

# HERB

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Student employment: combining study and work

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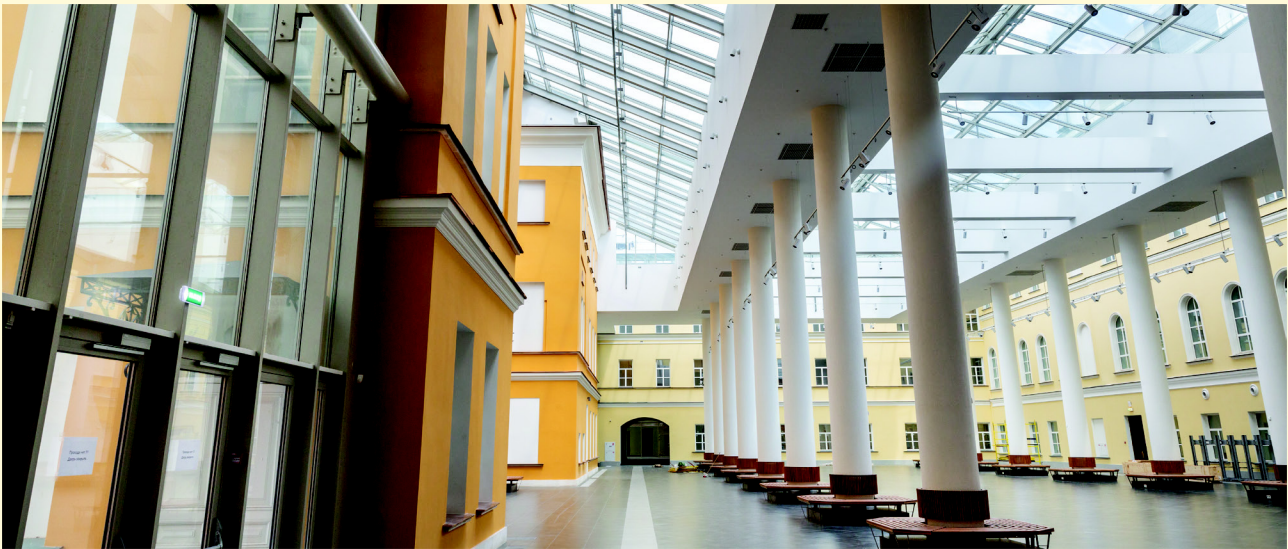
## Dear colleagues,

Student employment or combining study and work by university students is an important issue for the main stakeholders of higher education system, including universities, students, employers, educational authorities and households and the topic brings attention of the wider community of higher education researchers, education economists and sociologists.

The main purpose of our efforts is to create a picture of the incidence, motivation, educational and labour market outcomes of student employment in a region of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and CIS countries. The current issue brings together articles, expert opinions and overviews devoted to the issue of student employment in Russia, Belarus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine. The introductory part of the issue is devoted to an overview of the problem of student employment in the European Union and Russia. The next part presents analyses of the determinants and patterns of student employment, including a comparison of the motivations—finance and work experience—of combining of study and work. The following part highlights differences in student employment by level of education including vocational training, higher and doctoral education. The last part is devoted to the labour market outcomes of working while studying.

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## National Research University Higher School of Economics

National Research University Higher School of Economics is the largest center of socio-economic studies and one of the top-ranked higher education institutions in Eastern Europe. The University efficiently carries out fundamental and applied research projects in such fields as computer science, management, sociology, political science, philosophy, international relations, mathematics, Oriental studies, and journalism, which all come together on grounds of basic principles of modern economics. HSE professors and researchers contribute to the elaboration of social and economic reforms in Russia as experts. The University transmits up-to-date economic knowledge to the government, business community and civil society through system analysis and complex interdisciplinary research. Higher School of Economics incorporates

97 research centers and 32 international laboratories, which are involved in fundamental and applied research. Higher education studies are one of the University's key priorities. According to recent QS World University Ranking, HSE is now among the top 150 universities in the subject of "Education". This research field consolidates intellectual efforts of several research groups, whose work fully complies highest world standards. Experts in economics, sociology, psychology and management from Russia and other countries work together on comparative projects. The main research spheres include: analysis of global and Russian higher education system development, transformation of the academic profession, effective contract in higher education, developing educational standards and HEI evaluation models, etc.

## Center for Institutional Studies

The Center for Institutional Studies (CInSt) is one of HSE University's research centers. It focuses on fundamental and applied interdisciplinary research in the field of institutional analysis of the economics and sociology of science and higher education. CInSt is integrated into international higher education research networks and cooperates with foreign experts through joint comparative projects that cover the issues of higher education development and education policy. As part of our long-term cooperation with the Boston College Center for International Higher Education, CInSt has taken up the publication of the Russian version of the "International Higher Education" newsletter.

One of the main research areas of CInSt is the study of applicant and student strategies related to higher education and the link between education and the labour market. Our studies analyze the issues that applicants face during the admission process, the factors of student

success during their studies at universities, the issue of student employment and combining of study and work. We also study the expected and actual returns to education and labour market outcomes of university graduates depending on educational factors and strategies of school-to-work transition with particular attention to gender issues. Research on university graduates is conducted in collaboration with other research centers, including The Laboratory for Labour Market Studies at HSE University, Center for Research in Higher Education Policies of the University of Porto, and Ghent University.

The results of the research are published in leading educational journals, such as Higher Education, Higher Education Quarterly, Urban Education, International Journal of Educational Development, European Journal of Education, Journal of Education and Work, Journal of Higher and Further Education, Tertiary Education and Management and other outlets.

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# Student employment in Europe: An economic, financial and cultural phenomenon

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Student employment is a complex phenomenon. The proportion of working students varies considerably across countries in Europe: from 77% in the Netherlands to 24% in Serbia and Italy [1]. What explains such a variation, and what does it say about the learning and living environment of students in these countries? While we know about the profile of working students, the cross-country variation remains largely unexplained. In this brief paper, we highlight the main factors that contribute to student employment, and argue that a combination of economic, financial and cultural aspects leads to different employment patterns across Europe.

## Is student employment a problem?

Student employment is often presented as a problem. The critics see it as a signal of insufficient student support that diverts students' attention away from their core task—academic achievement. It is particularly a problem if students' socio-economic background determines whether they need to work, and thereby sacrifice their academic progress. There is some evidence to substantiate this concern, but the evidence is far from conclusive. Students from families with lower income and/or lower educational levels tend to work more [2], but not everywhere [3]. While working students seem to spend less time on their studies, there is little proof that this hurts their academic achievement [4].

Alternatively, massive student employment can be a signal of educational quality. If working many hours is reconcilable with full-time study, perhaps the study does not offer enough of a challenge. It can lead to a situation where students feel a need to work in order to distinguish themselves for better career opportunities [5]. It is remarkable that student employment differs considerably across different fields of study and across countries.

Student employment can also be seen neutrally, as a matter of fact. Students have always had side-jobs, and in the context of life-long learning there will be more and more working students entering higher education. The higher education system may need to adjust to the diverse needs of its increasingly heterogenous student body, instead of problematizing student employment. Regardless of the perspective, it is important to understand the reasons why students work, and how they combine work and studying most effectively.

## Financial factors

Financial arguments are usually the most prominent in explaining student employment. The more alternative resources students have at their disposal for covering their study and living costs, the less need there is to work, theoretically speaking. A large proportion of European students work for financial reasons, and they claim that they would not be able to afford to study without this income [1]. Cross-country differences, however, reveal interesting discrepancies. Student satisfaction with their material well-being varies significantly across countries (e.g. 4% of students are dissatisfied in Spain versus 35% in Austria), and it does not appear to be correlated with their material well-being in an objective sense [2].

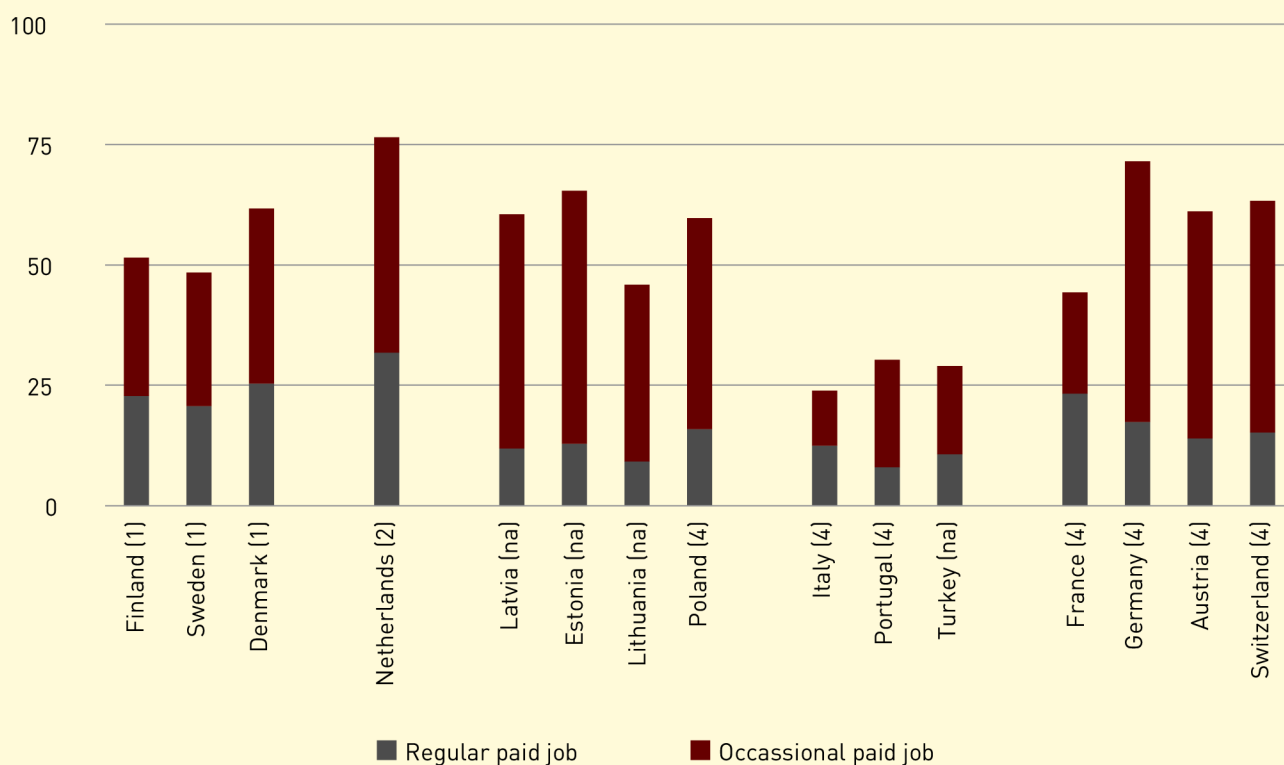
Country-level employment patterns do not seem to be related to the generosity of the student support system. An OECD [6] exercise divides countries into four groups based on their financial (support) system. In the first group are countries with no or low tuition fee and a generous student support system, mostly Scandinavian countries. Based on Eurostudent [1] data, these countries demonstrate a slightly below average employment rate, but they are far above Southern European countries (Italy, Portugal and Turkey) that according to the OECD have less developed student support systems (Figure 1). We see no significant difference between the Netherlands—a country of high tuition fees and a well-developed student support system—and Germany, which has a less developed student support system.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this. First, the financial needs of students are not only a matter of objective reality but also societal norms. Ehrenberg [7] shows that the increasing student debt in the US is related not only to increasing educational and living costs, but also with increasing students expectations of consumption benefits. In other words, the perception of financial needs is also normative. Secondly, student employment patterns are probably influenced by the labour market and the economic structure more generally, as demonstrated by regional similarities.

## Economic factors

Student employment decisions are likely to depend on access to work. Arguably, the more available employment opportunities are, and the better they are in terms of income and working conditions, the more likely students are to work. Periods of economic growth have been shown to boost student employment [8], providing a surplus of good work opportunities. Economic growth often creates demand for flexible work—either unskilled or skilled—that fits student workers particularly well [9]. European countries differ significantly in the rate of youth unemployment, and countries with high youth unemployment tend to demonstrate lower student employment rates. Countries differ greatly in the extent of part-time and flexible jobs. All these factors influence whether potential student-workers find a place in the labour market.

**Figure 1.** Regular and occasional student employment during a lecture period in selected European countries, 2018 (% of all students).



*Data source:* Eurostudent [1], OECD [6]. Note: the number behind the country name shows a classification in OECD (2014): 1=no/low tuition fee + a well developed student support; 2=high tuition fee + well-developed student support; 4=low tuition fee + less developed student support.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the data. Students are not only responding to their individual financial needs, but also to the opportunities that the economic context offers to them. Secondly, European countries have gone through economic fluctuations over the past 15 years, but student employment rates—although following the economic trends—remain stable relative to each other.

### Career perspectives

Students work not only for financial reasons. More than half of the working students report that they work in order to get experience and/or to distinguish themselves in the labour market [1]. It can be argued that due to the increasing number of graduates in most countries, students need additional credentials to promote themselves in the market, either through work experience or through other extra-curricular activities. In more egalitarian higher education systems the need to stand out may be even stronger than in highly selective and differentiated higher education systems [5]. In all countries, older students are more likely to work than younger students [1], indicating increasing financial independence from parents, but also, perhaps, an approaching career decision. The link between student employment and other (extra-)curricular activities is subject for future research.

### Conclusion

Working students have been studied thoroughly: consistently across countries they tend to be older, at a higher level of studies, (slightly) more often first-generation students, and in financial need. However, these same factors fail to explain the large cross-country variation in employment patterns. While financial and economic considerations matter, student employment seems to be also a cultural phenomenon. It is linked to norms of what is perceived as a ‘normal’ student standard of living, a ‘normal’ student job and a ‘normal’ student lifestyle in terms of study and work. These norms and formal institutions are likely to reinforce each other: labour market expectations adjust to the supply of student workers and vice versa, expectations of educational engagement and student lifestyle adjust themselves to working patterns. Student employment thus remains a complex mix of financial and economic factors, but also cultural factors, which reinforce existing patterns.

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## Student employment in Russia: incidence, motivation and labour market outcomes

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During last two decades there has been a rapid massification of higher education in Russia, mainly due to the growth of private universities, and programs in business, economics, law and social sciences. Higher education enrollment rose from 30% of high school graduates in late 1980s to 60–70% in 2018. This massive expansion of higher education has led to a differentiation of higher ed-

ucation by quality and a decrease in the significance of a university degree as a signal on graduate abilities in the labour market. Employers hiring recent university graduates face uncertainty about their productivity and since a degree is no longer a signal of abilities due to the relatively low average standards of education. Other factors, such as work experience, have become important signals of graduate abilities. The mismatch of educational programs to labour market requirements and the importance of practical and soft skills for employment also create demand for work experience before graduation. From the viewpoint of employers, the most employable graduates are those with work experience or/and a degree from a leading university. Consequently, since work experience accumulated during studies has become an important comparative advantage in the labour market and due to the relatively low workload during studies, Russian higher education students actively combine study and work. This article considers the incidence, motivation and determinants of student employment while studying and the educational and labour market outcomes of student employment.

### Incidence and patterns of student employment while studying

Combining study and work in Russia is a very wide-spread phenomenon. According to the data of a Russian Federal Statistics nation-wide survey of university graduates [1], around 40% of university students in 2010–2015 combined study and work. A survey of university students, carried out by Ministry of Education and Science of Russian Federation and HSE University (MEMO survey), [2] indicated that during the period 2010–2018 the share of students who combined study and work in Russia lay between 47 and 54%, with increases in periods of economic growth or recovery and declines during recessions.

The distinctive feature of student employment in Russia is that unlike in many European countries, students in Russia tend to combine studies with qualified jobs related to their specialization and by this complement their formal education with practical skills relevant for the labour market. Graduates of the most selective universities combined study and work even more often than students from less selective or regional universities mainly due to the fact that selective universities appear in most developed areas with developed labour markets with plenty of jobs including distant and part-time. According to an HSE University graduate survey [3], around 80% of students had obtained work experience during their studies.

The incidence of student employment while studying differs considerably by degree: among BA and Specialist students, around 47% combined study and work and among MA students around 75%. On average, students dedicated 26 hours per week to paid work, which is 2/3 of average working week. Master's students worked even more: around 30 hours a week. The majority of students start their employment in the 3rd year of their studies.



## Motivation and determinants of student employment

There are two main motivations for student employment: financial and labour market motivations (to obtain work experience, job search or job matching motivation). Current research shows that in West European countries and the US, the main motivation for student employment is financial. The massification of higher education contributed to the enrollment of students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, who need to work to support families, maintain living standards or even pay tuition fees. In the Western world, student employment while studying is more of a negative signal for employers as it indicates that student is likely to represent low-income family and did not dedicate time enough to his/her studies.

On the contrary, in the countries of Eastern Europe and Russia a significant motivation of student employment while studying is related to the accumulation of work experience, which is valued by employers after graduation. That is why Russian students tend to combine studies with qualified jobs related to their field of study and many of them continue this particular job after graduation. According to a Russian student survey (MEMO), labour market motivation is important for 70% of students. By obtaining work experience, students may signal their ambitions and abilities to potential employers and accumulate practical and soft skills. As a result, the specific form of gradual school-to-work transition (studying, then combining study and work, then working) is very common in Russia. Research on patterns of student employment in Russia shows that students of more selective universities are more likely to combine study and work but tend to work less intensively compared to students from other universities.

## Educational and labour market outcomes of student employment

Empirical studies on the educational outcomes of student employment in Russia have not found a significant impact of student employment on academic achievement, except for PhD students. This can be explained by the relatively low workload, the fact that students start to combine studies and work in their 3rd year, after the majority of the most difficult courses have been passed, and by the fact that students tend to combine studies with part-time jobs. Study in many MA programs is designed to let students combine studies even with full-time jobs (low educational workload, evening classes).

Studies on labour market outcomes of student employment shows that there is a significant wage premium for combining study and work for recent university graduates. Students who gained work experience during their studies earn 26–40% more than those who did not. There is also evidence that the intensity of student employment is positively correlated with the early-career wages of graduates.

This analysis shows that student employment does not seem to have significant short-term negative consequences but is a way for students and employers to adjust to the

inefficiency of the educational system and its relatively low standards of quality and incoherence to the requirements of the labour market. By combining study and part-time work students obtain soft skills and the knowledge necessary for performing their jobs; employers receive better trained graduates, who are more familiar with labour market requirements, and universities receive more students who have lower opportunity costs as they can combine work and studies. However, this steady state is not optimal as it leads to extensive public and private monetary and non-monetary educational spending and even if it does not affect academic achievement, it is likely to affect the quality of education and the accumulation of human capital, and by this may have negative consequences in the long-run and may need to be improved.

## Summary

More than half of Russian university students combine study and work and dedicate on average 2/3 of their working week to paid work. A significant motivation for employment while studying, in addition to financial motivation, is the necessity to obtain work experience, which is valued by employers as an additional signal of the abilities of university graduates and their soft skills. Student employment does not considerably affect academic achievement due to the relatively low educational workload and the limited intensity of student employment. There is a significant and large positive effect of student employment on salaries of graduates in the early stages of their careers.

## Notes

[1] Survey of employability of tertiary education graduates – [https://rosstat.gov.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/population/trud/itog\\_trudoustr/index.html](https://rosstat.gov.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/trud/itog_trudoustr/index.html)

[2] Monitoring of Education Markets and Organizations – <https://memo.hse.ru/>

[3] Center for Institutional Research. - [https://cim.hse.ru/en/alumnisurvey\\_en](https://cim.hse.ru/en/alumnisurvey_en)

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## Working or learning? The Cases of Hungary, Romania, Ukraine, Slovakia and Serbia

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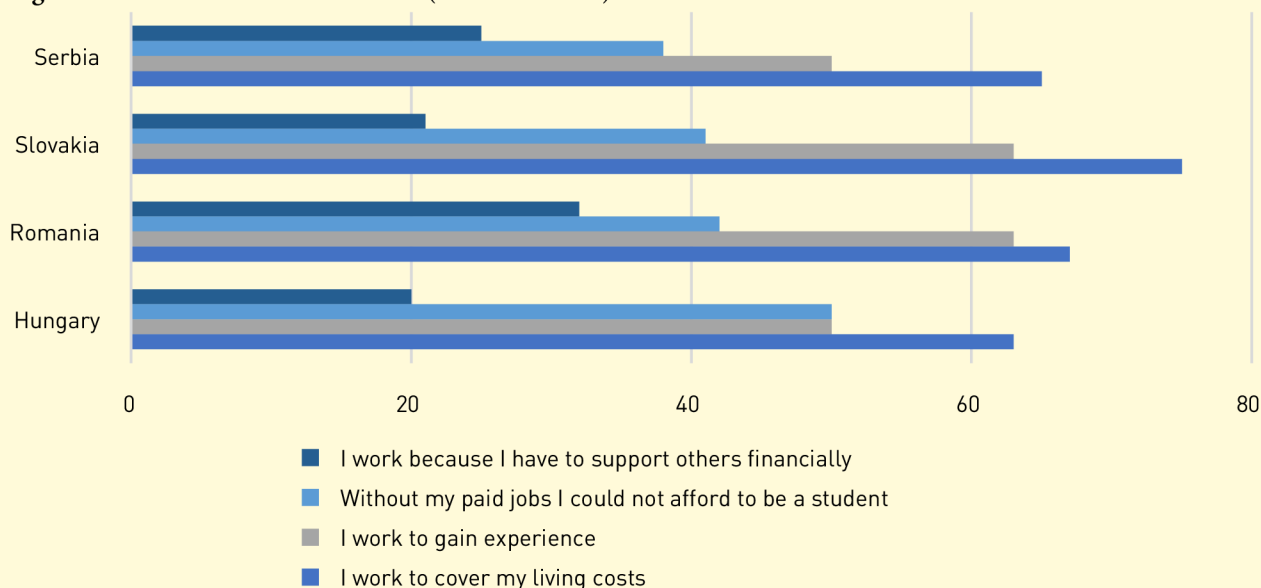
## Introduction

Education research has been studying student employment for several decades. Student employment found its way to university campuses as a result of the expansion of higher education around the turn of the millennium, partly because the expansion opened up higher education to low socio-economic-status students, who needed to earn

money, and partly because, in addition to traditional theoretical training, practical training also gained ground. As working students have diverse sociocultural backgrounds, family subcultures, experiences and visions for the future, their transition to work also shows a varied pattern [1]. The frequency and motives of student employment correlate with students' socio-economic status [1,2,3]. Based on students' sociocultural backgrounds it can be assumed that student work increases social inequality. The number of working students from less favourable socio-cultural backgrounds (e.g. working class) is higher. Considering that they work in low-paid jobs requiring no qualifications, it seems they are even more threatened by marginalization [4]. The same applies to motivation: the more highly qualified a student's background, the more likely they are to be motivated by professional ambitions rather than by circumstances [2]. In the Balkan countries, students are primarily motivated by the fact that they could not afford to go to university without paid work, by gaining work experience and by the need to support others. At least 60% of students work primarily in order to cover their everyday expenses.

Gaining work experience motivates Slovakian and Romanian students (63%) more than their Serbian and Hungarian peers (49–50%). While in Slovakia, Hungary and Serbia gaining work experience is the chief motivation among Master's students, in Romania both Bachelor's and Master students are motivated by this [2].

**Figure 1.** Students' motivation to work (Eurostudent VI)



Data source: Eurostudent VI [2], Student motivation to work. Note: Share of all working students\* for whom the following reasons to work applies (%), authors calculations

## Student employment in the eastern region of the European Higher Education Area

PERSIST was conducted in the eastern region of the European Higher Education Area, in higher education institutions of Eastern Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia [5]. The final number of the Hungarian sample [6]

was 934, it was representative for faculties, fields of study and forms of financing; quota sampling was used. In the institutions outside Hungary [7] probability sampling was used; students were contacted by group in their courses, where the entire population was questioned. The sample number outside Hungary was 1,381. The sample included second-year full-time BA and BSc students and second or

third-year students from undivided majors [8]. Based on our quantitative results, student employment was most often performed by Slovak students (30.9%), and every fifth Hungarian student also worked every week. In Slovakia and

Hungary almost every third respondent worked every summer. Monthly frequency is most common among Ukrainian and Hungarian students. The number of those who never work is the greatest in Romania, Serbia and Ukraine.

**Table 1.** Frequency of student employment by country (percentage,  $p = 0.000$ ).

	Hungary	Romania	Ukraine	Slovakia	Serbia	$\chi^2$	N
Never	38.8	69.3	56.3	29.3	66.7	205.818	2,257
Every year	28.2	14.5	19.7	29.3	17.2		
Every month	13.4	5.9	14.7	10.6	4.3		
Every week	19.8	10.4	9.3	30.9	11.8		

*Data source:* PERSIST 2019. Note: Underlined values indicate that this cell has a much larger value than it could be expected in a random layout.

We also examined the extent to which paid work was related to the students' studies. Although Ukrainian students have a smaller share of paid work, most of those work in their field of study (10.1%). The reason for this is economic emigration; a prolonged economic recession pushed a significant proportion of the population to work abroad (mostly in Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary). As a result, labour shortages in many cases are reduced by the employment of students who have not completed their studies. Research has also shown that working students may request flexible class attendance in Ukraine. A fifth of Hungarian students have study-related jobs [1]. The proportion of Hungarian students whose work is not related to their studies is the highest (78.6%). Since the establishment of student job centres in Hungary, the majority of students have been looking for work through these cooperatives, but these centres mainly offer typical student work that is rarely related to studies.

## Motivation

Students from different regions have different work values, which are rooted in their different cultural and economic backgrounds. Hungarian and Slovakian students have material-instrumental work values, whereas students from less prosperous regions tend to do voluntary work [9]. The most conspicuous difference between the eastern and western regions of Europe is the role and status of parents. In Eastern Europe, parents take a more active part in their children's lives and support them in their studies, and therefore students are less concerned about finances as it is considered the parents' responsibility [3]. We found significant differences in what motivates students from countries with different levels of economic development to do paid work. Building new relationships, networking and earning for leisure activities were the most common among Slovak students (2.69 and 2.12 points, a scale ranging from 1 to 4 points, the higher the score, the more consistency). The latter is the most important motivation for Hungarian students as is covering the costs of living (2.78 points). Paid work is the most important source of income for students in Ukraine and Romania (2.79 points). Roma-

nian and Serbian students worked to gain work experience (2.73 and 2.7 points). Among other reasons, most often cited by Ukrainian students, were to lay the foundation for their career, to achieve financial independence from their parents, and to earn money for summer vacations.

## Conclusion

The motivations for student employment differ. Hungarian and Slovakian students are motivated by earning for leisure activities, while for Ukrainian, Romanian and Serbian students these are mainly material factors, the opportunity to earn for themselves and their families, that is, as a means of achieving material well-being. The differences are mainly due to the financial situation, as students in Hungary and Slovakia are in a better financial situation than students in other countries based on subjective and objective financial indicators. As a result, they are less dependent on income from employment. Study-related work is atypical, regardless of the country. Although our results show that Ukrainian students work less regularly, the work is more related to their studies, which can be explained by emigration and the subsequent labour shortage.

While study-related work has a proven positive effect, non-study-related work can have negative consequences. Student employment reduces the time spent on studying and prevents them from becoming embedded in the university environment, while working students are characterized by a narrower network of institutional relationships. Our research has also shown that students' professional plans are directed towards external labour migration, which will negatively affect the economic development of the regions due to the loss of prospective members of the workforce.

## References and notes

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[5] The research project no. 123847 was financed by the K17 programme through funding from the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund

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[7] The Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, University of Oradea, Emanuel University in Oradea, Partium Christian University, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (Romania), Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Janos Selye University (Slovakia), University of Novi Sad, Novi Sad and Hungarian Teaching Language Teacher Training Faculty, Subotica (Serbia), Uzhhorod National University, Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute, Mukachevo State University, Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical University, Odessa National Polytechnic University (Ukraine)

[8] In courses with a low number of students, senior students were included in the sample.

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## Determinants of Student Employment in Poland

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Combining full-time studies with work is a controversial phenomenon that is explored in many countries. It is very popular in Poland for various reasons, including the conditions within the higher education system.

Higher education in Poland

Higher education in Poland is organized accordingly to the Bologna process. Students can pursue education at public or private universities. They can study in full-time programs (weekdays) or part-time programs (weekends or evenings). In Poland, full-time programs offered by public

universities are free of charge (the exception are usually English language programs). Payment for studies applies to all students in non-public higher education institutions (HEI) and in part-time programs at public universities. Part-time programs are by definition programs for working people. According to data from the Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland 2019, in the 2018–2019 academic year there were 392 HEI in Poland, with 1.23M million students. The majority (66%) studied in full-time programs, but the proportion of students in part-time programs (34%) was relatively high compared to other countries according to Eurostudent VI 2016–2018 [1]. In the 2018–2019 academic year, 73% of students studied at public universities, while 58% studied in public HEI full-time programs, i.e. non-fee-paying studies, so it can be concluded that the majority of students in Poland are in studies which are generally accessible. Admissions are based on the results of a matriculation examination. Students bear other costs related to their studies: travel, rent, etc. A relatively small percentage (18.5%) of students, received scholarships including scholarships for the best students and social grants [2].

Humanities (including education, arts, languages) and socio-economic studies (relatively less-time consuming), are very popular in Poland. Almost half of students choose such studies. Young people usually start their studies at the age of 19 or 20 (if they are graduates of a technical school). The weakness of Polish higher education is the low share of internships in study programs. For example, a full-time student at an economics HEI has a compulsory internship only during the bachelor's degree program, of at least 120 hours, which is to be completed in inter-semester breaks. Paid work can be counted as an internship. There are no official statistics on this subject, but various studies show that about half of full-time students in Poland are in paid employment.

### Why do full-time students in Poland work?

There are four categories of reasons to work while studying in Eastern European countries [3]: 1) financial, 2) favorable labor demand, 3) a change in the nature of studies, which became more available for representatives of different social groups, including those less affluent, combined with more flexible studying conditions, e.g. fewer hours spent at university 4) the need to gain professional experience and build social networks. In Eastern European countries students often work to show their abilities and ambition due to the relatively low level of academic standards and the decreasing importance of degrees caused by the massification of higher education.

We suggest all of the above reasons are valid in Poland. We designed and conducted research on paid student work to confirm this hypothesis. The survey was an anonymous questionnaire and it covered all first-year students of a full-time master's degree program in economics at the Faculty of Economics, the University of Economics in Katowice in 2014–2017 (499 students: 2014—124, 2015—192, 2016—116; 2017—68; the average age was approximately 23).

They were students who had already obtained a bachelor's degree and who were about 1.5 years away from graduation and entering the labor market. In the research period, 52% of students worked in 2014, 49% in 2015, 54% in 2016, and 72% of students worked in 2017. The results showed that the main reasons for working were financial (45% of working students, four-year average) or financial combined with the desire to gain professional experience (38%). The level of remuneration was of major importance when choosing a workplace (43%), but the importance of acquiring new competences grew in the last year of survey. A small percentage of students planned to continue working in the same place after graduation (10.5%). More than half of the students who were not working were going to look for a job [4]. The possibility of combining studies and work depends not only on the cost of studying but also on how time-consuming study programs are. For example, economics is relatively less time-consuming than other programs and has a small proportion of laboratory classes. Universities often organize classes so as to reduce the costs and time allocated to commuting and, as a result, they schedule classes only 3 or 4 days a week. The remaining days (including weekends) can be devoted to work. Additionally, participation in lectures is usually optional (only seminars are mandatory). Employers willingly hire students on the basis of flexible contracts. The problem is, however, the frequent incompatibility of the type of work performed with the field of study. Work allows students to acquire general social competences, but rarely professional ones.

### Student employment during a pandemic COVID-19—instead of conclusions

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in the second quarter of 2020 the level of economic activity dropped. GDP in Poland decreased by 8.9% compared to the same period the previous year. The number of employed decreased slightly, but paid employment was lost mainly by those working on the basis of flexible, fixed-term contracts, beyond the statistics. All HEI in Poland have switched to online education. Students have more free time (they did not spend time commuting, working in the library, youth events, trips, etc.), but there are fewer job opportunities. The global student surveys conducted in May–June 2020 by CovidSocLab [5] showed that in Poland 11% of the surveyed students lost their job permanently, 18% temporarily, 11% had their salary reduced, and only 20% continued to work as before. Judging from these statistics, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to change the patterns of student employment.

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## Combining study and work in Belarus: the effects of state job assignment

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This paper discusses the Belarusian practice of student employment taking into account the state assignment of work to graduates.

### State regulation of the first workplace

Higher education in Belarus has a specific feature: there is a state regulation mandating the first workplace for graduates whose study was state funded. Currently, just under 45% of all students do not pay for their education, therefore their first job is according to the state assignment. Students do not like this rule because the state jobs are less paid than jobs in the private sector. In 2015, when Belarus joined the Bologna process, the country promised to follow Bologna principles, and the rejection of mandatory work placement was one of the main requirements of the Bologna system. However, this did not happen, and remains a problem for thousands of young graduates who want to make their own decisions about their place of work. This feature of the Soviet period, restored in 1997, is viewed by the state as the students working off their higher education and an easy way to fill unattractive (although necessary) workplaces.

Overall, student attitudes to labor employment are formed under the contradictory influence of state social policy, on the one hand, and their personal interests constructed by mass media and market ideology, on the other. The state

provides the first workplace for graduates i.e. guarantees them employment. The second factor, individual interests and the media, stimulates expectations of a high quality of life and a well-paid job from the beginning of their employment.

According to previous research, some students agree to take the state job assignment, either following traditional work values or not being able to avoid a state workplace. We selected three groups of students. The first group are those enrolled in studies on the recommendations of state enterprises and institutions and receive scholarships from them. In accordance with the law, such specialists must work for five years. The second group are those whose study is state funded and who are obliged to work in the state job assignment for two years. The third group are those who pay for their study but can ask for a state assignment, if they do not want to, or cannot find a job.

#### How to Avoid a State Work Assignment

Most state-funded students try to avoid the state assigned workplace because they want to find a job on their own. They use several strategies for this. A popular strategy is to find a job themselves and provide an official request from this organization for their placement. This request is welcomed by the leadership of universities, if it is sent from government organizations that correspond to the student's profession. It also requires a guarantee from this organization that the graduate will work for two years. Employers do not appreciate this mechanism because they have to provide benefits to the young professionals. During the last few years students have been allowed to work in the private sector if the job corresponds to the student's area of study. Students have to find a potential employer and be employed there before they graduate, which means the students need to work in parallel to their studies. Otherwise it will be difficult to demonstrate their professional qualities and competences for the future employer who usually need young workers with some experience.

According to research data, around one third of the students in Belarus have a job. The question is whether these students differ from the rest in their value orientations, gender, or area of studies (technical, natural science and social).

#### National Case Study

We have been researching student value orientations, including labor attitudes, for several years [1]. However, only in 2016 did our survey include the questions necessary for analysing student motivation for employment during their study, their expectations regarding their future work and the qualities that will be in demand in the workplace. The national sample included ten universities that represent three major areas of study (technical, natural science and social). The proportion of males and females corresponded to the national division of students. The initial sample consisted of more than 450 students; for our analysis of students' attitudes to their future work, we selected only 3rd and 4th year students who are concerned about their future employment. Our final sample included 275 students.

Our study revealed that 40% of senior students are not looking for a job, 30% are combining study and work, another 30% are looking for work. A student's labor status is not statistically related to the course of study, gender or area of study. Differences between groups in academic achievements are also not statistically significant. The major difference between those who have a job and those who do not is the conditions of study (state-funded or private). Motivations to work include the desire to find a good workplace (and avoid the state job assignment) and to get work experience. Some students mentioned the need to earn money for living expenses.

There are no differences in work expectations between those who are already employed and those who are not: 67% of those who are already working and 60% of those who are not looking for work said that they want to work in their specialty. These results are in line with the nationwide survey of Belarusian youth about workplace criteria.

#### Conclusion

The state job assignment cannot prevent students from looking for employment in accordance with their interests and education and which pays high salaries. Instead, it stimulates students to work and study in parallel. Students who are already working (about 30%) rely on themselves for finding employment. Therefore, student employment is the best strategy for bypassing the state work assignment and a way to gain work experience.

#### Notes

[1] The data are in the archive of the Department of Sociology, Belarusian State University

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## Student work, competencies and employment: a case study of Slovenia

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#### Student work and controversies

The employment status of Slovenian students during the academic year is diverse: they either do not work (42%), engage in full-time employment (7%), engage in other contractual employments (5%), or engage in student work (46%) [1]. The latter is temporary or occasional work, flexible enough to be combined with the study calendar and

limited only to students enrolled in secondary and tertiary education. In contrast to other types of work in Slovenia, student work is paid by the hour, and provided by student work agencies, which ensures some level of security. It is, therefore, widespread; approximately 60% of Slovenian students do at least one hour of student work per year (with the average being 8.3 hours per week). Student work represents about 3% of the national labour market in work hours, and is the focus of this article.

A number of papers present student work as mainly low paid, menial, precarious work in sectors with low added value. Šušteršič [2] offers an overview of the student work market and divides it into manual labour (22%), other non-complex labour (50%), and complex professional labour (28%). He claims that student work shares segments of the labour market with unqualified workers and young graduates, and further advocates that student work as such cannot provide the competencies needed for improving the employability of students.

However, it has been proven that student work plays a great role in graduate employability. It represents a stepping stone, as more than 50% of working students find full time employment after graduation with the same employer for whom they worked as students [3]. When compared to non-working students, students who combine study and work find more stable and better paid employment after graduation [4].

Regretfully, since definitive data is insufficient, only estimated statistics are available. These estimates show that about 35% of students doing student work are employed as service and sales workers (ISCO 5), and about 20% as clerical support workers (ISCO 4), 15% of students work either as technicians and associate professionals (ISCO 3) or elementary workers (ISCO 9). These categories include work in food and drink services and administration, where around 20% of students find employment in each of the sub-categories respectively. These types of work generally do not complement the study programme and simply cannot improve graduate employability to the degree shown by Bartolj. Bridging the gap between these seemingly contradictory results was the topic of the research on competencies gained through student work [5].

## Student work and competencies

Researchers have divided the student labour market into 19 categories and 99 subcategories of work, with students and employers estimating the development of key transversal competencies by engaging in different fields of student work. With further measurement and taking into consideration expected and actual competencies of graduates, an estimation of the development of such competencies in formal higher education was made.

The decision to focus on transversal competencies was deliberate. Since the majority of students work in fields not directly linked to their educational programme, the development of other competencies needed in the labour market is crucial.

Practical education (internships, traineeships, or other work placements) contributed the most to the development of competencies, followed by formal higher education and student work. Since practical education is almost non-existent in university education (in which 60% of Slovenian post-secondary students are enrolled), the importance of formal education and student work is highlighted.

When comparing data on the actual competencies of graduates and the degree of the development of these competencies through student work, we concluded that formal higher education is still more important in developing competencies than student work. Competencies such as communication in a foreign language, written communication, IT literacy, searching for and interpreting information, mathematical literacy, and analytical thinking and problem solving are developed more in formal education. However, competencies such as expert behaviour, adaptability, manual skills, teamwork and cooperation, and customer orientation are developed more through student work.

Employers expect team work and cooperation, adaptability, oral communication, and IT literacy to be the competencies graduates should have developed most before entering the labour market.

Competencies which are developed the most by student work are team work and cooperation, adaptability, oral communication, and customer orientation.

These competencies are obviously not developed equally in different types of student work. Working in the fields of education, sports, organizational and project work, and food and drink services help develop the most important competencies in the labour market.

It is also important to understand that there are different degrees of professionalism in different study programmes. Based on Eurostudent VI [6] data, studying natural sciences, ICT, agriculture, and health and welfare takes on average more than 40 hours per week, while these students work on average 10 hours per week. This results in a more direct career path, starting with enrolment in a study programme. Students studying social sciences, business, and services need around 30 hours per week for studying and subsequently work around 20 hours per week, which makes student work more important in developing competencies and career paths.

## Conclusion

Considering, on the one hand, the intensity of study in different study programmes and the competencies developed in formal education and, on the other, student work, tertiary education needs to be understood in a broader perspective when exploring graduate employability. This includes the students' commitment to achieve the needed ECTS points as well as creating opportunities to develop competencies outside higher education institutions. Graduate employability does not depend only on knowledge and skills gained within the study programme, but also competencies developed through voluntary or paid work,

hobbies, interests, non-formal education, etc. Even if not directly complementary to the study programme, these activities are complementary to any formal education when thinking in terms of employability, career orientation and career building.

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## Drivers of Student Employment in Kazakhstan

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Socio-economic factors, structural issues within job markets and changing modes of education have been key drivers for combining work and study over the past few decades. Similar to global trends, Kazakhstan continues to experience growth in university student employment. While official statistics are unavailable, a survey of 4,000 students by HeadHunter Group in 2013, showed that 67% of Kazakh students were employed while studying at university [1]. In 2016, 163,000 students registered for part-time employment on HeadHunter – the most prominent job search website in Kazakhstan. Research is required to better understand the impact of this trend on educational outcomes and distributional impacts, particularly for women and households in rural communities.

## Drivers of student employment

Four factors are driving growth in student employment in Kazakhstan: (1) increasing tuition fees, (2) competition in the job market (3) the introduction of distance education and blended learning programs and (4) an increase in part-time job availability.

### Increasing tuitions fees

While the government continues to offer state scholarships, 70% of students pay tuition fees. Increases in tuition fees has led to inequalities in access to education, particularly for rural households who cannot afford university fees for their children unless without the contribution of a state grant. In 2019, 142,400 students at Kazakhstani universities did not complete their degree requirements, and for 20% of them it was due to financial difficulties [2]. The rapid increase in tuition fees has forced students to take on part-time employment to support their parents and ease the burden of financial constraints.

### Competition in the job market

Fierce competition for jobs is creating tremendous pressure on students, placing greater emphasis on their knowledge and skill development, and in differentiating themselves from others in the job market. Combined work and study has been a key avenue for many students to acquire the skills and attributes required in the job market. With significant investments made in education through various initiatives [3], over the last three decades, the pool of talented graduates has been increasing and leading to an oversupply of university graduates—leaving some graduates unemployed and others in jobs not related to their skills or educational background. The mismatch between the supply and demand of graduates has resulted in a situation where employers are raising the bar for jobs that decades ago did not require higher education. To ease the hiring process, employers often prioritise candidates with work experience relative to someone possessing only university credentials [4, 5]. Work experience is increasingly valued and this is one way through which recent graduates can differentiate themselves from others. Therefore, students start seeking employment at an undergraduate level to learn practical skills, gain experience, and to develop a professional network. Hence, those students who integrate work and studies have better employment opportunities [5].

### Distance education

The expansion of distance and blended-learning degrees, and access to the internet has been another driver of students combining work and study. Distance education and blended-learning programs have made education more affordable and accessible, particularly for individuals who are unable to enroll in full-time programs because of an inability to cover the cost of full-time university education or the need to earn money to support a family. Such programs have enabled students to pursue university education without quitting their jobs. These programs have made education more accessible for students with special



needs and mothers with small children who may have otherwise not considered pursuing a university degree.

The COVID 19 pandemic in Kazakhstan has pushed universities to switch to distance education or blended learning. Unfortunately, not all universities have the capacities and resources to support online teaching and learning. This has led to concerns about inequity in access to the online provision of education, particularly for faculty and students residing in remote areas where internet connectivity remains poor [6]. It may have also resulted in a disadvantage for students in rural regions in combining work and study. One significant government response has been investment in distance education through training and improved access to technological resources.

### **Part-time jobs**

An increase in part-time jobs has also been a driver for student employment in Kazakhstan. Better access to the internet and technology is enabling students to take on paid work while studying without traveling a great distance. More employers are now offering part-time jobs based on service contracts, helping employers to avoid paying for employee insurance, sick leave or annual leave.

### **Type of students combining work and study**

Students who combine work and study are mainly those from low-income households [7] who have to earn a living and provide financial support to their families [8]. Among those who combine work and study, many are self-funded students [5, 8], who come from other cities and have to live far from their families and cover the cost of accommodation and living expenses [8]. However, there are also students who combine work and study for professional motives such as gaining work experience, developing practical skills, and building a professional network for future employment.

### **Challenges of student employment**

Despite the increase in student employment, students in Kazakhstan face a number of challenges in combining work and study. Female students, particularly those who have small children, face tremendous pressure to combine work and study due to social and cultural norms surrounding household chores, child rearing and care. Similar to other Central Asian countries, women are the ones who are expected to manage household chores such as cooking and cleaning, grocery shopping—irrespective whether they work. Therefore, female students who combine work and study, experience a triple challenge: juggling work, study, and household chores. Although female students are known to be high achievers in Kazakhstan both at school and university, lack of support for female students (at home and in the workplace) combining work and study can adversely affect the quality of their education and their emotional wellbeing.

Students combining work and study, especially those through distance education or blended-learning programs, feel the lack of face-to-face interactions with their

instructors and fellow students whereas those who have chosen blended learning as a mode of instruction report being 'isolated' from their peers [9]. Within such a program, the dependency on computer, the internet and other technologies against the backdrop of unequal access to the technologies and IT literacy makes the learning process more challenging. For these reasons, not everyone can combine work and study, particularly individuals in rural areas or those from socio-economic backgrounds who do not have access to the required resources.

### **Concluding thoughts**

The number of students balancing work and studies, either to earn a living or enhance employability, is likely to increase in Kazakhstan in the coming years. However, in the current economic situation, job cuts and freezes on hiring in Kazakhstan and globally, students who counted on combining work and study are likely to struggle financially.

The increase in student employment suggests that there is a greater need for higher education institutions to reconsider traditional ways of providing education and consider programs and teaching approaches that enable and engage working students in their academic life more effectively. Moreover, universities need to establish and strengthen links with industry to help students who seek part-time employment to find a job in fields related to their area of specialisation. Most importantly, and in areas not just related to combining study and work, greater support is required for female students with families and children to access opportunities at universities and in their workplaces.

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## Work and studies in Finland during COVID-19

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More than half of Finnish university students work during the academic year, and even more do so during the summer break [1]. The importance of work in Finnish student life raises important questions about what happens when

many job opportunities disappear. This, for example, happened in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic caused a reduction in economic activity. In Finland, the number of new job vacancies decreased and unemployment increased especially among young people [2]. In this article, we draw on our own experiences, on an expert interview, and on national register data to show how under appropriate student finance schemes, universities can mitigate student unemployment risk and foster study progress even at times of great societal uncertainty.

### Why work?

Even though most Finnish university students have been working already prior to their studies, they also work during their studies in order to gain further labor market experience [3]. Using Finnish data, Häkkinen [4] shows that working while studying causes better labor market outcomes immediately after graduation. This is however something of a double-edged sword. Time spent working is typically time that cannot be spent studying, and working while studying thus delays graduation itself, resulting in a zero net labor market benefit to students.

A second reason why students work is to finance living expenses. At first glance, it is not clear that this would be necessary in Finland as Finnish university students receive government financial support during their studies, including student grants, housing supplements, and government-guaranteed student loans. Finnish students are furthermore not required to pay tuition fees. In spite of this, nearly half of students report having at least some difficulties covering all of their expenses, with the main expense being housing [5]. When students cannot work, they must thus find a different way to finance their studies.

### COVID-19 and student employment in Finland

Reported Finnish COVID-19 cases started to rise quickly in early March 2020. On March 16, the Finnish government declared a state of emergency and announced multiple measures to prevent the further spread of the virus. Public facilities such as schools and universities were closed, and had to move to online teaching. Public meetings were limited to 10 persons, and travel was restricted across internal and external borders. Following a decline in the number of daily new cases, most of these restrictions had been lifted by July. While the economic impact of COVID-19 has been smaller in Finland than in the eurozone as a whole, Finnish unemployment rose quickly during the first half of the year, and by June 2020, youth unemployment was at twice the level it had been a year earlier [4].

Students' labor income reduces the level of student financial aid they can receive. At the same time, financial aid is tied to course completion. Students thus face a choice in allocating their time between work and studies. One should expect a lack of immediate labor market opportunities to increase both the time students have available to spend studying, and the financial necessity to do so. Indeed, student financial aid applications increased by over a third in summer 2020 compared to the year before [5],

suggesting that many students were reallocating time from work to studies. This mechanism can however fail when courses are cancelled en masse. Furthermore, Finnish universities normally only supply limited numbers of courses during the summer break.

## Universities respond

Although in theory, Finnish university students could easily substitute work with studies when job opportunities disappear, it requires universities to react quickly to new circumstances. In our own experiences, this is exactly what happened in Finland — a point of view shared by the dean of the Jyväskylä University School for Business and Economics. At the business school, most immediate problems related to moving teaching and research online had been solved by the end of March, and the attention then shifted to longer term planning. Lecturers were asked whether they could consider teaching extra courses during the summer break, when students might find themselves without a job, and many lecturers did. Different scenarios for fall term teaching were also prepared already in spring. Other universities similarly expanded their course offerings [6].

The switch to online teaching was hard on some students, but created new opportunities for others. Online teaching allowed extra students to be added to otherwise oversubscribed courses, and students living outside of Jyväskylä were able to take courses they had not originally been able to take. From the university's perspective, what started out as a crisis soon began to look more like an opportunity. Students demanded more teaching, and the university was able to supply it.

When we examine study progress at the national level, we see a pattern that corresponds to our own experiences. We measure study progress using data on study credits attained [7] and on the number of students enrolled [8] in all Finnish universities between 2016 and 2020, and find that monthly credits per student were 2–3% higher nationally for the end of the spring term 2020 compared to the same months in earlier years, and 18–20% higher for June and July [9].

## Conclusions

Finnish students routinely work while studying, especially during the summer months. Such employment can be beneficial to students by providing relevant work experience as well as desired extra income. The number of jobs available to Finnish students however rapidly declined during the first half of 2020 as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and unemployment consequently increased.

Our experiences from spring and summer 2020 illustrate that a flexible student financing system can dampen labor market shocks by allowing students to substitute studies for work. This however requires higher education institutions to increase course offerings and respond quickly and flexibly to changing circumstances. Since working while studying delays graduation, and is thus not unambiguously beneficial to students even in normal times, consideration should be given to expanding course offerings also

during future summers, especially since courses can now reliably be held online.

## Acknowledgements

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# Student Employment in Vocational and Higher Education in Russia

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The combination of studies and work by the vocational education students which is the start of a professional trajectory for many, is discussed in this article and compared with the situation in the higher education system.

To begin with, a few key points should be highlighted about vocational education in Russia, since research is more often focused on either higher education or school education, while vocational education is ignored or used as a basis for comparison, although the number of the vocational education and higher education system graduates among young people under 30 is almost equal. In other words, these represent two equally important population groups for the education system, for the labour market, and for the state as a whole.

Vocational education trains workers, employees, as well as mid-level professionals, and the share of students in the qualified worker professions has fallen significantly over the past fifteen years (from 45% in 2005 to 17.2% of all vocational students in 2019). Where do graduates of the vocational education system work?

Graduates of vocational education often have to compete with university graduates. There is a range of professions that are filled equally by young people with a university degree and with vocational training. For example, construction and manufacturing plant foremen, secretaries and accountants, teachers in primary and preschool education. This comparison is of course based only on the job titles, while the content and professional responsibilities may vary greatly, as do the educational requirements of the applicants.

## Key Premises

There are several premises that are important for understanding the context of students combining work and study. First, according to the data of Monitoring of Education Markets and Organizations (MEMO) [1], families of students in vocational education are usually less educated and less financially secure than families of university students.

The education of the vast majority of vocational education students is state funded. According to federal statistics, more than half of the students in the higher education system study on a fee-paying basis, while only one in every six vocational students pays for his or her education. The

main reason is the low income of vocational students' families. This usually forces students to choose educational programmes where they can study for free, rather than those that are of particular interest to them.

The third important factor impacting the employment of students in vocational education is the early choice of their educational trajectory. They need to decide in the ninth grade, while future university students have two more years left. The lack of, or highly skewed, knowledge of the labour market at this age may lead to early disillusionment with the choice of educational trajectory.

## Student Employment

After outlining these three important premises, the combination of study and work can be discussed directly. The majority of students in vocational education start their studies immediately after the ninth grade (74%), meaning that they are 15 to 16 years old, which significantly limits the opportunities for employment in the first years of study; this is important to consider when comparing the employment data of university students. According to the results of the MEMO, about half of students (44% in vocational education vs. 55% in higher education in 2015) gain work experience by the end of their studies, while according to Rosstat, much fewer 2010–2015 graduates combined study and work (21.9% in vocational education and 36.7% in higher education).

However, the proportion of those who gain work experience related to their profession is extremely low (According to federal statistics, 10% of all vocational education graduates in 2010–2015). While studying and holding down a job not related to their profession, a student accumulates specific knowledge and skills that may not be required for a potential job in his or her professional area. Thus, the transition to a job in the student's field of study is associated with costs (in terms of remuneration, the need to retrain, etc.) that not everyone will be ready to bear. This means that if a student has been working for several years in a job that is not related to his or her education, then only entry-level positions in their field of study will be available to him or her upon graduation.

## Conclusion

If the choice of the area of work is based on a student's personal preferences about his or her future employment or educational trajectory, then no problem exists. However, the choice of employment is often made under the pressure of external circumstances, be it a difficult financial situation or lack of offers in the professional field of interest. As a result, students choose jobs based on the salary, rather than on their relevance. All these considerations are also valid for university students from low-income families.

Students in vocational education and higher education lack reliable information about what is happening in the labour market, i.e. what prospects they will face after graduation or what skills and knowledge are in demand. One way to deal with the lack of such information is to raise their awareness. Students can be taught how to use

job search websites and given basic skills that are necessary for a successful job search, such as, how to write a CV, how to compose a cover letter, how to search for vacancies, how to prepare for a job interview. Naturally, all these skills are not directly related to the profession or field of study, but without these skills, the chances of a student finding a suitable job that would require the skills and competencies acquired during education are reduced. Graduates of vocational education often cannot afford a lengthy search for a suitable job for financial reasons. This is why a vocational graduate is forced to accept the first job offers received while focusing on the promised salary, and not on employment in his or her area of study or career prospects. In fact, without the simple, perhaps auxiliary, but still very necessary skills, the employment effectiveness of graduates and, therefore, the effectiveness of education as a whole, suffers.

## Notes

[1] For more details on the methodology and questionnaires, visit <https://memo.hse.ru>

# To work or not to work during a PhD?

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A critical number of highly skilled graduates is considered a necessary condition for innovation, technological development, and economic growth. Nevertheless, despite the increasing number of PhD holders, a large proportion of PhD students do not make it to their thesis defense. The share of Russian PhD graduates who defended their thesis within the expected period has been steadily decreasing since 2007. Prior to then it was stable at around 30%.

In 2019, the dropout rate hit an all-time high, with 89.5% of graduates not defending their thesis on time. There are not many studies of dropout factors in Russia but public discussion views doctoral student employment, caused by low financial support, as one of the key reasons for the high dropout rate. Despite the widespread belief about the negative effects of employment on graduation outcomes, there is no empirical evidence for such a conclusion. This study investigates how student employment and the balancing of work and study relate to doctoral experience and graduation outcomes.

## Student employment and studying process

In order to investigate the relationship between student employment and studying process we analyzed the data from a 2016 survey of PhD students at leading Russian universities [1]. The aim of this cross-sectional study was to assess the extent and types of their employment, their experiences of balancing work and study, and the main challenges that confront them. We explore how such factors as the place of employment, the type of contract, and the nature of the job affect their academic performance and professional experience.

The survey showed that 90% of doctoral students combine study with work. The most common type of employment is full-time work off-campus (34%). The place of employment has a significant correlation with career prospects. There are more PhD students planning to pursue an academic career among those who have a full or part time job at a university. The sphere of employment plays significant role in student perceptions of studying and university services. Students employed on-campus are more satisfied and have less difficulties with combining study and work. Those employed off-campus reports more difficulties and lower levels of satisfaction with the services provided by their university. Usually there is little connection between their jobs and their thesis topics, which can negatively affect their study. These students also see their supervisors less often. Most of these students plan to pursue a non-academic career after their graduation and the share of those who do not plan to defend their thesis is also higher in this group.

## Student employment and graduation outcomes

The studying process is different for PhD students with different employment characteristics. But do these students differ in their graduation outcomes? To answer this question we collected a longitudinal dataset on doctoral students who studied at HSE University between 2008 and 2017 [2]. The dataset combines data collected during doctoral training and administrative data about students' outcomes, gathered in 2018, after graduation. The final dataset consists of 655 doctoral students. To characterize the relationship between graduation outcomes and student employment, a logistic regression was used with graduation outcomes (defense or dropout) as the dependent variable.

Only 36% of students had defended their thesis by 2018. Other students graduated without a defense (30%), were dismissed (19%), or withdrew before graduation (15%). Most doctoral students who get their degree defend their thesis within the expected period (4 or 5 years) or the year after (78% of full-time students and 79% of part-time students). Theoretically, a student can work on their thesis after withdrawal, but this is quite rare. The share of PhDs among those who graduated is much higher than among those who were dismissed or left the program (55% vs 5%). 39% of full-time students defended their thesis compared to only 29% of part-time. There are no differences

in completion rates between male and female students or between students from different fields of study.

The results of the logistic regression models showed that different factors play a significant role for students employed on campus or off campus. Students employed on campus have the highest completion rates. The critical success factor for these students is their position at the university. Students who have a research assistant position defend their theses more often than students who work as instructors or administrative staff at the university. Students not employed on campus are divided further into those not employed and those employed off campus. Employment itself has a negative impact on the outcomes. Non-working students have more chances of defending their thesis in comparison with students employed off campus. Among those employed off campus, those who decide to pursue a degree to build an academic career and plan to work in the university after graduation have more chances of defending their thesis. Participation in the advanced doctoral program, which has greater financial and academic support, has a positive impact for both groups.

## Summary

Both parts of the research showed that employment does affect the process and the results of doctoral study. Cross-sectional data analysis showed that the characteristics of employment are connected with the doctoral students experience and those students who are employed on campus have more benefits during their study. Students with full-time off-campus work are the most vulnerable group in terms of the learning process. These students are already less focused on their study, they plan to work in non-academic fields, and they have the greatest difficulties in combining study and work. A longitudinal study showed that these students have less chance of defending their thesis. Combining study with work negatively affects the chances of a postgraduate student defending their thesis and thus contributes to the dropout rate. The exception is research positions at the university. Additional academic and financial support by the university is also an important factor of student outcomes. These findings might help to define the groups of students that are at risk and who should be targeted with support. In addition, they can be used as a basis for policy changes at the university and national levels.

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# Differences in student work according to educational factors at a Hungarian university

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## Introduction

In Hungary, since the 1990s, we have been talking about student employment as a phenomenon when students start working during their university studies. They either worked while studying or interrupted their studies and took a job. The boundaries between studies, work, and unemployment, and the output points have become increasingly blurred, so the start of a career can no longer be interpreted as a single closed process [1]. Student employment is a complex phenomenon, and during this transition period, student and employee status are constantly changing.

Based on EUROSTUDENT VI data, 39% of students in Hungary worked during the semester and 14% took up casual work. Nearly 40% of Hungarian students worked to cover their living expenses and would not be able to continue their higher education without paid work. In addition to financial reasons, gaining experience was an important motivating factor, and this type of employment was important for 25% of students. Gaining work experience was typical of young people, those in full-time students and students in a more favourable financial situation. In terms of educational level, work experience was typical for master's students [2].

According to previous large-scale studies investigating the relationship between the field of education and student employment, the proportion of working students is higher in the social sciences, arts, natural sciences, computer science and agriculture, while students studying medicine work less [2]. Study-related work is typical for students in the fields of computer science, engineering and economics, as employers in these fields are more interested in hiring students. However, according to EUROSTUDENT VI data, students in health care have often study-related jobs too [2].

In our research, the PERSIST 2019 database was used. We focused on the employment habits of students from the University of Debrecen (N=803), which has almost 30,000 students in 14 faculties.

## Field of study and student work

Our results are consistent with previous research which shows that employers in some areas are more likely to recruit students. Regular work is typical for students in engineering, humanities and nursing, while students in medical, dental and pharmaceutical work less or have never worked. There are differences between nursing students and medical students, as the former can perform many professional tasks before graduating. While the performance of certain work in the professions of pharmacy, medicine or dentistry is dependent on the acquisition of a degree and a professional examination—students cannot gain relevant professional experience before obtaining their degree [3]. It can be assumed that medical students do not work because of curriculum inflexibility or training requirements. They are less dependent on an additional income from work or are less willing to risk success in their studies by working.

The Hungarian higher education system consists of three interdependent educational cycles: bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies. However there is also “undivided education”, which means that in some majors it is possible to obtain a Master's degree in 10–12 semesters, whereby the student graduates with a Master's degree. According to earlier studies, students studying for a Master's degree tend to work during the semester, while two-thirds of students studying for an undivided degree do not work during the semester [2]. According to our results, Master's students worked more often than students in Bachelor's and undivided degrees, and they are also characterized by the correspondence between work and study. Our analysis also showed that bachelor's students rarely work in their first year; usually starting work in their second or third years. This decision can be explained by the fact that the first year is spent taking the basic exams and subjects and familiarising oneself with university life. Masters' students already have a university degree and a routine that makes it easier to combine work and study; it is also more important for them to gain work experience [2].

The frequency of employment is significantly influenced by the form of funding for education. If students do not have parental support or do not take out a student loan, they are more likely to take a job. Fee-paying students take up work more often than state-funded students. In addition to covering tuition fees, fee-paying students have a desire to acquire new skills and new friends, which is also reflected in the fact that fee-paying students more often have a study-related job. This raises the question of whether these students should plan their university careers more consciously? It cannot be ruled out that as fee-paying students already pay for their education, they do not change majors, and, if they already work, gain professional work experience.

## Motivation for work

In 2019, a scale of 1 to 4 points was used to examine the motivations of student employment (the higher the score,

the more consistent the motivation). Based on PERSIST 2019 data, independence from parents was the most important motivating factor, 66% of the students cited this factor, wanting to be independent from their family. Although independence from parents in all majors was a significant incentive for students to work, the main motivating factor for students in medical and sports studies was the funding of recreational/leisure.

The motivation to work is related to the socio-cultural background of the students, and we found that medical students and law students are in the best financial positions. This also explains why medical students work less, not only because of the training requirements, but also because they are less often required to work. There is a significant difference in that the second most important motivating factor for IT and art students was gaining work experience.

## Limitations and conclusion

Our research results show that there are differences between majors in both the frequency and motivation of employment. Some research has highlighted that study-related work has a positive effect, while non-study related work has a negative effect on student performance. For a successful university career it is therefore important for students to have study-related work as it can benefit them professionally, but the match between work and study is typical only for a small proportion of students.

Fee-paying students are more likely to work, and previous results have shown that three times as many students drop out of university as fee-paying students than as state-funded students [4]. There was also a difference in work motivation, with IT students being most motivated to gain work experience. This is also important because 55% of IT students have a below-average persistence (adj.res.=3,  $p=0,035$ ). In IT, the dropout rate is 49–55% [5].

Our previous research found that low persistence, negative perceptions of education, and student employment can encourage students to interrupt or abandon their studies. Student employment can be a possible factor in dropping out, so further research is needed to examine the institutional factors (contact with teachers, satisfaction with teaching, etc.) that reinforce or mitigate the negative effects of employment in addition to training areas and requirements.

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## Wages of Czech graduates: The positive effects of work experience gained before graduation

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### Introduction

This study evaluates the wage effects of student employment. According to the 2016 Eurostudent survey more than half of university students in the EU combine studies and paid work [1]. The motives to work are primarily financial but gaining experience is also important [1,2]. Previous research mostly finds that student employment increases wages after graduation [3,4]

### Masaryk University alumni survey

This empirical analysis employs data from a Masaryk University alumni survey conducted in April 2020. Masaryk University is the second-largest university in Czechia with approximately 33,250 students enrolled in 10 faculties. The invitation to participate in the survey was sent to all graduates of Master's level programs graduating in 2017 and 2018 i.e. graduates were surveyed one or two years after graduation. In total 805 graduates replied (22.5%). Presumably, the COVID-19 pandemic was one of the factors contributing to low response rate.

### Descriptive evidence

The data include the individual and employment characteristics of graduates. The final sample is restricted to graduates who report working at least 20 hours per week

(N=684). Importantly, the survey includes job search questions, which identify graduates who worked before graduation and continued the same employment after graduation (N=265) and those who started employment after graduation (N=419). The results reveal that the wages of graduates with work experience are 17% higher relative to those without work experience. First, the difference in wages may arise due to favourable characteristics that allow graduates to find paid work during their studies and to advance their careers after graduation. For instance, males and students in STEM subjects may find it easier to find employment during their studies and earn more after graduation. Second, the difference in wages is attributed to better job characteristics. Graduates who gain work experience during their studies are employed more in private and foreign firms (rather than in public sector or NGOs), run their own business, or work in supervisory positions.

### Results from the wage regression

The wage effects of student employment are further tested by estimating the wage equation. The dependent variable is the logarithm of gross monthly wage, and control variables include gender, field of study, year of graduation, academic performance during studies (GPA), city size, logarithm of working hours per week, type of company (public sector, Czech private firm, foreign firm, self-employment) and an indicator for a supervisory position. Estimates show that wages are 8% higher for graduates with work experience in the full model. A surprisingly high gender pay gap (23%) has emerged within two years of graduation. Graduates with STEM education earn on average 16% more, and wages do not depend on GPA. Self-employed graduates and those working in foreign companies earn 22–24% more than graduates employed in public sector or in private Czech firms. Graduates in supervisory positions earn 9% more, and those settled in towns with less than 100,000 residents earn 12% less. Graduates graduating in 2017 earn 6% more than the cohort graduating in 2018 which reflects a steep wage increase in the early career of graduates.

### Conclusion

University students are attractive to businesses struggling to find skilled workers. This research shows that students who worked before graduation and continued the same employment after graduation earn 8% more relative to graduates who started a new employment after graduation. The results are robust to the inclusion of controls for student academic performance, education specialization, and job characteristics. A striking result is that a high gender pay gap (over 20%) emerges very early in the career of university graduates and persists in the Czech labour market [5].

The study has several limitations. First, the survey does not include information about the quality and length of the work experience before graduation. Second, the low response rate may influence the representativeness of collected data. Third, talented and more able students are more likely to combine study and work [2] and also



to earn more after graduation. Fourth, combining study and work delays the graduation and negatively influences student academic performance [1,3]. In our sample graduates with working experience have worse GPA but findings from wage equation show that the GPA has no association with wages. These shortcomings should be challenged in future research.

## Acknowledgements

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# Student employment in Poland: evidence from the Polish Graduate Tracking System

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Student employment has not been at the centre of the debate on higher education in Poland and remains under-researched. The discussion on the relationship between university education and the labour market focuses on graduate employability. However, recent regulatory changes led to the inclusion of pre-graduation employment re-

cords in the Polish Graduate Tracking System (ELA), which offers a glimpse into student employment in Poland.

## Educational expansion

The Ministry of Science and Higher Education created ELA in response to concerns about graduates' labour market prospects that arose after the previously elitist higher education system massified within two decades. The liberalisation of tertiary education in Poland in the early 1990s, which was a part of the transformation after the fall of communist rule, created the conditions for the rapid expansion of the sector by allowing increases in enrolment at public institutions and the creation of new private institutions. The changes enabled the university sector to respond to society's demand for university credentials. The result was an almost fivefold increase in the number of students between 1990 and 2006 [1]. Since then, enrolment has been slowly declining, primarily due to demographic dynamics [2].

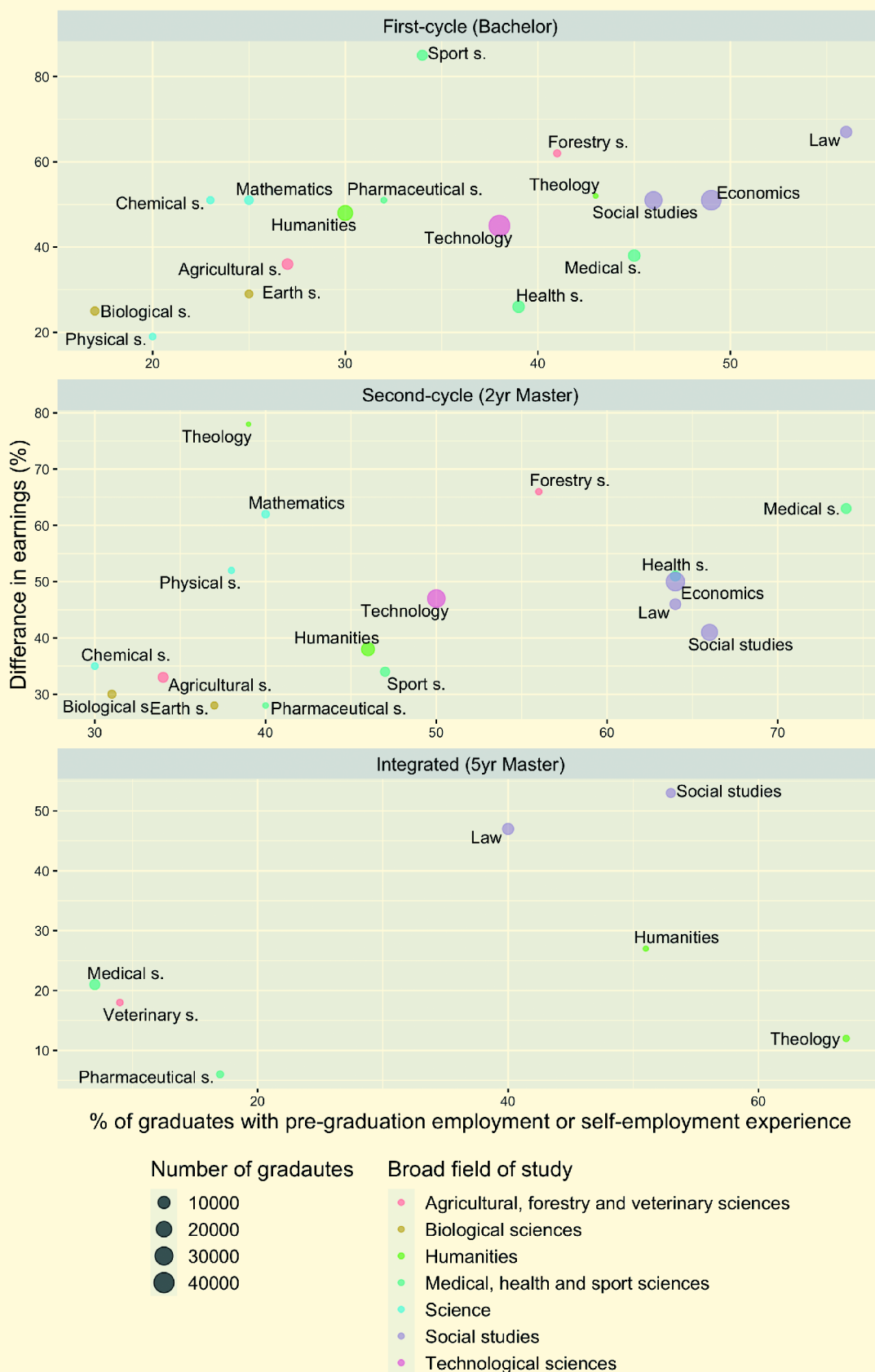
The breakneck growth in the number of students resulted in a deterioration of the labour market advantage of HE graduates [3]. This sparked a heated debate on graduate employability and the merits of at least some degrees. One of the consequences of this debate was the establishment of the ELA system in 2015, which monitors post-graduation labour market outcomes. It supports evidence-based policymaking and guides prospective students in their choice of educational paths.

## Data on student employment

The ELA system utilises administrative records collected in POL-on, the Polish integrated system of information on science and higher education, linked to data extracted from the database of the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) [4]. The primary goal of the system is to track post-graduation labour market performance. However, the latest edition includes ZUS records on the pre-graduation employment and self-employment histories of graduates stretching back to their first enrolment recorded in POL-on. This change created an opportunity to measure the extent to which students undertook economic activity before graduating and ascertain the effects of such activity on their post-graduation outcomes. Accordingly, this paper focuses on the youngest cohort of graduates, i.e. those who finished their studies in 2018, for which the data are most accurate [5].

Employing administrative data has tremendous benefits, chief among them is access to detailed records on the entire population. Unfortunately, those benefits come at a cost. Researchers have little impact on data collection. For student employment analysis, the most significant caveat is that the data do not include records of any civil law contracts of students. A civil law contract is a kind of work arrangement usually meant for casual work. Its flexibility and cost efficiency, especially when employing students, led to its adoption in situations of extended employment as well. Therefore, the actual share of working students is likely even higher.

**Figure 1.** Graduates with experience of pre-graduation employment or self-employment and difference in earnings between graduates with and without experience by level and field of study



Data source: Polish Graduate Tracking System

## Student employment and self-employment

Among graduates of first-cycle (3-year bachelor-level) programmes who finished their studies in 2018, 40% had experience of pre-graduation employment (or self-employment). Almost half of this group had employment preceding the commencement of studies. The share of graduates with such experience is even higher among second-cycle (2-year master-level) programme graduates. 60% of them were employed before graduation, and 40% had episodes of work before the beginning of their last studies. There is one more type of studies, five-year master-level studies reserved only for selected disciplines, such as Medical Science, Law, and Psychology. Graduates of these programmes make up 13% of all graduates and are least likely to have pre-graduation work experience.

Previous research documented differences between fields of study in post-graduation labour market performance. The new ELA data provide evidence that the divergence in professional paths occurs at a much earlier stage. In the case of both first- and second-cycle studies, graduates of social sciences and health sciences are most likely to have experience of pre-graduation employment. Science graduates occupy the other end of the spectrum (see the x-axis in Figure 1).

Graduates of five-year programmes are generally less likely to have pre-graduation work experience than their second-cycle peers. The difference is starkest in the case of medical science. While second-cycle students in this field are most likely to work before graduation (74%), those enrolled in five-year programmes are least likely to do so (7%).

### Impact on post-graduation outcomes

Figure 1 also presents the difference in earnings between graduates with and without experience, expressed as the percentage of the average earnings of graduates without experience (y-axis). Unsurprisingly, graduates who have pre-graduation work experience have higher incomes in the first year after graduation. The difference varies widely between fields. In extreme cases, graduates with experience earn 80% more than those without it. In the case of larger disciplines, it rarely exceeds 50%.

Importantly, the share of graduates having work experience does not seem to be related to the increase in average earnings. There is no link between the percentage of graduates with work experience and how well, on average, the graduates of a discipline perform on the labour market.

### Conclusion: Next steps

The results show that regardless of the academic discipline, Polish graduates with work experience enjoy a significant labour market advantage in the first year after graduation. The effects of pre-graduation work experience will probably wane with time. However, further research is needed to estimate the size of the effect and to ascertain for how long it lasts.

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- [4] Detailed information on data sources, linkage, and methodology can be found on the project's website: <https://ela.nauka.gov.pl/en/experts/source-data>
- [5] Pre 2014 POL-on records are deemed likely to be incomplete. There is a higher risk that some groups of graduates were not properly reported by universities. This means that the older the graduate cohort, the shorter on average the observation window during which employment or self-employment is captured.



## Reading list

Research on student employment focuses on the incidence, determinants and motivation of combining study and work, and its educational and labour market outcomes. There are several research questions related to the determinants and motivation of student employment, including what type of students from which socio-economic backgrounds are likely to combine study and work, and whether the main motivations of student employment are financial or the accumulation of work experience. Studies of the educational outcomes of student employment explore its effects on the quality of education, academic achievement and dropout rates. Studies of labour market outcomes of combining of study and work are focused on graduate employability, salaries and returns to education and consider the phenomenon of student employment using the approaches of human capital and job market signaling theories.

We have prepared a list of selective academic publications which explore the problem of student employment and might be of particular interest to our readers.

### Determinants and patterns of student employment

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### **Student employment and educational outcomes**

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- Van Belle, E., Caers, R., Cuypers, L., De Couck, M., Neyt, B., Van Borm, H., & Baert, S. (2020). What do student jobs on graduate CVs signal to employers? *Economics of Education Review*, 75, 101979.

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