on entry to university, believe less strongly that their activities undermine their university performance and spent *more* time in paid employment. For ethnic minority students, self-reported marks are higher for those who believe less strongly that their activities undermine their university performance and who have no specific learning needs. Interestingly, learning needs such as dyslexia are associated with lower marks for ethnic minority

students but not for White students. Unlike ethnic minority students, White students who spend more time in paid employment report higher grades. This is an interesting finding considering the nature of their paid employment described earlier: White students spent less time in paid employment than ethnic minority students, are more likely to make friends at work and are more likely to work in order to pay for their social life. Therefore this finding is perhaps less counter-intuitive than it first appears.

Table 11. Regression models predicting White and Minority Ethnic students' self-reported marks.

Predictors of self-reported marks	Standardised Beta values	
	White students	Minority Ethnic students
A-levels on entry	.18**	
Specific learning needs		-.16*
Believe that ECAs undermine university performance	-.14**	-17*
Time spent in paid employment	.10*	
Variance in reported marks explained	5%	6%
Adjusted R^2	.05	.05
Model fit	F(3, 374) =7.17, p<.001	F(2, 220) =7.09, p<.001

Time spent studying

This was measured by a single item that asked students the number of days per week they normally spent studying (from 1 (none) to 5 (every day)). Highly significant regression models were obtained that explained up to 29% of the variance in the time spent studying of different student groups. These regression models are compared below.

Age: For younger students, those who visit the library more, do a non-vocational degree, do more sport, spent more time with friends, report higher marks, read more books and spend more time with their families spend more time studying. Therefore it appears that younger students who are highly engaged in certain sporting, social and family activities are also highly engaged in their studies. For mature students, those who visit the library more and read more books also spend more time studying, but time spent on other activities does not predict study time. It therefore appears that mature students spend more time studying than younger students regardless of the time they dedicate to other activities.

Table 12. Regression models predicting time spent studying for young and mature students.

Predictors of time spent studying	Standardised Beta values	
	Young students	Mature students
Time spent in the library	.32***	.17**
Doing a vocational degree	-.18**	
Time spent seeing friends	.17***	
Self-reported marks	.16***	
Time spent doing sport	.15**	
Time spent keeping family commitments	.12**	
Time spent reading other books	.09*	.20**
Variance in time spent studying explained	27%	8%
Adjusted R^2	.25	.07
Model fit	F(7, 398) =20.68, p<.001	F(2, 184) =8.16, p<.001

Gender: The table below compares significant predictors of the time spent studying by males and females. Students who visit the library more and who do a non-vocational degree spend more time studying. Additionally, females who spend more time seeing friends and playing sport also spent more time studying.

Table 13. Regression models predicting time spent studying for male and female students.

Predictors of time spent studying	Standardised Beta values	
	Male students	Female students
Time spent visiting the library	.39***	.34***
Doing a vocational degree	-.17**	-.15**
Time spent reading other books	.12*	
Time spent seeing friends		.11*
Time spent doing sport		.18***
Variance in time spent studying explained	16%	17%
Adjusted R^2	.16	.16
Model fit	F(3, 271) =17.76, p<.001	F(4, 324) =16.97, p<.001

Ethnic background: For White students, those who have higher self-reported marks, spend more time in the library, spend more time with their families, spend more time seeing friends and are doing a non-vocational degree spend more time studying. For ethnic minority students, time spent studying was predicted by time spent in the library, reading books, doing sport and seeing friends. Interestingly, self-reported marks are one of the strongest predictors of time spent studying for White students, but not for ethnic minority students (who spent more time studying than their White counterparts).

Table 14. Regression models predicting time spent studying for White and Minority Ethnic students.

Predictors of time spent studying	Standardised Beta values	
	White students	Minority Ethnic students
Time spent in the library	.32***	.30***
Self-reported marks	-20****	
Reading other books		.25***
Time spent doing sport		.19**
Time spent with family	.16**	
Time spent seeing friends	.11*	.14*
Doing a vocational degree	-.11*	
Variance in time spent studying explained	20%	29%
Adjusted R^2	.19	.27
Model fit	$F_{(5, 368)}$ =18.31, p<.001	$F_{(4, 218)}$ =21.94, p<.001

Number of university-based ECAs

For each ECA students engaged in, they were asked to indicate whether it was undertaken at university, in the community or alone. A composite score was compiled measuring the number of different university activities engaged in. Highly significant regression models were obtained explaining a substantial proportion of

the variance (up to 47%) in the time spent studying for different student groups. These regression models are compared below.

Age: Younger and mature students who spend more time in councils/committees, clubs/societies and the students' union, and who spend less time seeing family do more university-based activities. For mature students (who do less university-based activities than their younger peers), doing a science-based degree and doing more community activities negatively predicts their involvement in university activities, whereas career enhancing and religious activities positively predict their involvement.

Table 15. Regression models predicting engagement in university-based activities for young and mature students.

Predictors for the number of university-based ECAs	Standardised Beta values	
	Young students	Mature students
Time spent in councils and committees	.36***	.43**
Time spent in clubs and societies	.33***	.27***
Time spent visiting the students' union	.17***	.17*
Time spent keeping family commitments	-.13**	-.19*
Time spent doing sport	.08*	
Time spent on religious activities		.15*
Doing a science-based degree		-.12[a]
Number of community activities engaged in		-.23**
Number of activities engaged in to enhance job prospects		.12*
Time spent in paid employment		.16*
Variance in number of university ECAs engaged in explained	42%	42%
Adjusted R^2	.41	.39
Model fit	$F_{(5, 406)}$ =58.81, p<.001	$F_{(9, 160)}$ =12.76, p<.001

Gender: Males and females who do an arts-based degree, spend more time in clubs/societies, councils/committees and in the students' union do more university-based activities, although visiting the students' union is more strongly associated with university activities for females than for males. Females living on campus do more university activities, and males living with their parents do less. For females, doing activities to enhance job prospects and strongly identifying with voluntary work is also associated with doing university-based activities.

Table 16. Regression models predicting engagement in university-based activities for male and female students.

Predictors for number of university-based ECAs	Standardised Beta values	
	Male students	Female students
Time spent in clubs and societies	.40***	.26***
Time spent in councils and committees	.38***	.28***
Number of community activities engaged in	-.18***	
Doing an arts-based degree	.14**	.13**
Living with parents	-.12**	
Time spent visiting the students' union	.11*	.25***
Time spent doing sport	.10*	
Living on campus		.20***
Number of activities engaged in to enhance job prospects		.12**
Identification with voluntary work		.10*
Variance in number of university ECAs engaged in explained	47%	41%
Adjusted R^2	.46	.39
Model fit	$F_{(7, 259)}$ =33.23, p<.001	$F_{(9, 160)}$ =12.76, p<.001

Ethnic background: The table below compares the significant predictors of involvement in university activities for White and ethnic minority students. White and ethnic minority students who spend more time on councils/committees, clubs/societies and in the students' union do more university-based activities. For ethnic minority students (who do less university-based activities than their White counterparts), the number of university-based activities undertaken is negatively predicted by community activities and age. White students who do a science-based degree and spend more time with their families are less involved in university activities, but those who are more involved in sport, religion and enhancing their job prospects are more involved in university activities.

Table 17. Regression models predicting engagement in university-based activities for White and Minority Ethnic students.

Predictors for number of university-based ECAs	Standardised Beta values	
	White students	Minority Ethnic students
Time spent in councils and committees	.33***	.38***
Time spent in clubs and societies	.31***	.34***
Time spent visiting the students' union	.18***	.13*
Time spent keeping family commitments	-.15***	
Time spent on religious activities	.15***	
Doing a science-based degree	-.14**	
Time spent doing sport	.12**	
Number of activities engaged in to enhance job prospects	.08[a]	
Number of community activities engaged in		-.13*
Age		-.13*
Variance in number of university ECAs engaged in explained	45%	37%
Adjusted R^2	.43	.36
Model fit	$F_{(8, 347)}$ =34.95, p<.001	$F_{(5, 215)}$ =25.25, p<.001

Follow-up survey

A follow-up survey was carried out to obtain information about the actual marks that students received for the year. Students were also asked which of their ECAs, if any, affected their marks, and if so, whether this effect was positive or negative.

Variables associated with actual marks

Thirty-three students responded to the follow-up survey. A composite measure of actual marks was calculated (alpha=79). Due to the small sample size, there was insufficient power to detect correlations between actual marks and extra-curricular activity (with the exception of time spent studying, $r=.47**$). However, students actual marks were highly correlated with their self-reported marks ($r=.49**$). Therefore, the factors that influenced students self-reported marks above are likely to also influence their actual marks. Actual marks were also highly positively correlated with doing a science-based degree as opposed to an arts-based degree ($.36*$).

Eighteen students (53% of respondents) said their marks were the same as expected, whereas 13 students (38%) said their marks were better than they expected, and only three students (9%) said their marks were worse than expected. Fifteen students (44%) said their ECAs undermined their grades. These students cited paid employment, socialising, family life, sports clubs, political campaigning and housing difficulties as commitments and activities that had undermined their grades. Three students (9%) said that their activities had both a positive and negative effect on their grades, and these students cited paid employment, playing in a band, and clubs and societies as their ECAs. However, there were no students who said that their ECAs had a completely positive effect on their grades, and the majority of students believed that their activities had no effect on their grades at all.

Part Three – Talking to students, alumni and employers

In trying to gain a holistic picture of extra-curricular activities and their value, the research team undertook a series of interviews and focus groups with current students, former students and employers. The rationale for this phase of the research was to put more flesh on the quantitative data to understand the meanings behind the choices of students, to see how former students who were in full-time employment felt about their prior extra-curricular activities and to understand how much value employers placed on activities beyond study in higher education. The data presented below provides rich detail of how students felt about their activities, why they made particular choices and what value these activities have in the wider world. The first section presents the findings from talking to current students.

Section 5a: Qualitative analysis – focus groups and interviews with students

Focus groups of between three to eight students were conducted at the post-92 and 1960s institutions in the South-East of England (four at each site). Telephone interviews were conducted with students from the 1960s institution in Scotland and from the Russell Group institution in the North-East of England (three student interviews from each institution). Thirty-nine students participated overall: 19 from the post-92 institution, 14 from the 1960s institution in the South of England, three from the 1960s institution in Scotland and three from the Russell Group institution. There were 13 males and 26 females. There were 25 students from White ethnic backgrounds, eight were from Black ethnic backgrounds, four were from Asian ethnic backgrounds and two were from other ethnic backgrounds. One student had a registered disability and three students had dyslexia. There were 13 mature students (over 25 years old) and 25 students aged between 19 and 25 years. Twenty-three students were studying vocational courses (Nursing, Law, Engineering, Pharmacy, Medicine, Business or Education), and 16 students were studying non-vocational courses (English Literature, Maths, Politics, Sociology, Media or Psychology).

Students were asked to talk about the ECAs they engaged in and their impact on their progression at university and subsequent employment. Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed, and ATLAS.ti software was then used to analyse the main themes. Prior to the main analysis, the following section briefly introduces five of the students from across the institutions, summarising the activities they were engaged in, their motivations for doing so and the perceived effects on their future employment.

Below we provide a 'pen picture' of the students interviewed or who attended focus groups. The research team was keen to obtain a broad representation of different students from our profile given the differences in the profile of activities we discovered from the survey results.

'Kwame'

'Kwame' is 20 years old and currently studying for a Law degree at the city university. He describes himself as middle-class, Black British and Nigerian. He is a member of the university Law society, treasurer for an international student campaigning group and founding member of the Commercial Law society. He says that his involvement in these activities has given him confidence and made him feel known at his institution. He also has some casual part-time employment selling food at his local football stadium. He describes himself as a very studious, ambitious and career-orientated student. While he expresses confidence in his abilities, he has mixed feelings about his job prospects due to the competitive and exclusive nature of the law industry.

'Becky'

'Becky' is 19 years old and currently studying for a Maths degree at the 1960s English campus university. She describes herself as White British and middle-class. She is a member of the university Horse-riding society, founding member of the Ultimate Frisbee society and student mentor for the PsyTech society (for Maths, Engineering, Physics and Computer Science students). She does voluntary work for

her church youth group, and for the town council (organising activities for local children). She is confident that these activities will benefit her future job prospects but is undecided about her career path, and describes herself as more focused on "having fun" and enjoying "the university experience".

'Marion'

'Marion' is 45 years old and studying Education at the 1960s Scottish campus university. She describes herself as White Scottish and with a working-class background and has two secondary school aged children. She spends most of her time with her children and supports their own ECAs by driving them to sports practices and watching matches. She does yoga and exercise at home, as well as cooking and socialising with her friends and partner. Her previous career and child-caring responsibilities have given her passion and knowledge of the issues around teaching, and she feels that these life experiences will benefit her future job prospects.

'Rosie'

'Rosie' is 19 years old and studying Politics at the Russell Group university in the North of England. She describes herself as White British and middle-class. She's captain of the university football team and spends a lot of her time training and socialising with the team. She also does some casual part-time work organising events for her local football stadium and racing track. She is undecided about what she'd like to do as a future career, but feels that the good reputation and vibrant social environment of her university will be a clear advantage in the job market.

'Safiya'

'Safiya' is 29 years old and currently studying Pharmacy at the post-92 city university. She describes herself as middle-class and British Asian-Pakistani. She's the course representative for the Pharmacy society and organises their social events, but would like to be more involved in university life. She feels prevented from doing this by the amount of contact hours and course work in Pharmacy, her

financial situation and the general lack of activities on offer at the university. She lives at home and spends her time with family and at her local gym at weekends. She worries that future employers will look negatively on her university and so wants to get involved in more career-focused activities such as a voluntary work placement or a part-time pharmacy job, as she is anticipating high job market competition.

Students who were engaged in different activities variously perceived different benefits of their involvement, as well as experiencing different barriers to participation in certain areas. The analysis below will further explore the motivations of these students and their peers in the context of their different institutional environments. It will consider the diversity of extra-curricular experiences, the variety of benefits and barriers to such experiences, and the consequences for students' progress and future employability.

Different activities engaged in by different students

Students from the four universities were engaged in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities both at their universities and in their local communities.

Clubs and societies

Forty-six per cent of the students who completed the questionnaire were engaged in extra-curricular clubs and societies. Some of these students were in clubs that were affiliated to the university in some way, and many were involved team sports, particularly at the older universities. Many students joined established students' union clubs, while some others set up their own university societies around their hobbies and interests. Those who chose to join their official university sports teams found that this took up a lot of their time:

> I play Ultimate Frisbee so last year I set up my own university society. Certain sports like Ultimate Frisbee, where you attend the gym five times a week, leaves no time for anything else so you have to be careful what you pick. *Becky, Maths, 1960s SE*

> The rowing team does take a lot of commitment, outside the race meets we're at the gym and circuit training six times a week. But there's other less intense options for people as well, for example you don't have to be on the main teams, you can just set up your own social five-a-side football team that doesn't train as much but meets afterwards in the pub. *Suzy, Economics, Russell Group NE*

Other students joined societies that were based around their chosen subject of study. These societies often involved socialising within their subject groups. Those who accepted positions of responsibility in their societies found that this took up a lot of their time:

> I'm part of PsyTech, for Maths, Engineering, Physics and Computer Science students. I organised the casino ball in December, we had card tables and a jazz band which was good. I organise the pub crawls, that kind of thing. A lot of work goes into it and it takes up a lot of my time. *Becky. Maths, 1960s SE*

> Being the second-year representative of the Pharmacy society involves a lot of organisation like for the last Pharmacy Ball. *Safiya, Pharmacy, Post-92 SE*

Other students joined clubs and societies that were affiliated with their local community. These clubs were similarly based around their hobbies and interests and included cultural, political and community-based projects:

> I do Polish dancing, and am a member of the Polish scouts, organise weekends away for the kids. It's a really good way to keep up with my heritage and to have a completely different friendship group because it's separate form the university. *Ania, Media, 1960s SE*

> Socially to relax I play gigs with my band. I was in a rock band before I had kids, and we've recently reunited and perform together, which is a nice musical outlet for me, which I really enjoy. *John, Business, 1960s Scotland*

Councils and committees

Thirteen per cent of students who completed the questionnaire were involved in councils and committees. Younger students were more involved in university or

students' union committees, whereas older students were more likely to sit on committees in their local community:

> I belong to my residents committee; I'm one of the directors. It involves running the finance and day-to-day management of the block of flats where I live, collecting rent and arrears and coming up with solutions for making things run more smoothly. *Parvati, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

> Outside of here I help run an arts centre...and I'm chairman of the board of trusties of a charity which runs this art centre. I spend a lot of time involved in that. *Peter, English Literature, Post-92 SE*

Socialising with friends

Almost all students who completed the questionnaire spent time seeing their friends (98%). In addition to organised clubs and committees, students spend time socialising inside and outside university in a number of different ways. For example, some students, particularly the younger students at the older universities, socialised with their housemates in bars, pubs, clubs and parties:

> Me and my housemates go out together, sometimes there's quizzes in the bar, flat parties in Halls. Last year especially there were lots of students getting drunk and stealing road cones. *Tracey, Sociology, 1960s SE*

Some students, particularly those at the post-92 university, socialised with their course mates and study groups in the university coffee shops, canteens and library:

> I hang out in the canteen or a lot in the coffee shop in the library, it's a nice place for us to sit. I'm mainly socialising and talking in the library, it's a way of spending time with the people on my course, I can't say I actually buckle down and get much work done there. *Parvati, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

Others, particularly the mature students, socialised with their families and friends at home:

My friends come over to visit and we spent time together staying in a lot. I enjoy having these informal discussion groups with other people. Money is getting a critical issue so I spend a lot of time at home. *Carla, Sociology, 1960s SE*

We have friends round for lunch and dinner a lot, and we love to eat and cook a lot and socialise with our friends. I can't leave the kids so it's easier to do stuff at home. *Marion, Education, 1960s Scotland*

Internet communities

Many students (84% of those who completed the questionnaire) were involved in internet communities including social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook and Bebo. Many of the younger students talked about online communities as a means of socialising and meeting new people. Mature students talked about this technology more in relation to keeping up with their studies, and international students with regard to keeping in touch with friends and family overseas:

Embarrassingly I'm actually on three [social networking sites]. It's the only way I can keep in contact with my friends in Switzerland but the majority of my uni friends are on there too. It's a good way of organising your social life, going out and meeting up, as a lot of my friends are on pay-as-you-go mobiles so they don't bother responding. *Oli, Psychology, 1960s Scotland*

I talk to my family and friends over the internet and on Skype every day for a good few hours, it really helps as it can be frustrating sometimes being here as it's so different from home. My home base and family background plays a big role in keeping me grounded. *Hayley, Law, Post-92 SE*

Religious activities

Fifty-two per cent of students who completed the questionnaire held religious or spiritual beliefs, and 32% spend time in prayer or worship. Students attended places of worship in their local communities and at their universities:

Last year I really felt the university chapel supported my religion, it's a really fun community and the priest was excellent. I didn't know the English prayers and they helped me learn. *Ania, Sociology, 1960s SE*

I'm quite heavily involved, not here but in the local church where I live, and I lead community groups there as well. *Peter, English Literature, Post-92 SE*

Some students felt their religion was a very personal activity and were reluctant to talk about faith outside their place of worship, anticipating that others may be prejudiced against their beliefs:

My religion is very personal to myself and is not something I want to share with the rest of the planet. If I went to an interview and someone asked me my religion I'd say "why do you want to know, do you think it will affect my work?" I think I'd disregard the question and not respond to it. *Kwame, Law, Post-92 SE*

In my experience sometimes unfortunately people are less interested and even less tolerant of people with religious beliefs so I'd be extremely cautious. Coming from an Anglican background one tends not to discuss that in a work environment. *Peter, English Literature, Post-92 SE*

However, many more of the religious students, particularly those from Christian backgrounds, said that their faith provided opportunities to relax and socialise, to engage in extra-curricular activities such as volunteering, and to progress at university:

Religion is the basis of my whole personality, how I handle things, it affects my schoolwork and my motivation. My voluntary work is also related to that so it's quite foundational to the way I am, I apply it to everything, to my studies. That's why I put so much effort into my studies as I know from my experiences around my religion that it will be worth it and that you get what you give. *Abde, Engineering, Post-92 SE*

At our church we do charity, we go out to houses and talk to people, we talk to the homeless, and sometimes we go out and preach as well. This doesn't get in the way of my studies,

actually it helps my education. Through prayer, because I pray for help. And it cools down my brain and helps me to relax. So it's stress relief. *Mercy, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

Civic engagement

Fifteen per cent of students who completed the questionnaire were involved in voluntary work. Voluntary programmes were often organised through their university or through their local church. These students talked about their desire to 'give something back' to their local communities and wider society:

> I work in a youth club attached to my local church. I help out there with young members of the community. I work there as I'm really interested and feel I have something to give back to the young people, I feel decisions I made at their age had a huge impact on my life and so I feel I can really help them make these choices. *Abde, Engineering, Post-92 SE*

> I tutored Maths for a year at...high school. It was really interesting, 50% of year 7s there have learning difficulties. I went to an independent school, only because I had dyslexia, but always felt so out of place there. I feel really privileged to have met those kids, they've got exactly the same problems as me. It really was a very worthwhile experience, incredible for me. *Lauren, Maths, 1960s SE*

Paid employment

Fifty per cent of students who completed the questionnaire were engaged in part-time work while they were studying, although the amount of paid employment that they undertook varied. Some students, particularly mature students and those at the post-92 city university, needed a job to fund their course or support their families, and so worked more hours. For these students, paid work took priority over other extra-curricular activities and sometimes conflicted with their studies:

> I should do more and make the most of my time here. But I don't really have a day off. I'm either studying or doing work to fund my studying so don't have time to volunteer or anything. *Nicola, Politics, 1960s SE*

> I don't have the social life of a typical student because I'm so busy and do so much other stuff ... always worrying about the bills tomorrow, how am I going to pay rent, electricity, where will I sleep, but this is what I worry about. My job ain't a choice for me like it is for some students. *Liberty, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

This contrasted with students who had less of a financial need for paid work. They saw their paid work more as a choice rather than a necessity. Some felt it provided then with much needed 'time out' from studying, or some extra pocket money for socialising:

> I work once every two weeks at the stadium selling beer and food, the pay's not great but I don't have a great need for money. It's something different, something to relax. It gets my mind away from university stuff. *Kwame, Law, Post-92 SE*

> I did get a job at the end of this year. I initially didn't want to waste the opportunity of having fun at university by working, but eventually took a part-time job to be able to afford going out more and socialising. My job's part-time in a call centre and quite flexible so I can plan it around my other activities. *Suzy, Economics, Russell Group NE*

Family commitments

Sixty-eight per cent of students spend time with their families, although the amount of time spent and the types of family commitment varied. Younger students who lived at home (as did a large proportion at the post-92 city university) spent time with their parents or relatives and helped around the house, sometimes in caring roles:

> I am very family orientated, if there are issues that have to be sorted out at home then I like to get involved. Just this morning they came to fit our heater and sort out the gas bill so I had to arrange all that myself. Since I started university I think I took more family responsibilities and that's because of the maturity and insight I've gained since coming here. *Kwame, Law, Post-92 SE*

> My mum's been really ill and as I live at home I spent a lot of time just looking after her, making sure she's ok. Like the other day I didn't come in to lectures as she seemed unwell

and I thought I'd rather just stay with her as she's far more important. *Gus, English Literature, Post-92 SE*

Some of the younger students who lived away from home visited their families or relatives at weekends:

My family live about an hour away and we are quite close, so I try to go home as much as possible. We do try to get together for family weekends, spend a long weekend away together, that sort of thing. *Rosie, Politics, Russell Group NE*

Most of my family live down in London so I don't see much of them, but my grandmother lives nearby who I see occasionally, I go and visit her sometimes on the odd weekend. *Claire, Business, Russell Group NE*

Other students were older with young families, particularly at the post-92 university, and they spent most of their time looking after their children:

I find spending time with my son is really good as it's important to have some time out and get away from the studies. Last time I went to the natural history museum with him, and I was explaining stuff I'd learnt on the course. *Ruth, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

I spend most of my free time ferrying my children to their own activities like football. They're ten and 15 and do a lot of stuff like this, which I like to be involved in. *Marion, Education, 1960s Scotland*

For these students their childcare took priority over other activities, and sometimes conflicted with their studies:

I can't study at home with my baby, which means I work in the breaks between lectures rather than hanging around socialising. *Olivia, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

I try to do all the things I would normally do with the kids and then do my course work really late at night, so I can be up doing an essay till one or two 'o' clock. *Marion, Education, 1960s Scotland*

Campus versus city environment or old versus new university?

One way to frame these patterns of participation is to consider the university environments in which they occur. Both the physical and social university environment seemed to play a role in the sorts of activities that were on offer and accessible to the students.

University location

Students attending the campus universities found it easier to participate in activities because they all took place on the same site and were easy to get to, whereas those at the city university more often found it difficult to travel between university sites to participate in activities:

Everything is quite close together on two nearby campuses and very easily accessible by transport links so it's easy to get involved in these things. *Suzy, Economics, Russell Group NE*

Other universities...all the courses are on one campus rather than being, you know, everywhere. Here, unless you *go* to another campus you don't get to see new faces. So there's not much to do at this university in terms of social or anything. *Safiya, Pharmacy, Post-92 SE*

A high proportion of the city university students lived at home and this also prevented them from participating in campus activities:

I went to a few of the group readings last year but I find that now that I'm living at home it takes two hours to get home. Especially when it's on a day that I'm not in university anyway I tend not to come in anymore. *Gus, English Literature, Post-92 SE*

It takes me quite a while to get home so during the week I'm pretty much home uni, home uni, home uni. I can't stay behind after lectures for things if it means I'll be travelling home late at night on my own. *Safiya, Pharmacy, Post-92 SE*

The new university students often said that there were not enough activities on offer to them, whereas the campus or old university students were more likely to talk about the wide range of opportunities for getting involved in different things:

It's easy to get involved, there's so much choice of activities... and the discounted student rates makes it accessible for most people. *Suzy, Economics, Russell Group NE*

My personal bond with the university is weak beyond that of fellow engineers and feeling interested in my studies. We're a bit isolated...and there's not many activities going on and there's not much beyond work. *Hugh, Engineering, Post-92 SE*

Political engagement and 'student lifestyle'

Those at the new city-based university described a lack of a coherent student body, and little communication between different departments, which meant that often activities were not well-publicised:

Here you don't see the movie clubs, the department wine and cheese evenings, we come together for a lecture, that's all. Maybe because there are so many campuses, there's not like a student body as a whole. We don't all mesh together as it's too spread out, there's little socialising between departments. *Parvati, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

When you read the prospectus there's nothing on the student body, just about the environment, the town centre, the new buildings and facilities it has to offer. There's nothing about having vibrant student societies or political campaigns and active students and I think that's missing here. I haven't seen many adverts for the events either, you really have to go and search for them because there's not much going on. *Hayley, Law, Post-92 SE*

This contrasted to the old university students, particularly those studying social and political sciences, who described a more integrated and active student body, and a political ideology that united many of their activities:

> The typical student here is politically thinking, open minded. I knew of this reputation before I came and these expectations have been confirmed. Students here are taking in a lot of information and are still open to making up their own minds, you have an active dialogue with everything around you. It's both academically and politically active. I really feel there's an ideology behind the university that's transmitted to the students. *Carla, Sociology, 1960s SE*

> The uni is quite politically active, there's always somebody outside handing out flyers for some campaign, we get regular emails about the sorts of political campaigns going on. *Rosie, Politics, Russell Group NE*

Widening participation profile

The demographic make-up of the student body also had an effect on the activities students engaged in. Two of the universities had a relatively high widening participation profile. The city university had a high proportion of ethnic minority and mature students, and the Scottish university had a high proportion of mature students, whereas the two other universities contained a higher proportion of traditional students. Accordingly, the diversity of the student body affected the culture of participation at the different universities and the different ECAs that students prioritised over others;

> The social aspect here is amazing, it's very easy to get involved and make friends there's so much going on. I definitely looked at the league tables when I came here, but also balanced everything out in my decision, the social aspect was really appealing, being able to interact in a busy social environment, it's like the London up North. *Claire, Business, Russell Group NE*

> All of my course-mates are more worldly wise than the average 17-year-old. As mature students we're not as involved in campus life but have a very busy life outside university. I've done the going out and having ten pints a night with your mates when I was 17, I don't feel I'm

missing out as I've got no real interest in doing it now, that's not why I'm here. *John, Business, 1960s Scotland*

This translated into differences across the institutions regarding students' perceived benefits of their ECAs and the barriers to participation that they experienced, as described below.

Perceived benefits of participation

Political representation

As illustrated above, the two older campus universities with a higher proportion of traditional students were often described as politicised environments with an active and cohesive student body. These students were more likely to talk about the benefits of their ECAs in relation to their personal interest in political and social issues. This was especially the case for students studying Politics and Social Sciences, as academic courses were more common at these universities than the vocational courses offered by other two institutions. Students took an interest in the politics of their institution and enjoyed taking part in social and political campaigns both inside and outside the university campus:

> Outside of working, I'm more involved in community activities, volunteering projects. I'm part of... a volunteer-run vegan cafe and social space. ... it's everything from somewhere to meet and discuss politics and ideas, networking, organising campaigns, like volunteering with asylum seekers. It's a really nice community with lots of benefit gigs. *Mark, Politics, 1960s SE*

> I've always been really interested and intrigued by how education is run. When I came to uni it was weird not knowing what was going on behind the scenes so I immediately wanted to get involved. So being a course rep. and being active in the union is great as I know what's happening and why, and where the money's going. *Abi, Media, 1960s SE*

Employability versus 'having fun'

Students at the two older campus universities were much more likely to frame the benefits of their ECAs with regard to personal development and enjoyment. There was a general consensus among these students that learning at university should be primarily about having fun, gaining new experiences and developing as a person:

> There's no point being here and having a great degree but no good memories. So I wouldn't sacrifice my good time. *Abi, Media, 1960s SE*

> I'd definitely say uni is about the experience, yes it would be good to get a first or a 2:1 but ultimately it's about the experience, going out, having fun and meeting loads of people. *Suzy, Economics, Russell Group NE*

Some students chose to participate in activities that they felt would directly benefit their future career, often because of perceived labour market competition. This especially applied to students studying for vocational courses who tended to be more career focused, and was more of an issue at the city university, which had a lower proportion of affluent students and more vocational programmes:

> I created the Commercial Awareness society and I actually run it now myself, because with law, employers want to know about your involvement and awareness of the industry. You need to research the company you apply to, their clients, how the FTSE 100 works and how the economy is run, that's why I set up the society as there's so much extra you need. *Kwame, Law, Post-92 SE*

> It's not enough anymore to get a 2:1, employers want to see these extra things which is why I've just signed up for the leadership programme where I'll be going round local schools and doing voluntary work there. *Tracey, Business, Russell Group NE*

Students at the two old campus universities with a higher proportion of White middle-class students were generally more confident about their employment prospects. Consequently they were more likely to talk about participating in activities 'just for fun' and were less focused on the employment benefits of these activities:

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When I get involved in activities I don't think about what I can and can't put down on my CV – I'm not quite that cynical ... I think I'm fairly employable, I've got good references and plenty or work experience. *Abi, Media, 1960s SE*

Generally my outside interests aren't so much related to my course, they're more to relax and have time out, to do something a bit different ... my future employability isn't something which overly scares me. *Rosie, Politics, Russell Group NE*

Socialising and 'feeling known'

As illustrated above, at the two older and more traditional campus universities, students felt there were lots of opportunities to get involved in clubs and societies, particularly the university sports clubs. Many students said that the main benefit of these clubs was that they enabled them to meet people and make friends:

I joined Hockey club because there's so much sport around I thought I'd get left out if I didn't join in. For me, it's more about meeting people and forming friendships than the sport though. *Helena, Sociology, 1960s SE*

The social aspect of rowing is as least as important as the fitness side, you do get really close with the teams as you spend so much time with them, you make really close friendships. *Suzy, Economics, Russell Group NE*

Sometimes these students found that the campus environment with its vibrant social scene could become a little claustrophobic.   Therefore they also benefited from ECAs that enabled them to escape from the campus and their fellow students:

I work in a phone shop now and I really love it, without work and friends outside uni I missed little things like not knowing what was on the news, what was going on in the world. *Lauren, Maths, 1960s SE*

> It's nice to be in the real world at work because a lot of students are really rich, and working in a betting shop it's nice to get back to reality a bit. *Nicola, Anthropology and Politics, 1960s SE*

At the city university, which had a high widening participation profile and a higher proportion of students living at home, students similarly chose activities that offered them the opportunity to meet people and make friends. However, they were more likely to be involved in activities that were directly related to their subject area. They felt that they did not have enough contact with their fellow students and saw the main benefits of these clubs and societies as a means of getting to know people on their course:

> I joined the Space club originally because it was a really social and enjoyable thing, full of engineers and its what I'm interested in, we went out every Thursday and it was a good way of getting to know the engineers. *Hugh, Engineering, Post-92 SE*

> The student ambassador scheme is the best activity I'm involved in here because most of the students involved are very friendly, I've met other Law students and it's a way for me to socialise and I have made lots of friends from it. *Hayley, Law, Post-92 SE*

'Feeling known' appeared to be an issue for the city university students. Some of them described how they felt isolated from students on other courses and from the teaching staff in their own departments:

> There's the department and there's the students separate, they come together for lectures, that's all. We don't all mesh together as it's too spread out. *Hayley, Law, Post-92 SE*

> The department don't make any effort for us all to mix socially. I think the department should arrange social events more, to help us integrate and socialise together as a group. *Parvati, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

ECAs sometimes benefited students by enabling them to feel known at their universities. Some students described how their involvement in university societies enabled them to feel integrated into and acknowledged by their institutions:

> These activities are very important for my uni life, because that's how people know me here now. My participation and socialising with people would be really different if I hadn't become involved in these activities. *Kwame, Law, Post-92 SE*

> I organised I lot of things and had a lot of responsibilities. Being part of the department is great and it's handy when everyone in the department knows your name, when it comes to handing in essays and also just generally to get things done quicker. *Abi, Media, 1960s SE*

Confidence and personal skills

Some students talked about their activities in relation to the confidence they had gained from them to communicate with others. This was particularly true for the younger students with less experience of dealing with a variety of different types of people:

> [University radio] enabled me to communicate with people and work as a group. You never really do a solo radio show, it's always a team effort, and it's really complicated so you have to be happy to rely on and ask for help from others, which is something I have had to learn to do. *Oli, Psychology, 1960s Scotland*

> Honestly I was a bit of a loner when I got here, not much confidence. I had just moved ... and didn't fit into the whole gang culture thing. I joined the Law society and made the effort more to approach people and make them understand who I am, I got friends through that and became more confident. *Kwame, Law, Post-92 SE*

Work experience versus life experience

Some of the younger students who had not yet entered a career said that their activities were providing them with relevant work experience. Some of these students talked hands-on experience and skills that were directly relevant to their chosen career:

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Through the NMC (National Mentoring Consortium) I've set up links with people in the industry, it gives me knowledge and experience of practical law in the Crown Prosecution Service so that's really helpful. *Kwame, Law, Post-92 SE*

I do voluntary work helping kids with their Sociology course work, it's really good because I want to teach this when I'm older, and it makes me use skills I don't normally use. *Helena, Sociology, 1960s SE*

While others said that they were benefiting in more indirect ways by learning skills that were broadly applicable to the workplace:

With the bar work, you see all these different styles of management and how different businesses are set up and run. That's more useful than what I actually learn in uni I think. *Luke, Business and Management, 1960s SE*

[Volunteering] gives you empathy and understanding, and this job [nursing] does make you meet a whole lot of different people, you can't just say "they're a drug addict" or "they're homeless". It helps you to really speak to these people and see them properly and I think that will help with the career as well. *Marie, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

Some students also talked about the importance of social networking and making connections that they could later rely on to get a job:

At work [as a hospital assistant] I really try and make friends with the sister and to work hard, and build that relationship, because then when I finish it might be a job opportunity for me or something. Now they know me on the wards and they recognise me, so maybe when I finish I'll be allowed to choose a ward to work on because they all know me there and like me. *Liberty, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

Through work [bar work and theatre company] I'm making a lot of contacts... networking, as much as I hate the word, which will help me get a job later, and everyone I've ever worked for has given me a good reference. *Abi, Media, 1960s SE*

Mature students were often more engaged in their own activities including paid work and family commitments, rather than those on offer at the university, as illustrated previously. These students tended to see their life experience as more relevant for preparing them for the workplace:

> The work I did before [HR development and child-minding] has prepared me for this career [teacher] in terms of people management and teamwork, encouraging others to do well and succeed. And the school environment with my own kids, I've witnessed good teaching and bad teaching, and have been very close to it ... I think this perspective and experience will be useful for me in my work. *Marion, Education 1960s Scotland*

> Our lifestyles are going to be helpful for being nurses as we're always on the go, we have kids and we're always running around, for us I think nursing will be less of a shock than for some. All our commitments and responsibilities with family and money, it teaches us to work well under pressure, and to manage our time. *Marie, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

Non-participation in ECAs

Focus on study

Some students prioritised their studies over their social life and 'having fun', saying that the university experience for them was more about getting an education and qualifications. This was especially the case for students studying vocational or science courses and was therefore an important issue at the city university:

> My university life tips towards the studying about 80:20 because I rarely go out. I'm happy with that as it's for a very good cause, this is going towards a very good degree and a very good job at the end of it. And there's a time for everything, now it's to study. *Kwame, Law, Post-92 SE*

> Some people here seem to do absolutely everything and think that's the most important. Well if I had more time I'd probably do more voluntary stuff in the [local] community but I'm firstly here to work hard and get a degree because the cost of the course is so high. *Lauren, Maths, 1960s SE*

This focus on education and getting qualified was also particularly true for older students, making it more relevant at the Scottish campus and the city university because they both had a relatively high proportion of mature students. These students were less likely to have financial support from their parents and many of them had families to support. In this context, they saw their university education much more as a personal investment:

> I have a family and my own business and my drive behind doing this is really just the piece of paper, because in my working life it became apparent that I needed this qualification to attract certain clients, so it's just a means to an end really. *John, Business, 1960s Scotland*

> I want this education badly, so I have to make the decisions to balance out my time. I have a family to support and yes I need the money from my part-time job but we must also think long term and concentrate on our studies to go further. *Mercy, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

Additionally many mature students had already experienced university once before as a young student and were therefore less inclined to get so involved in the social activities the second time around:

> The prospectus talks a lot more about the lifestyle, really they're selling a lifestyle and an experience because that's what the youngsters are interested in, at the expense of education. But I'm actually here for the qualification. *John, Business and Management, 1960s Scotland*

> Now I'm a mature student and I think I see uni very differently now. My first degree was about socialising and the whole uni experience but now ... it's not all that different from a job. My concerns about fitting in and making friends are not relevant anymore. *Parvati, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

The time that students spent on their study was an important factor in the amount of extra-curricular activities they were involved in. Some students felt the curriculum did not allow enough time to engage in outside activities. Again this was particularly an issue for science students who reported more contact hours and heavier workloads:

It's not like other subjects where you just have a few lectures a week. You've got to work loads, you're supposed to do about 70 hours a week in and out of lectures, so nine in the morning till midnight. I try to do that or maybe more, and try to keep weekends free but I'd like more time to see the girlfriend or work on my cars. *Hugh, Engineering, Post-92 SE*

If I'm not in the library I'm probably working at home, so I'm a very boring student. I just don't hang around socialising, I go home and do some reading. There is a social scene and people do invite me to join them but I prefer to focus on study until outside exams. *Kwame, Law, Post-92 SE*

Students also differed in the extent that they felt they could keep up with their studies, and this influenced their participation. Students who found the workload more difficult were less likely to be involved in lots of ECAs:

Doing Maths and also being dyslexic, I don't have the time, I spend a lot of time on homework and just keeping up. *Lauren, Maths, 1960s SE*

Sometimes it's so stressful keeping up with all the work and then going to the placements as well, you're killing yourself dragging yourself to a placement when you're ill and stressed and tired ... there's no time for anything extra. *Mercy, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

Students at the older universities that required more UCAS points on entry and, particularly the Russell Group university, were more likely to say that they found the workload relatively manageable. These students who found their studies quite easy had more time to engage in ECAs:

I'm very lucky to be one of those annoying people who doesn't have to work hard to get good grades. I have a lot of time that a lot of other people don't have so I want to take full advantage of it really. *Becky, Maths, 1960s SE*

I don't find the workload too hard, I find I have lots of spare time in the week and can afford to have a bit of me time. *Oli, Psychology, 1960s Scotland*

Financial concerns

Some students were less involved in socialising around the university because of financial reasons. Age and social class were obviously relevant here, with younger working-class students and mature students, particularly those with families to support (as illustrated above in the paid employment section), being more likely to report financial hardship:

> I think my financial situation plays a large part in my lack of socialising here. One of my reasons for not going out so much is that this is my second degree and I don't get any Government funding. So whatever money I do mange to save, it has to concentrate on books and travelling and food and paying rent rather than actually going out. *Safiya, Pharmacy, Post-92 SE*

> I don't hang out so much around campus as I try not to spend money in the canteen unnecessarily as it's expensive, so I'll go to my room and then come back out after eating. *Hayley, Law, Post-92 SE*

However, there were also some younger middle-class students from the more affluent universities who reported missing out on activities because of financial reasons. This perhaps reflects the different levels of financial support provided by middle-class parents, in addition to the high cost of the sporting activities typically on offer at these universities:

> The reason I don't do any football, I'd like to but you have to rent the field so you need to be part of a group as it's quite expensive. *Luke, Business, 1960s SE*

> Some of the sports clubs I didn't approach just because of money. There's quite a high standard and level of commitment involved and I didn't want to end up buying all the uniform and paying 100 quid or something just to find out that I couldn't continue on the team. *Claire, Business, Russell Group NE*

Feeling excluded

Some students at the two older campus universities felt that the students' union catered for certain subjects more than others. The more active members of the SU tended to be those studying the political or social science subjects, and while there were more of these academic programmes on offer at these universities, those doing vocational or science courses there tended to feel excluded:

> I think they're quite cliquey, the Union. They're willing for you to join but they're not willing to come out and find you. They also need to go out there and connect with the rest of the subjects. *Becky, Maths, 1960s SE*

> For my course the SU isn't really a kind of focus point because we have everything on the other campus away from the campaigns and demonstrations that go on. Business Studies isn't as political and also isn't as personal just because of the sheer size of it. *Claire, Business, Russell Group NE*

Students at the city university, as illustrated in the campus versus city section, tended to feel excluded because of the separation of the campus sites, meaning that they sometimes felt isolated from activities that were going in. Some of these students also mentioned a lack of advertising for university events, which meant that they were not as involved as they would like to be:

> There's a very vibrant drama department just over the road there but has anyone been invited to any of the productions that they put on? *Peter, English Literature, Post-92 SE*

> I never hear about any events going on. More posters all around the building would probably help, as well as emails. I know, in my course many students don't access their emails and things are spread by word of mouth. *Safiya, Pharmacy, Post-92 SE*

Those who missed freshers' week were also less involved in the students' union as they felt they had missed their chance to get involved in university-based activities clubs and societies from the start:

I'm not very much involved in university clubs simply because I missed freshers' week this year so I haven't been able to join up to anything. Plus, I don't know what actually is going on. *Safiya, Pharmacy, Post-92 SE*

I was really late with my application so there was no accommodation and I ended up moving in with some squatters...and didn't spend much time at uni in my first term. ... There are facilities here to make friends and join in but I didn't make use of them initially. *Carla, Sociology, 1960s SE*

This is an interesting point for the students' unions, which may benefit from holding mid-term freshers' weeks for students who missed out the first time around to 'catch up'. Although most of the students we spoke to had attended freshers' week, we would predict that this would be more of an issue for students from less affluent backgrounds who are less able to take the time out of paid employment for freshers' week and meet the extra accommodation costs.

Career prospects

Future plans

Many students doing vocational courses, and therefore particularly at the city university, had a clear career path in mind:

I want to be a commercial lawyer in the city working on transactions. Most of my decisions have been very geared towards this career and sometimes I think I'm crazy, most of my friends haven't decided what they want to do yet. *Kwame, Law, Post-92 SE*

I did a non-specific degree before [English and Italian] and it took my friends years to find jobs. But doing this course will lead directly to a well-paid job because I'll be a qualified doctor with lots of practical experience. *Siobhan, Medicine, 1960s SE*

Those doing academic courses, and therefore particularly those at the older and more traditional universities, had less clear career plans and perceived their degrees as less relevant:

> I have absolutely no idea what I want to do. Having a degree is a big advantage though. My course doesn't lead to many vocations apart from academia, and whilst I thought about an MA I can't do this because of money. I love my course and if I could get a related job I'd love this, but there aren't many related jobs around. *Nicola, Politics and Anthropology, 1960s SE*

> I'm interested in history and film which aren't that practical – you learn to research and write generally but it doesn't put you down a direct career path like my friends in Engineering or Medicine. I feel really bad about this like I should have a definite plan – all my other friends kind of do. *Rachel, History and Film, 1960s SE*

There appeared to be individual differences between students, regardless of their degree subject, in the extent that they made use of their universities' careers services. Some students had sought out help and support from their universities with their career plans, while others were more self-reliant:

> This university's really given me a lot of opportunities and ideas in regards to what I want to do when I've left [fiction writer]. Publishing in the...magazine and speaking to authors at the group readings, I'm getting all this feedback before I've even started. *Gus, English Literature, Post-92 SE*

> We did have some talks from some of the big investment banks, they came in and gave presentations to us about career prospects with them, which was useful. There's so many opportunities at [university] especially for postgraduate stuff, so I'm not looking too actively at the moment as I'm sure something will come along which takes my interest. *Suzy, Economics, Russell Group NE*

Job market expectations

Students had differing expectations of the job market. Some of those studying at the two older, more traditional institutions felt that the university they attended would influence their job prospects, giving them an advantage in the labour market:

> The hardest thing was getting in, but once you're here you've got a foot on the ladder. I feel pretty confident it'll lead onto a good job when I'm finished. *Joshua, Medicine, 1960s SE*

> I think it's going to look good, it's a respected university. The older universities are kind of looked at more when it comes to classic jobs. Employers will see the league tables but also the social aspect, it's like the London up North, so going here also shows I'm able to interact in a busy social environment. *Claire, Business, Russell Group NE*

Many of the students at these two predominantly White middle-class institutions expressed confidence in their ability to make their outside interests look relevant on a CV. As illustrated above in the clubs and societies section, they were more often involved in activities that were less directly related to their chosen career or degree subject. Despite this, many of them were adept at 'spinning' these activities in a way to make them appear more relevant to future employers:

> Pretty much anything can be put on your CV, it's just the way you spin it. Especially with my volunteering I can say it helps my social and communication skills, but other things look good too, like ...[one] wouldn't need to mention it's an anarchist club, just that it's a place to collaborate and discuss intellectual ideas. *Becky, Maths, 1960s SE*

> You just put everything down to show you've got other interests and that you did more than what you *had* to do for your degree. I organised a lot of union things and had lots of responsibilities which is always useful, but anything you do helps make you look like a well-rounded person. *Abi, Media, 1960s SE*

However, there were some students at these institutions who felt that they were engaged in the 'wrong' activities. These students, whose activities were less officially recognised by the university or students' union, were less confident about

their relevance for their CV. Often their activities presented the same potential opportunities for developing job relevant skills, but the students lacked confidence to 'sell' them in the same way:

> My involvement in the Autonomous Students' society I'd never put down [on my CV] as it's not a real society, it's not part of the students' union. It involves direct action so we can't put the uni's name on it. It's helped me a lot, to become politically engaged and a part of the society I live in, I can't put it on my CV though. *Carla, Sociology, 1960s SE*

> I work quite hard to study and to earn money, so am much more easy-going in my free time. The fact that I haven't done many activities will look bad for employers because compared to a school-leaver I've had more opportunities to do them. *Lauren, Maths, 1960s SE*

Students at the city university were more likely to feel that the university they attended would negatively influence their job prospects, giving them a disadvantage in the labour market:

> If I had a choice, then yes I would go elsewhere, simply because the league table and it effects where and how you get a job and how long it takes to get into employment, competitiveness and so on. *Safiya, Pharmacy, Post-92 SE*

> Standards here have really slipped in Engineering and employers know this. Employers will look at the fact that I graduated from here in 2009 and think "that's not a good university", and they'll go for someone else. *Hugh, Engineering, Post-92 SE*

Students at this university often chose to participate in activities that they felt would directly benefit their future career, and often because of perceived labour market competition, as illustrated in the perceived benefits section. These students had mixed feelings about their future employment prospects. Some of them felt that they were building up a good career portfolio:

> My involvement with the two societies I do put it on my CV, in particular I've used it to demonstrate what I've gained from it, and described how successful they've been as well.

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> The decisions I've made along the way all relate to this ambition, that's why I set up the Commercial society and why I joined the Law society, because I know these companies want active students who can think and demonstrate certain abilities. *Kwame, Law, Post-92 SE*

> I'm going and doing things for myself, just ringing people up and asking them just to spend the day with them, like the blood bank or the disabilities centre, and all of this information can go into my portfolio and will help my job prospects at the end. *Ruth, Nursing, Post-92 SE*

However, others at the city university, despite feeling confident of their achievements and progression at university, were still concerned that this would still not be enough to secure them a job:

> I'm the second-year representative of the [university] Pharmacy society, so, we tend to have a lot of meetings and organising events such as the Pharmacy Ball, we actually won an award for it just the other day. But I think because Pharmacy is getting quite competitive now, it's not going to be enough. *Safiya, Pharmacy, Post-92 SE*

> I know of people who got 40 last year overall, and they've got industrial placements in top city firms because their auntie works there, or their sister works there, or a friend of the family works there. I got 80, and I haven't got that. I believe I have better communications skills than them and better intellectual acumen, but in law sometimes it's about who you know. It's a very exclusive industry and the question is whether I'm going to be able to break the boundary and get in. *Kwame, Law, Post-92 SE*

Age and location matrix

The matrix below summarises the qualitative data from students (n=39) regarding their perceptions of extra-curricular activity according to their age and institutional environment. These two dimensions, age and university type, seem particularly relevant to students' anecdotal experiences as reported in the focus groups and interview excerpts above. Referring back to the quantitative findings, age and university type were also significant predictors of engagement in certain ECAs. Students from the older campus universities spend significantly more time seeing friends ($p<.01$) and were marginally more likely to engage in sport ($p<.06$) and other

university-based ECAs ($p<.06$) than those from the new city university, who spent more time in the library ($p<.001$). Similarly, mature students spent more time studying ($p<.01$) and in the library ($p<.05$) compared to younger students, who spent more time seeing friends ($p<.001$) and did more university-based ECAs ($p<.01$).

Figure 10. Matrix summarising students' perceptions of extra-curricular activity according to their age and institutional environment.

New, city university

Activities focused outside university	Less choice of university activities
Family activities and childcare	Less conveniently located activities
Financial difficulties	Focus on study
Paid employment	Subject-based activities
Career-focused activities	Career-focused activities
Clearer career plans	Issue of not 'feeling known'
Life experiences increase employability	Clearer career plans
Less job market confidence	Less job market confidence
e.g. Safiya	**e.g. Kwame**

Mature students   **Young students**

Activities focused outside university	Lot of campus activities, easy to access
Family activities and childcare	Activities 'just for fun'
Financial difficulties	Political representation
Paid employment	Sports
Clearer career plans	Vague career plans
Life experiences increase employability	All activities increase employability
More job market confidence	More job market confidence
e.g. Marion	**e.g. Rosie**

Old, campus university

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Section 5b: Interviews with alumni

Alumni were identified by the alumni and development offices at the relevant institutions and consisted of members of the 'class of 2001'. This gave the research team access to students who studied under the regime of fees six years after the completion of their degree. Alumni from the post-92 university, the 1960s university in Scotland and the 1960s university in the South of England agreed to take part. A total of 12 interviews were conducted in all (four from each of these three institutions). There were six males and six females. Four of them had studied as mature students and eight of them as younger students. Alumni had studied a mixture of academically and vocationally focused programs, and were currently employed in a variety of graduate jobs as shown below:

Table 18. Alumni participants' details.

Pseudonym	Institution	Subject studied	Current employment
Leonard	Post-92	Mechanical Engineering	Design consultant
Ravi	Post-92	Computer Science	Hardware sales and development
Sean	Post-92	Computer Science*	Runs own IT services business
Kelly	Post-92	Social Science*	Immigration officer
Nicolas	1960s Scotland	International Management	Charity director
Eleanor	1960s Scotland	Politics, Philosophy and Economics	Government policy manager
Hamish	1960s Scotland	Biology and Psychology	Psychology lecturer
Eileen	1960s Scotland	Business*	Marketing lecturer
Geoffrey	1960s South of England	Sociology*	Court clerk
Kim	1960s South of England	History and Language	Legal PA
Joanna	1960s South of England	History	Human resources manager
Maria	1960s South of England	English Literature	Procurement manager

*Four interviewees had studied as mature students.

Alumni were asked to reflect on the ECAs they did at university and the effect that these had on their university performance and subsequent employment. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using ATLAS.ti software. Prior to the main analysis, the following section briefly introduces a member of each institution's alumni, summarising the ECAs they engaged in and the effects on their future employment.

'Kelly'

Kelly studied for a BSc in Social Science at the post-92 institution as a mature student. While studying at university she was a single mother and had three part-time jobs as a barmaid, healthcare assistant and personal assistant. She was inspired by her course to volunteer in her community and became involved in work for several children's charities. She would have liked to have been involved in more social activities at her university if she'd had the time. Instead she focused on working to support her family and on her volunteering, which she felt was more relevant for a career in social work. Her voluntary work experience helped her decide that she wanted to work with vulnerable young people and prepared her for this type of working environment. Her part-time employment, while not directly relevant to her chosen career, provided social contacts that led onto other employment and taught her the written communication and project management skills that she used in subsequent positions. She got her first graduate job, as a community mental health advocate, four months after leaving university. After five years she was made redundant and became an immigration officer. Overall, she says that university was a busy but very enjoyable time for her.

'Nicholas'

Nicholas studied for a BSc in International Management at the 1960s university in Scotland. He did not complete the qualification, describing himself uninterested in his studies and uninspired by the career options that his degree naturally led on to. While at university he did part-time work as a DJ and pub quiz organiser, and became involved in promoting and organising events for his students' union. Most of

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his ECAs were focused around the union and involved paid or voluntary work: he was a student welfare officer, helped to set up the union TV and radio stations, organised and promoted union charity events, and was involved in political campaigning for NUS Scotland. These activities helped him decide that he wanted to work in events management and provided him with the social connections that helped him get his first graduate job in his students' union. After this he worked in events management and fundraising in the voluntary sector, and is now assistant director of a charity. Overall, he feels that he benefited most from his hobbies and activities, rather than his degree course, because they inspired his career choice and made him more employable.

'Kim'

Kim studied for a BA in History and Language at the 1960s university in the South of England as an international student. While at university she had several part-time jobs teaching Russian in a local school, as a sales assistant and as a cashier for several banks. She initially felt socially isolated at university, used alcohol to overcome her shyness and found it difficult to make lasting friendships. She started to make friends after she became involved in sport and fitness activities. She joined the Russian society and became involved in an inter-university Russian literature project. However, she found the students' union unfriendly and unwelcoming. She would like to have got involved in voluntary activities, the student newspaper and the radio station, but feeling excluded from the union and having part-time employment prevented her from doing so. On leaving university she had a lot of student debt and describes her career path as more a matter of financial survival than personal interest. She took her first graduate job as maternity cover for a legal PA. She has worked as a PA for various legal firms since then and is currently studying for an MBA. In hindsight, she feels that while her sporting activities were really important for her sense of well-being at university, she learnt most of her transferable job skills from her course and her part-time work.

Varied career paths

Members of the 'class of 2001' reported varied job histories and career paths. As fee-paying students, many of them were in debt on leaving university and talked about the need to get a job straight away:

> So I basically had to grab what jobs I could get you know, otherwise it was unemployment and I had a lot of debt by then as I had been studying full-time. *Geoffrey, 1960s SE alumni*

> I had to work as unfortunately I'm not from a rich background and my parents weren't very well off to help with fees and stuff, so it was important to find a job straight away. *Ravi, Post-92 SE alumni*

For this reason many initially took graduate jobs that were relatively low status or not specifically related to their degree subject or interests. For some graduates, these jobs were temporary in nature, before embarking on their preferred careers:

> After uni I was a recruitment consultant for six months, then did a few temporary jobs in other places. Then I temped at the Scottish Parliament and through that got a policy job, and finally became a permanent member of staff for the Scottish government. *Eleanor, 1960s Scotland alumni*

> I ended up taking the first job that came along, which was a traffic warden. Then a caretaker for a block of flats, then finally to the YMCA to try and get into social work but I realised it wasn't for me actually. I ended up abroad in Lanzarote running a pub for a couple of years and now I work as a clerk and usher for the courts. *Geoffrey, 1960s SE alumni*

Others stayed on in the same area (and sometimes the same organisation) where they got their first graduate job, but spoke of working their way up through their company, or tailoring their role to their interests:

> They gave me a temp position for four days, and I'm still here seven years later. I've changed roles five times, I started as an administrator and now I'm responsible for our quality

improvement agenda. We help long-term unemployed people back into work so there's a real human element, I've always been interested in society and the social side of things and I suppose there's a link to my degree. *Joanna, Post-92 SE alumni*

I would have loved to have gone on to further study earlier but I had debts so did maternity cover as a PA for six months. After that I did a contract job working for another law firm as a PA. I've had various PA positions in different companies since then, so nothing to do with History, and now I'm studying for an MBA. *Kim 1960s SE alumni*

Alternatively, one of the mature students already had an established career, which he returned to with new skills:

I was a mature student so already had a bit of an IT career beforehand. I've ran infrastructures and operations for various companies and I'm now having a go at starting my own web-services business. *Sean, Post-92 SE alumni*

Satisfaction with extra-curricular activity

Overall, alumni placed a high value on extra-curricular activity for enriching their university experience:

I've got two kids now and I'll certainly be telling them it's not all about passing exams, it's about all these other opportunities and just enjoying all of these other things that you can do. *Sean, Post-92 SE alumni*

I'd say these activities are an incredibly important part of your development at university. *Nicholas, 1960s Scotland alumni*

However, some of them wished that they had done more ECAs. Voluntary work in particular was an activity that many students regretted not having done, saying that it would have opened up more job opportunities to them. Most of these students cited financial and time constraints for not becoming involved in voluntary work

I did voluntary work in the fourth year to try and get into the voluntary sector but I didn't have enough time to commit, so I pulled out quite quickly. Experience in the voluntary sector would have maybe enabled me to start a bit higher up and would have given me a lead on my career. *Eleanor, 1960s Scotland alumni*

I didn't have that much choice really in terms of the part time work I did. I actually would have loved to do something like volunteer for the student newspaper or radio, develop the skills more and meet normal people, as my part time jobs I felt didn't really opened up many different career opportunities for me after university. *Kim 1960s SE alumni*

Some students also said that were not involved in certain activities because they did not feel welcomed by or a part of their students' union:

Proper student activities involving the students' union, unfortunately I did not get involved, I visited the students' union from time to time but a lot of the time it was like a foreign country for me. I felt I was the outsider in the out group and not in the cool crowd, and every time I tried to say something I felt misunderstood. *Kim 1960s SE alumni*

I was very anti student politics at university, even though I had friends that were president of the debating society and blah, blah, blah, I just couldn't stand it actually. I never got involved or joined any clubs. I did visit the union, but purely just to socialise. *Eleanor, 1960s Scotland alumni*

Some of the mature students said that there were less ECAs that were accessible to them, although they also said that their studies and career were their main priority:

I would have loved to have done some sport at uni but the facilities aren't there for mature students who have much less time and have to leave immediately after lectures to pick the kids up from school. My priorities at the time were our life as a family, and the only other things I did were voluntary work so as to gain experience in the field I wanted to go into. *Kelly, Post-92 SE alumni*

The mature students' group was pretty inactive, and there wasn't much going on for mature students really. I think I had a bit of a separate identity from the rest of the younger students, I

was more focused on the course and socialised outside a lot more. *Geoffrey, 1960s SE alumni*

The importance of social capital at university

Most of the alumni emphasised the social aspect of their ECAs, describing them as an important opportunity to meet people and make new friends. Some socialised with people from their university clubs, particularly sporting clubs, which often met around the students' union pubs and bars:

> All my activities, Ultimate Frisbee, rowing, badminton, they were SU clubs and we all used to meet in the union bar to drink beer and watch sport games together, rugby, football, everything. *Leonard, Post-92 SE alumni*

> I spent a lot of time with the rugby team – watched their matches, had themed nights with them dressing up and going out in town – but social rather than actual sport. *Joanna, 1960s SE Alumni*

Some socialised primarily with their course mates and did social activities together as a group:

> I was very close to small group of people on my course, we'd go to the wine bar in town, the SU bar, have a few drinks and chats and catch up. *Kelly, Post-92 SE alumni*

> I made some very close friendships with the fourth years on my course when we started. In the Summer it was about sitting around, lovely hills in Scotland, talking and debating with friends. *Eleanor, 1960s Scotland alumni*

Others met friends through activities outside the university and so had friendships with non-students as well:

I sang and rehearsed with the ...Festival Chorus who wanted to recruit some younger voices. So we rehearsed and socialised together and I got to know some older and different types of people. *Joanna, 1960s SE alumni*

The badminton group was really just a bunch I'd met out and about...none of them were students. We used the campus facilities because they were cheaper. We socialised in the pubs and bars in town, they were a great bunch of people. *Geoffrey, 1960s SE alumni*

Many of the younger alumni said that their social activities were important for developing their self-confidence, and that this was important for their well-being, making them feel happier at university:

In terms of confidence, it was rewarding to go to a university where I had no friends attending as it made me socialise and meet new friends, which increased my confidence and made me happy with myself. *Maria, 1960s SE alumni*

I didn't make such good friendships definitely because alcohol was always involved, so in my second year I completely stopped drinking, I got involved in some of the sports and started to make friends. I think these activities are really important, especially for shy students like me, it's important for getting over your insecurities and having a much happier and more fruitful experience. *Kim 1960s SE alumni*

Many of them also said that these social activities made them feel a strong sense of connection to the university, and they felt like they fitted in or belonged there:

The socialising that we did around the campus most definitely did make me feel like a part of the uni, meeting with other students and other campuses, there was a strong sense of community and it was very rewarding to experience the different cultures of the different campuses. *Sean, Post-92 SE alumni*

My involvement in the SU absolutely helped me to fit in, because I felt like a visible part of the institution, considering the future of the organisation, representing students and pushing certain agendas, you do feel intrinsically linked to the organisation through these types of activities. *Nicholas, 1960s Scotland alumni*

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Some of the younger students also talked about their activities in relation to their social development and maturity. Some of their social activities gave them experience of interacting with a range of different people and developed their social and communication skills, which they came to rely on in their later careers:

> I was very much into philosophy and cultivated friendships in that way, we discussed politics, religion, beliefs as a matter of course among my friends. Now I present government policy and have to think about different sides of the political argument, so talking with my friends at uni who shared my interest in debating things helped me to see things from different angles, which I do all the time in my job now. *Eleanor, 1960s Scotland alumni*

> The Chorus society involved socialising with older and different types of people, which helped in my career where I mixed with a broader range of background and ages. Going into business you need to be able to talk to people at different levels and negotiate. Leaving uni you are incredibly young and fresh, and having this experience definitely helped me in being able to handle that. *Joanna, 1960s SE alumni*

The mature alumni had more previous life experience and had already developed their social skills and self-confidence. Therefore they were more likely to say that that their social activities gave them academic confidence rather than social confidence. They described the importance of receiving academic support and advice from their peers, and of being able to focus on their work by relaxing in their free time:

> The SU for us was a place to socialise but also to collect our thoughts and discuss the lectures. I'm a very confident person socially, but being able to go and sit in a bar and socialise with your friends who you are studying with, you can get to understand each other and to help each other more, and this really helps, especially in group work. *Kelly, Post-92 SE alumni*

The sport really gave me energy and kept me going. It's all very well going out all the time but it doesn't help you focus and work, I think when you do sport you feel energised and focused and you do end up doing more coursework actually as a result. *Geoffrey, 1960s SE alumni*

Some of the alumni even said their friendships were still important years after leaving university. They described how the social networks they made at university helped them either to find jobs or to progress in their chosen careers. Some reported that a particular social contact had helped them secure a position in a certain organisation:

The PA job helped me progress a lot, and I got that through my part-time bar job. I was working in a wine bar, which was very posh with a lot of doctors and lawyers and wealthy people, and I was friendly with a lady who used to come in a lot, who asked if I wanted another part-time job to help me out. *Kelly, Post-92 SE alumni*

I got a job with [someone] who went to the same university. I think it did give us a sense of camaraderie, which is a pretty cool thing, because it isn't one of the most prestigious unis in Scotland, so you do become more defensive of it, which installs camaraderie I think. I've met a lot of people through him, and he's introduced me to some really good networking opportunities. *Eleanor, 1960s Scotland alumni*

Others reported that while their social contacts had not helped them to get a job, their friendship networks from university were still important in their working life, helping them to carry out their jobs more effectively and to progress in their chosen profession:

The friendships I made at university have helped me in the sense that I've made so many contacts out of it. I've got friends in industry who've come to me for help and advice about different computing equipment, and those business relationships have grown through friendships, so that's really important, to draw on these resources and networks, that's really helped me. *Ravi, Post-92 SE alumni*

The friendships and socialising didn't necessarily help me get my job but I think it's influenced my behaviour, my personality and confidence, my ability to pick things up, get on with people, that's really important in my work to be able to progress. *Maria, 1960s SE alumni*

The job application process

Many of the alumni said that they mentioned their extra-curricular activities on their first graduate CV and that they felt that this had strengthened their application:

> The students' council representation and advocacy work was what I made the biggest deal about on my first application because it was obviously an opportunity to display responsibility and communication skills. *Sean, Post-92 SE alumni*

> My whole experience for my first post was based around the part-time work, DJing and organising and promoting events, and my voluntary work. Everything extra-curricular I've done was part of my application. *Nicholas, 1960s Scotland alumni*

A few of them felt less confident about mentioning their activities in their first CV or said that mentioning them did not have a positive effect on their employment prospects:

> I didn't mention any of my university extra-curricular activities when I applied for the PA job. Not the Russian society or the Russian literature project. I guess I was quite shy at the time, and I felt that perhaps some kind of thing like being a DJ or a writer, these things that other people were doing, that kind of stands out more, and I didn't do any of these things. *Kim, 1960s SE alumni*

> I tried to show a balance, that I was active and fit with the badminton and swimming stuff like that, and also the social side, so the alumni group events from my previous college, and I'd previously run a community centre in the past so voluntary stuff like that I put down as well. But I found it impossible to get an interview, no one was really interested. *Geoffrey, 1960s SE alumni*

In general, the alumni were in agreement that today, their university extra-curricular activities were of little or no importance to their CVs, as they now had much more life and work experience to support their applications:

Probably I wouldn't put them on there now, not to denigrate them but I'm now 38, and the last role I applied for was a junior executive role, it's not that I'd want to hide them but the employers now are very focused on what you've delivered, and your attitude and aptitude kind of thing. *Sean, Post-92 SE alumni*

People don't ask me about my degree any more. At this stage it's based solely on my previous jobs. My experiences at university have obviously helped me but it's never discussed anymore. *Eleanor, 1960s Scotland alumni*

However, some of them did still refer to their ECAs in current job applications. This was especially true for activities where they had played a central or leadership role, reached a certain level of achievement or felt that their activities were still important to their sense of identity:

Yes I still have the rowing on my CV, I'm really proud of it, I'm proud to have won something for my university. I would still put the rowing on my CV even now, but not the other ones any more. *Leonard, Post-92 SE alumni*

My job applications are far more about my working life now, but there is always a passing mention of the events organising and positions of responsibility in the students' union. They were a big part of my life and they were how my interests developed. *Nicholas, 1960s Scotland alumni*

Learning transferable skills for the workplace

Many of the alumni described how their activities had given them transferable skills that they later brought to the workplace. Again, social skills were heavily emphasised, and many of the communication skills they used at work had been first developed at university:

I do a lot of social networking in my job, playing golf and making contacts with new clients, socialising, networking, meeting people kind of thing. That social side I was able to develop whilst at university, because I did enjoy networking and I loved socialising. *Ravi, Post-92 SE alumni*

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University was a place for me to grown up and develop as a person. It was more my personal attributes and character that got me the job. I had made very good friends and developed good socialising skills, which gave me very well-developed inter-personal skills and confidence for my age. *Eleanor, 1960s Scotland alumni*

Personal skills such as teamwork, perseverance and discipline were also emphasised by those who had taken part in sporting activities at university:

I did martial arts at university so that brought etiquette and discipline to me. That's really helped me in working life as you realise you have to do things in a certain way following a certain procedure and timely manner. *Ravi, Post-92 SE alumni*

I did learn skills from rowing that helped in my career. You have the teamwork, you learn that you have to work really hard to achieve things, it teaches you to persevere and it shows how far you can go. I really like this way of working in industry, I try to work this way as a team, supporting each other and pushing ourselves to achieve great things. *Leonard, Post-92 SE alumni*

Voluntary work was also considered by some as important for learning transferable skills for the workplace. Alumni who had been involved in voluntary work described how this experience helped to direct their career interests, gave them confidence to work in their chosen field, and provided them with directly relevant work experience:

The voluntary work made me understand why social science is so important, made me understand the world, it just gelled the course together and it all made more sense. And through my experiences I gained the confidence to aspire to be the best and take it further. *Kelly, Post-92 SE alumni*

I think the student welfare volunteering was very good practice for the sorts of things you have to do in psychology, talking and interviewing people in all sorts of difficult situations, and it built my confidence to be able to do this. Working for 'Nightline' especially raised my confidence levels for this sort of work. *Hamish, 1960s Scotland alumni*

As mentioned earlier, many alumni had been less able to do voluntary work because of their need for part-time work. However, some alumni described how their paid employment, while not directly relevant to their future career, had in fact taught them skills that they now used in their current work. Some of these skills were more general, such as time management, whereas others were more specific, such as report-writing:

> I worked part-time in a local shop to help support myself whilst studying. Customer care and dealing with people was helpful from my part-time job. That helped me get into my first graduate job. *Maria, 1960s SE alumni*

> Most definitely I did use skills I learnt from my part-time work as a cashier and shop assistant, perseverance, keeping going, making mistakes and learning to overcome them, taking a flexible approach and being adaptable, and attention to detail. *Kim, 1960s SE alumni*

However, perhaps unsurprisingly, many students, despite learning some transferable skills from their hobbies and interests, still found that the majority of their learning took place on their course. They described how their course work and assignments taught them critical, intellectual, language, IT and other skills, which they put to use in their first graduate jobs:

> The Engineering course influenced me most in my choice of a career using CAD software, I started this with university and became a CAD expert. *Leonard, Post-92 SE alumni*

> I'd probably have to say that the Psychology course was the most important, above everything else, helping me get into an academic career, and also the course again was most important in helping me to decide this career path. *Hamish, 1960s Scotland alumni*

Supporting the extra-curricular

Alumni were asked whether, in hindsight, they would advise future students to focus more on their hobbies and interests or on their studies. Most alumni said that they would highly recommend active involvement in extra-curricular activities. The importance of universities supporting the extra-curricular was strongly emphasised. Many alumni expressed regret that they had not done more activities while they had the chance and would have liked more encouragement from staff to do so:

> I've always been interested in technology. At the time my lecturers didn't see my interests as something in line with my course, but I really believe you should follow what interests you. *Ravi, Post-92 SE alumni*

> They [tutors] didn't emphasise their [ECAs'] importance, and I think they should really encourage them because it's quite an opportunity, and because being burdened with all your exams you really need some encouragement to do these things. *Joanna 1960s SE alumni*

Those who had been more heavily engaged in activities tended to remember their experience of university life as a fulfilling and happy one, describing fond memories and feelings of pride.

> I spent four really good years [here], a special moment in my life and I will keep it warm, it was a totally 100% positive experience. *Leonard, Post-92 SE alumni*

> Looking back I really enjoyed my time there, my involvement in the union made me feel like I was really a part of the university and that my actions mattered in the grand scheme of things. *Nicholas, 1960s Scotland alumni*

Therefore, it appears that by supporting students' ECAs, universities may not only improve students' job prospects, but also increase their happiness and satisfaction with university life, and even their sense of belonging to their institution. As illustrated above, alumni members were in general agreement as to the importance of ECAs for enriching their university experience, particularly by developing their

confidence and communication skills. The social capital provided by such activities seems to be particularly important to their accounts of university life. While mature alumni emphasised the importance of social activities for providing academic support and confidence in their studies, younger alumni emphasised the importance of social activities for developing confident and effective communication styles as well as useful contacts, which they used in their later careers. In addition to the importance of friendships and socialising, certain activities, particularly voluntary work, provided inspiration and direction to students' career choices, while other activities such as paid employment provided transferable skills that prepared students' for the workplace. Some of these alumni members' experiences also highlight the need for universities more fully to support students in their pursuit of ECAs. Some alumni cited conflicting responsibilities such as paid employment and childcare that prevented them from engaging in activities such as voluntary work. However, as shown above, some alumni said that they would have engaged more in activities had their students' union been more welcoming, or had their university offered more activities for mature students or activities that were more compatible with their child-caring responsibilities.   This therefore highlights the importance of supporting different students in their pursuit of ECAs, in order for all student groups to benefit from the enriching and positive benefits described above.

Section 5c: Interviews with employers

Employers were identified by the careers services departments at the relevant institutions. Key employers of students from the post-92 university, the 1960s universities in Scotland and the South of England agreed to take part.   A total of nine interviews were conducted in all (three key employers for each institution). There were five male and four female employers. They worked in a variety of mainly modern professions (many of which involved information technology, new media and marketing), and they recruited graduates from a variety of subject areas as shown below:

Table 19. Employer participants' details.

Organisation/profession	Degree subjects recruited from	Institution	Pseudonym
Multimedia management (software development/marketing)	Marketing Software Engineering Business	Post-92	Alex
Computer hardware (manufacture and sales)	Computer Sciences	Post-92	Guy
Software development (small company)	Computer Sciences	Post-92	Jason
Accountancy (large firm)	All disciplines	1960s (Scotland)	Luke
Town council (e.g. teaching, social work, HR, criminal justice etc.)	All disciplines	1960s (Scotland)	Abigail
Communications software (support and marketing)	Marketing Computer Sciences	1960s (Scotland)	Hannah
Internet digital marketing (small company)	Digital Marketing, Engineering Business	1960s (South of England)	Alice
Audit, tax and advisory (large firm)	All disciplines	1960s (South of England)	Laura
IT consultancy/support (large firm)	Computer Sciences	1960s (South of England)	Ross

This does suggest some gaps in employment areas; however, the views of the employers did appear to be generic. Employers were asked about the most important skills that they were looking for in a graduate employee and about the relative importance that they placed on ECAs when considering graduate applications.

Class of degree

Many of the employers said that the class of degree was the most important thing on a graduate's application, in that there was usually a minimum requirement of attainment. Particularly at the large firms where there was often a high academic standard, class of degree acted as a filter at the first stage of the selection process, by determining which students would be selected for interview:

> The qualification is the first thing you notice, the degree they studied and the mark. The class of degree you tend to look at, and we consider all people ranging from a 2:2 and above. *Ross, IT consultancy/support*

> Obviously the degree is important because everyone has to have at least a 2:1, it's very important for them to have that level of ability because unless you've been unlucky, then lower than that really shows a lower level of ability. *Hannah, Communications software*

However, these employers also conceded that the large number of graduates applying with a 2:1 meant that there was little variation in applicants' levels of degree attainment. Therefore class of degree on its own was an insufficient criteria with which to compare applicants. In these circumstances, ECAs became more important as a source of additional information:

> A 2:1 is important for getting into the interview but because all students have a 2:1 it's become pretty meaningless in the sense that we almost take it as a given. So that's where the other activities come in as an indicator of what they can do. *Hannah, Communications software*

All graduates may well be just the same when it comes to it, they've all got the qualification, so what makes them different? It's not always about the grade or the qualification actually, it's about the person and what they've done with their life that's interesting. *Abigail, Town council*

Relevant work experience

All of the employers emphasised the desirability of applicants that had gained some work experience in their chosen profession during their degree:

Relevant work experience is the most desirable thing in selecting for interview, as this will prepare them the most for the workplace. *Alice, Internet digital marketing*

I'm a firm believer that you learn 90% of what you learn on the job rather than your degree, so if you've worked in an environment before, even if it's just an internship or whatever, then you'll be streets ahead of someone who's just been sitting in a classroom for three years. *Jason, Software development*

Some employers, particularly those recruiting from the computer sciences, found that graduates were often unprepared for the practical application of their degree:

If they're fresh graduates then some sort of relevant experience they've had whilst at university is important as a lot of the courses don't reflect real-world information. *Jason, Software development*

I've seen graduates from university who I'm absolutely blown away by their lack of ability, absolutely gobsmacked at how little prepared they are for the real world. Most of them are just mind-bendingly awful. *Alex, Multimedia management*

A few employers even said that they prioritised relevant work experience above class of degree and qualifications in the selection process:

I'm not fussed about the amount of degrees people have, and whether they got As or Bs, clearly if someone has a degree and passed it then that's ok, I'm not too concerned, it's more about the work experience they've got. *Jason, Software development*

Work experience is important as I've met many people who have got seemingly good educations who are absolutely useless. Whereas I've met a great deal more of people who've had good work experience and who perhaps don't have any formal education, who are much more valuable to the company. *Alex, Multimedia management*

However, most of the employers also said that it was quite rare for students to be able to obtain directly relevant work experience while they were still studying, and ECAs became a way for applicants to illustrate the skills and experiences that they had developed through other means. For this reason the majority of employers expressed a keen interest in graduates' ECAs:

Relevant work experience in accountancy is a bonus but obviously not a prerequisite as it's hard to find as a student. But alternative experiences are even available to them at school, like mentoring other kids, helping the first years with their studies, and things like this can help them develop and build up their own confidence. *Luke, Accountancy*

We actually do understand that not many graduates can get relevant work experience so we do pay attention to their hobbies, we'll be looking at any personal project such as helping a friend promote an event with digital media, or developing online social networks, online business, as long as they're relevant to the job. *Alice, Internet digital marketing*

Two of the employers were less optimistic about ECAs as an accurate source of information about a candidate:

I only pay attention to hobbies and interests conversationally; I don't make them a prerequisite. We've had people who were in the Territorial Army who were supposedly meant to be able to lead but couldn't. Volunteering abroad, you'd think that would mean someone's outgoing, but again the people who do them might be complete introverts who are just trying to run away from things. *Alex, Multimedia management*

I don't pay much attention to their activities, on a scale of one to ten, then maybe one. I might get chatting to someone in an interview who had similar interests to mine but I don't place much importance on it as everyone's different aren't they. *Jason, Software development*

However, even these employers described how engagement in certain ECAs helped them to form judgements about individual candidates:

From personal experience I'd say that people who have a rich life outside work tend to contribute more in work. *Alex, Multimedia management*

I think the team-related activities do actually hold a lot of weight, because being outward going and being able to socialise and get on with a lot of other people, those are the sorts of things that would help them do the job. I might look at it just to get a sense of what type of personal they are, to put it all together and form an overview opinion kind of

thing. *Jason, Software development*

'Cultural fit'

Many of the employers talked about the importance of 'cultural fit' between the culture of their company and the personal qualities, attitude and aptitude of the candidate. This was especially true for large firms who conducted projects in teams of people, or companies whose work was client facing. These organisations valued highly sociable, confident and friendly candidates. Social and communication skills were emphasised as an indicator that a candidate would fit happily into the culture of the workplace and be able to interact effectively with clients and colleagues:

We're looking for things that will tell us if they'll fit in with the company. We're looking to assess communication skills, that's where the ECAs come in, to provide examples of where they've experienced certain situations working and communicating with others. *Luke, Accountancy*

I think cultural fit is the most important thing, based on communications skills and that people are outgoing and have the right aptitude to work with us. For our consultants who are very client facing, they have to travel a lot, and to work with small teams in other countries. You need to be outgoing, have something to talk about, are not going to spend every night at

home in the hotel learning a new computer language rather than socialising with the team. *Hannah, Communications software*

However, there was far less agreement over the types of ECAs thought to demonstrate these highly valued social and communication skills, as illustrated below.

Socialising

Some employers said that casual socialising with friends was a good indicator of a getting on well with others in the workplace. These employers encouraged candidates to talk about their general socialising in the interview in order to break the ice, make the candidate feel at ease and to gauge how sociable they were:

> I think it can be useful as well to give an idea of the social life, just as an ice-breaker kind of thing in the interview. A lot of graduates can be nervous in interviews so this helps things along, and outgoing, sociable like to talk about their social life. *Hannah, Communications software*

> I'd also like to see evidence of general socialising, you want people who are outgoing, who are good at networking. I think a lot of people don't put that stuff on as they think it just looks like they're larking about and having a good time, but I think it's good to have people who do actually enjoy going out to socialise and network 'cos that actually helps in your role. *Guy, Computer hardware*

Other employers were less keen on candidates mentioning general socialising, believing that that this demonstrated a lack of social experiences and skills in the absence of more structured activities:

> If you've just got things like socialising, with nothing else to back it up with, then often that's a sign that they will not have very good communication skills at work, because they haven't been involved in things with other people, haven't had the chance to step forward in positions of responsibility and learn about themselves. I think it shows maybe a lack of self-awareness, if you don't know how you work in such a role, you're maybe not disciplined enough to think how you're coming across. *Luke, Accountancy*

Socialising is all very well but we need to see examples of competencies that have actually been gained from that. So if you organised an event or held a position of leadership within that group, then that goes a lot further. *Laura, Audit, tax and advisory*

University societies and committees

Some employers felt that membership of university societies and committees was a good indicator of social and communication skills, since they offered students an opportunity to hold positions of leadership and responsibility, to work as a team and to manage their time effectively:

The first activity that springs to mind that I'd like to see is anyone who's had a committee position within a society. If they were involved in a group or society, and been a secretary or treasurer, or even a president, that's a really good example of teamwork and leadership. Being on a committee or organising an event is a great opportunity for students to do this. *Laura, Audit, tax and advisory*

Students in committees or having positions of leadership within a club or society are normally accustomed to task management as they are juggling their uni work and other commitments. People on the committees tend to do a lot of things outside their university work, so it shows a lot of time management and keeping on top of a lot of competing deadlines. *Alice, Internet digital marketing*

Most employers valued union societies for being open to everyone (and so a good indicator of people who were sociable 'team players'), although one employer did acknowledge that university clubs and societies were less accessible to certain students:

There's definitely benefits to these university clubs and societies and it's more realistic for them to be involved, anyone can join if they want to. *Laura, Audit, tax and advisory*

Certain universities and certain social backgrounds can't necessarily afford the money involved, or the time involved, because they have to commute to university and work part-time to support themselves. So it just wouldn't be fair to expect these things. *Hannah, Communications software*

Voluntary work

Some of the employers said that they liked to see candidates who were involved in some kind of voluntary work, whether formally through an organisation or informally through helping out a friend. Employers said that these kind of activities demonstrated the right kind of personal qualities for the workplace such as maturity and responsibility, enthusiasm and commitment:

> Volunteering is actually somewhere near the top desirable traits beside a strong academic applicant, because that shows commitment and the right positive attitude that we're looking for, someone who goes out and gets things done. *Luke, Accountancy*

> Some of the voluntary ones, volunteering in order to achieve a certain task, that's usually a quite interesting thing. The Duke of Edinburgh award gives an indication of someone's commitment for example. But just any experience in the community, to show they understand their environment and the broader aspects of life. *Abigail, Town council*

Despite a general consensus that university societies and voluntary work were a good indicator of candidates' communication skills and personal qualities, there were some employers who were put off by these types of activities. These employers recruited graduates from computer science subjects, which is interesting considering the findings from the student focus groups that science subjects tended to feel excluded from the students' union councils and committees:

> Now I really couldn't care less about the students' union or clubs and societies, that makes no difference to me, leave that to the politicians. I would possibly even look unfavourably on it, but that's my own prejudice. *Alex, Multimedia management*

> The type of person I look for it's nothing to do with if they've been on this committee or on the board of that charity or they volunteer or whatever, all of these things like president of students' unions or this, that and the other is just complete bollocks. I went to university myself for four years, and as far as I'm concerned I don't see it as a sign of someone who's absolutely fantastic. *Jason, Software development*

While these employers above were similarly interested in candidates who were strong communicators and team players, they were more likely to see other activities as an indicator of this, particularly team sports.

Sport

Employers were in general agreement that they were looking for candidates who were extroverts: friendly and confident graduates who worked well with others as part of a team. Many of them said that involvement in team sports at university was a good way of demonstrating these qualities. Team activities, particularly sport, were often favoured over solitary activities such as reading or watching films:

> Activities demonstrating any type of teamwork are particularly impressive; being involved in committees or sports clubs and groups, the sports tend to be examples of where you're part of a team and you have to communicate. *Luke, Accountancy*

> I don't look for people that have been members of the local St John's ambulance brigade or this charity or that charity, it's more along the lines of are they a loner or a team player, do they play lots of team sports or are they more into sitting alone with a book or watching a good movie, that sort of thing. *Jason, Software development*

Some employers in the IT sector said that Computer Science graduates were generally less likely to have been highly active in team sports at university. However, they still preferred graduates who had been involved in sports as this showed that they were active, energetic and sociable:

> Certain things like team sports show you are this kind of outgoing team player, but the thing is software engineers generally tend not to be very sporty and into that side of things, they often are quite insular. But we are really seeking the outgoing types of people who are going to be client facing, so things like rugby or football, they are sometimes hard to find in this sector but we do like to see them. *Hannah, Communications software*

> I do appreciate it when they have an activity that involves strenuous exercise, in an environment when we're employing a lot of geeks who are sitting down all day. If they get out and get the adrenaline going and get some hormones pumped round their body, otherwise they'll fall ill quite quickly. *Alex, Multimedia management*

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Original interests

Some employers also talked about the importance of candidates' enthusiasm and vitality. They said that in addition to sport and exercise, activities that were adventurous or unusual showed that a person was passionate and interested in life:

> You're looking for something that's different. Lot of students do a gap year, but since everyone does them, it would be nice for them to have done an exciting project or expedition somewhere challenging, something more interesting, original or concrete rather than just a holiday. *Abigail, Town council*

> I find that a lot of people tend to put quite repetitive things in their CV, there is not much originality and excitement, which I would like to see. *Guy, Computer hardware*

However, other employers preferred candidates who had interests that were more in line with their degree subject and the work of the company. They said that these candidates were the ones that would be genuinely interested in their jobs and enthusiastic and competent members of the workplace:

> The best activities that they could be involved in are ones that are relevant to the job, any projects they may have undertaken in their spare time, setting up their own website, helping to advertise an event with digital media. These types of projects take initiative and show a real interest in the field. *Alice, Internet digital marketing*

> Career interest is a really important one for us in their activities, why they're interested in audit or tax, what inspired them to want to get involved, to see evidence that they have a real interest in that aspect of the company. Just wanting to work for a big company is not good enough. *Laura, Audit, tax and advisory*

Areas for improvement

There were a few general areas in which employers generally felt that graduates needed to concentrate on, in order to improve their chances of success.

Business knowledge

Some of the employers, particularly from the larger firms, said that candidates needed to demonstrate a more thorough knowledge of the business that they were going into. They said that graduates needed to display a greater understanding not only of the wider industry, but also of the specifics of the role that they were applying for, in order to demonstrate a genuine interest in the position and the organisation:

> Not knowing about the company and doing their research really lets them down, it's amazing how little a lot of them know about it. It's a pretty hard slog for three years so they really need to show they've researched it and know what to expect. Also they need to do research in the specific vocation that they're going into so they're working towards a goal and have an idea of what their role would be in the company. *Luke, Accountancy*

> General business awareness...is often lacking, what our business drives are and our markets and competitors, also a general understanding of how businesses make money, that sort of thing. *Ross, IT consultancy/support*

Writing skills

Many employers, particularly those recruiting from the computer sciences, emphasised the importance of written communication skills and complained of graduates' lack of ability in this area. Interestingly, one employer who recruited both Marketing and Computer Science graduates said that the latter were more likely to have poor writing ability, indicating that they did not take advantage of the literacy skills support on offer at their universities. Candidates with poorly spelled, ungrammatical or badly structured applications or CVs were unlikely to get an interview, because these skills were perceived as vital in the workplace:

> We get quite a lot of applications from international students and if English is your second or third language you're perhaps more likely to make mistakes. So it can be a problem, because

attention to detail and being able to write well and coherently are things we look for all through the process, on the online application and also at the last stage where there's a writing test. *Laura, Audit, tax and advisory*

The worse thing I can see that lets them down on the application is the spelling and grammar. If it's terribly spelt then it won't get any further. While verbal communication is important, equally our staff need to write emails and reports to clients and if they can't string a sentence together then it's going to reflect badly on us. That's one thing they really need get down before they go anywhere. *Ross, IT consultancy/support*

Quality not quantity

With regard to the types of ECAs that employers said that they would like to see more of, there was a general consensus that it was the quality rather than the quantity of ECAs that was important. Employers particularly emphasised the desirability of activities that were long term and showed a level of commitment, activities that involved some level of achievement or attainment and activities that involved roles or responsibility or leadership:

If you took on responsibility like a football or rugby captaincy or vice-captaincy role, you can talk about your team's achievements as a leading member of the group. *Hannah, Communications software*

The Duke of Edinburgh award is good because it shows long-term commitment and some level of achievement, because you can get a bronze, silver or gold award. *Abigail, Town council*

Underselling your activities

Employers also emphasised the importance of graduates selling themselves on the application and interview. They said that ECAs needed to be used specifically to demonstrate a candidate's key skills and competencies, and for this reason they needed to be clearly articulated in detail. Candidates who just listed their activities without further explanation, or those who were not comfortable talking about their interests at interview, were less able to demonstrate the relevance of their outside hobbies and interests to the job:

You usually find that they just list hobbies like reading, badminton, photography, without giving any detail. If they maybe said that 'I'm a keen badminton player and I'm thinking of setting up a local tournament', then I would be able to pick up on that. So it really depends on how much they make of it on their own activities as to how noticed it will be. *Hannah, Communications software*

They tend to fall down on not giving us enough detail, it's about selling yourself, but some will just put 'teamwork', without explaining their role in the team, they just say 'we achieved everything' and don't say what they brought to the team and how they made it succeed, so they could have just stood back and let everyone else do the work for all we know. *Alice, Internet digital marketing*

As illustrated above, these employers were generally in agreement about the key skills and competencies that they were seeking in a graduate employee. Cultural fit with the company appeared to be very important, with employers seeking sociable, outgoing and extroverted graduates who would fit in well with colleagues and communicate effectively as part of a team. An enthusiastic and lively attitude was also important, as were graduates who were motivated, committed and interested in their work. However, employers seemed to differ a great deal as to the types of ECAs they thought demonstrated these abilities and personal qualities. While some thought that general socialising was an important indicator of 'personality' and ability to 'network', others thought that voluntary work and positions on university councils and societies were more indicative of maturity, communication and leadership skills. A few employers seemed to be prejudiced against these voluntary and union-based activities, while still others thought that involvement in team sports was the best indicator of someone who would fit into the workplace. However, employers were generally agreed that activities involving leadership or responsibility, long-term commitment and achievement were the most impressive for demonstrating transferable skills for the workplace. They also emphasised the importance of graduates 'selling' their activities, by being aware of the skills they had taught them and using illustrative examples. This suggests that students would benefit from careers advice from their universities that helped them to do this. The fact that many employers found students to be lacking in this area also suggests that certain

students are perhaps less trained in the ability to market themselves and are not taking advantage of the careers support on offer at their universities.

Part Four – What does the research tell us and what should be done?

Section 6: Conclusions and recommendations

The research provides rich detail of the activities of students currently in higher education as well as the views of graduates and employers on the value of extra-curricular activities undertaken while studying. It also paints a detailed picture of the student experience in higher education in the UK. Taking students as a whole, the analysis of how students spend their time reflects a population of students whose focus is on sociability and who are using technology to enhance this sociability, which reflects other research (Frand, 2000); when you examine different student characteristics there are significant differences between what different student groups are doing with their time outside of the classroom.

The differences revealed between different students engagements in ECAs suggest there is no one student experience but many. The research suggests that there is a marked divide between students' activities in old and new universities. Some of these differences could have an impact on graduate outcomes, whether to employment or the class of degree students are able to obtain. Further work on this divide is recommended.

Younger students overall are more involved in university activities, whereas mature students are more involved in activities outside of the university such as family responsibilities. This distinction suggests that while young and mature students may sit in the same classroom, their view of their time in higher education is likely to be very different.

White students tend to engage in university clubs and societies for pleasure and personal development, while students from ethnic minority backgrounds are more focused on activities that they feel will give them an advantage in the workplace. The focus groups revealed a higher level of anxiety among ethnic minority students about gaining benefit from their time at university. They are more likely to have undertaken

vocationally orientated courses and felt engagement in activities beyond the classroom was needed to increase their chances of gaining good employment. These findings also relate to the old/new university divide. Old university students tend to be more involved in university activities related to the students' union such as clubs and societies, but students' unions are seen to be 'cliquey' and in many universities they tend to attract students who are politically motivated, which excludes some other students.

There are a number of groups of students who are not engaged in university activities, which co-relates with the categories often broadly defined as 'widening participation' students: working-class students, some ethnic minority students and mature students. This is for a variety of reasons, all of which 'disadvantage' students in obtaining what is considered to be the traditional student experience. These widening participation students spend more time studying, are more involved in their families, whether they are mature or not, and are involved in more paid part-time work, so unable to spend as much time at university.

There was a significant minority of students who were religious and who spent a lot of their time praying and being involved in activities related to their religion outside the university environment. There was also a significant divide between old and new universities and students' perception of religion. Many more students at the new university were religious and many more ethnic minority students were religious.

Universities value student engagement through participation in volunteering, being course representatives and other 'citizen-type' roles in the university. There are also some interesting results here. A small proportion of students are involved in these activities, and it is clear that only certain 'types' of students are involved in these activities; again those broadly classified as 'widening participation' students are less likely to be involved in these activities because of the commitments they tend to have outside the university. This has significant implications for 'representativeness' of the representation system in universities. It may be that some of the current well-meaning attempts by Government to involve students through groups like the

National Student Forum may only gather views of particular groups of students and not reflect the overall student body.

Most students are highly technologically literate, even mature students are increasingly making use of the internet, although slightly less than younger students. However, different student groups are using the internet and social networking for different reasons. Young White students tend to use the internet to stay in touch with friends and increase their sociability, while ethnic minority students use the internet for doing business and meeting new friends. The role of technology in bringing students together, keeping them in touch with others and the impact on their future lives is an area that requires further study. The focus in HE research in this area has largely been on the value of technology in the formal learning environment, but there is real scope for further work to be undertaken on social networking and the wider student experience.

Alumni from the 'class of 2001' who were interviewed expressed considerable support for extra-curricular activities at university, and although they did not necessarily see that these activities had an impact on their careers, many said that they felt that the friendships they made at universities did give them contacts and support once in employment. This is an example of the social capital (Field, 2000) that university life can offer students.

Alumni identified many of these friendships developing through extra-curricular activities, providing a mechanism for the growth of useful social networks. However, given the results of the research there is some question about who is actually able to access this important social capital, as it is clear that those students whose locus is not the university environment and are more focused on the community outside the university may not be able to make these connections. As many of these students can broadly be considered to be widening participation students we suggest that these students are being further disadvantaged even when succeeding in their studies.

In interviews with employers, grades were identified as the most significant factor in deciding who to employ. We have identified that there may be an effect on degree outcomes depending on the types of activities students undertake while at university. Equally employers valued sociable, outgoing and well-rounded graduates who would fit into the workplace. They differed in which ECAs would demonstrate this, but they felt that experience of leadership in activities was highly desirable. The findings of what different student groups were doing beyond the classroom suggest that certain groups may be able to demonstrate leadership experience more easily than others.

Some employers had strong, and negative, views of political engagement in students' unions, which students involved in these activities at university were concerned about. Overall employers felt that graduates did not know how to make the best of their experience in preparing for employment, and there are clearly lessons to be learned in universities in how students are prepared for the world of work. It was clear from the focus groups and interviews with students that they were not certain about how to use their experience to the best of their advantage in preparing CVs and in interviews. Some students were more confident about gaining good interesting employment after university, especially those who attended old universities. They were more likely to see term-time employment as a means of taking time out from studying or funding their social activities. Others were more anxious and concerned about their futures and the need to gain an edge in the job market. Many of these students were the first in their families to go to university and had no reference point to understand how to benefit from their wider experience.

The research suggests that a subtle but powerful disadvantage is prevalent in students' experiences of higher education. Different student groups are involved in very different activities outside of the classroom where they sit and share the same teaching and assessment. Beyond the classroom students are engaged in very different activities often dependent on their backgrounds and life trajectories. There is an overall divide between White middle-class students who attend old universities, who are strongly engaged in 'traditional' ECAs and who benefit from the intangible but valuable links these activities offer them. They are also more able to have a say in the running of their universities and increasingly in policy decisions at a national

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level. They are also likely to benefit from the social capital gained through the friendships developed at university, providing them with networks that can facilitate an easy movement into a successful graduate lifestyle. However, other students who are more rooted in their own communities and who attend new universities are equally active beyond the classroom, but the activities they participate in are less likely to bring them the social contacts and networks to move them easily into graduate employment. We do not wish to suggest that all students should have the same traditional experience; rather that society still has particular expectations of graduates that will continue to disadvantage certain groups. We would also argue that universities need to face up to the differences and examine ways of including students who are less able to be 'present' while they are studying.

The final part of this report sets out the recommendations from this study.

Recommendations

For universities: There is evidence from this research that engagement in extra-curricular activities at university is particularly valuable for students to feel a part of the university. It is clear that only particular groups of students are participating in university-based activities, and universities need to pay attention to this unfortunate divide in the students' experience.

For students' unions: From this research there are indications that students' unions are only attracting certain types of students, which may be putting off other students. Being able to present themselves as unions for all students is an important issue if they are to ensure that the whole student population is able to benefit from activities. There is also an issue about the notion of the students' union as a (perhaps old-fashioned) 'Political', with a capital 'P', entity, and unions should reflect on how to be more representative of the overall student body. This is 'political', but perhaps with a small 'p'.

For universities and students' unions: Work needs to be done to develop a broader base of experience for students who have busy lives outside of university and who are currently missing out on traditional extra-curricular activities, especially as these students tend to be 'widening participation' students. The importance of offering wider experience is highlighted by the importance of the networks students are able to develop at university, which develop their confidence, offer them extra opportunities (often unquantifiable) to gain employment and be seen to 'fit' the culture of the workplace.

Given the high usage of technologies by students and with the likelihood of an increase in use, universities and students' unions should ensure they are using the most popular technological tools for engaging with students. While there is a debate about using social networking sites for teaching purposes, using them for extra-curricular activities should not be in question and may benefit those groups who are less able to spend time on campus.

For curriculum leaders and teachers: As well as looking to broaden the experience provided to students in their courses, curriculum leaders should explicitly place value on the whole lives of their students to help them see how their different experiences can contribute to future employment. Attention should be paid to helping students articulate the learning they are gaining from the extra-curricular activities they are involved in and possibly accredit this learning.

For university student services such as 'jobshops' and careers services: Many students spend large amounts of time in paid employment while studying, especially students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Universities should seek out part-time employment opportunities that will benefit students in their future careers by providing examples of the experience and characteristics valued by employers.

Employers felt that graduates did not make the most of their experiences in presenting themselves for employment, further work with students to develop their CVs needs to be undertaken, perhaps more innovative approaches to teach students

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to develop their career opportunities should be sought to ensure all students benefit from such advice.

Further work needs to be undertaken with employers to see beyond the class of degree as the most important factor in deciding on employing graduates. The emphasis on a 'good' (1st and 2:1) degree is limiting. There are many other qualities that may be of more value in many jobs, and those in universities working with employers should engage in a debate with employers in exploring the range of qualities different students can bring to employment.

For policy makers and university leaders: It is clear that there are very different student populations in different universities. It is likely that different students may well feel 'comfortable' in different HE environments. However, it is also the case that students are experiencing very different types of student experiences. This research suggests that those students who are less represented overall in the HE student population, those broadly called 'widening participation' students, are not generally participating in the 'traditional' student experience. At one level this is completely understandable and acceptable, students are engaged in a wide range of activities outside the university, and perhaps university for these students is less engrossing and less important, rather it is more a means to an end than an experience in itself. However, if the argument developed in this research is valid, that involvement in university activities has significant benefits in developing confidence and a sense of belonging to the university, which impacts positively on outcomes and, perhaps more intangibly, provides useful opportunities for some but not others through developing social networks, then there are real questions about the differences in the student experience revealed in this study.

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