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**EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR PART-TIME HIGHER
EDUCATION STUDENTS**

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Authored by;

**Geoff Mason, National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR),
London, and Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies
and Societies (LLAKES)**

**Report to Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) and Department
for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)**

The views and interpretations expressed are the authors' and do not necessarily
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Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

1 Victoria Street

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www.bis.gov.uk

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Executive Summary

This report draws on a 2011 telephone survey of 145 employers of part-time higher education (HE) students who had previously been interviewed in 2009. These employers were identified by participants in HECSU's survey of part-time students which took place across the UK in 2008. A large majority of these employers see part-time HE study as increasing the confidence of employees and equipping them to become more proactive, better prepared for their next roles within organisations and more likely to stay with their current firms or organisations. As a result many employers are willing to pay for employees' HE tuition fees (in whole or in part). About seven in ten employers in the sample thought that the skills gained from combining part-time study with employment were superior to those acquired by graduates from full-time university courses.

However, since 2009 there have been a number of changes in the HE policy environment such as increased tuition fees and the extension of student loan facilities to part-time students. Comparison of employers who employed HE students in both 2009 and 2011 shows a reduction in some employers' willingness to provide support with tuition fees for employees. About one in four employers had cut back on such support during the recession and the great majority of them had not subsequently restored support to pre-recession levels. One in six employers had also cut back on allowing employees to have paid time off work to study for exams.

Furthermore, about 45% of employers of part-time HE students said that increases in HE tuition fees were likely to lead to a reduction in their provision of full fee support for employees. In some cases these employers were still willing to consider providing partial fee support but one in five employers considered it likely that even partial fee support would be cut back. Follow-up interviews with some employers suggested that cuts in fee support reflected difficult economic conditions as well as higher fees.

It is important to note that these findings may overstate employer willingness to support part-time HE study because this sample of employers contains a much

larger proportion who are generally supportive of part-time HE study than would be found in a nationally representative sample of British employers. (The special nature of the current sample reflects the fact that they were identified through an earlier survey of part-time HE students).

One possible effect of increased HE tuition fees is that well-qualified school-leavers may increasingly choose to seek opportunities for part-time HE study while in employment, and may choose to do so through apprenticeship training. In order to assess whether employer recruitment and training policies might adapt to this potential source of high-quality trainees, employers in the 2011 survey were asked a series of questions about their future willingness to recruit young people who were interested in combining part-time HE study with work-based training. About seven out of ten employers expressed some willingness to undertake this kind of recruitment while six out of ten were positive about combining part-time HE study with apprenticeship training. Follow-up interviews with some employers suggested that these positive responses had more to do with apprentice training itself than with part-time study for HE qualifications. In some firms a small proportion of apprentice trainees may eventually find their way to HE study. Furthermore, the continuing commitment to apprentice training in this sample of employers is notable in itself. However, due to the special nature of this sample, these positive responses cannot be generalised to the wider population of British employers.

1. Introduction

In 2010-11 the total number of part-time enrolments in higher education (HE) institutions in the UK was just under 824,000, representing about 37% of all enrolments in HE institutions (HESA, 2012). This total includes students on HE courses which are franchised out by HE institutions to further education (FE) institutions. In addition, there are an estimated 100,000 part-time students on HE courses which are provided directly by FE institutions and are not included in HESA data (Mason 2010).

Part-time participation in HE by people already in employment potentially represents an important means of skills updating and improvement for the UK economy. In particular, combining prior work experience and part-time HE study could help to increase the supply of highly-educated people with the types of 'employability skills' that are widely sought by employers. A further attraction of this mode of skills development is that it minimises absence from work, with individuals investing their own time in study.

In this context there is considerable interest in learning more about employer support for part-time study in the UK, including

- the extent to which employers provide support with course fees and other costs of part-time HE study
- how much employer support for part-time study is likely to be affected by changes in the HE landscape such as increases in tuition fees payable by students,¹
- the extension of student loan facilities to part-time students²
- and the expansion of apprenticeship training.

In this report we investigate these and other issues by drawing on a survey of employers in 2011 (with additional interviews in 2012) which followed on from an earlier survey of the same employers in 2009 (Mason and Hopkin, 2011). The

¹ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/studentfinance>

² <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/f/11-702-full-part-time-students-loans.pdf>

employers were identified from information provided by a subset of part-time students in employment who were interviewed as part of a large-scale survey of part-time HE students in 2008 and then re-interviewed in 2010 (Callender and Wilkinson, 2012).

The report is ordered as follows: Section 2 describes the research methodology and provides background information on the sample of employers. Section 3 examines employers' evaluations of the advantages and disadvantages of employees participating in part-time HE study and the effects of such study on individual and organisational performance. Section 4 investigates the extent and nature of current employer support for part-time HE study and how such support has changed since the 2008-09 recession and over the course of the subsequent economic downturn. Section 5 assesses the impact of higher HE tuition fees on employer willingness to provide financial support for part-time HE study. Section 6 examines the links between employer recruitment and training practices and their support for part-time HE study, including their involvement in apprenticeship training. Section 7 summarises our main findings.

2. Research methods and sample characteristics

This report follows the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) definition of part-time HE students, that is, they are defined residually as those who do not meet the HESA definition of full-time.³ Thus HE students are classified as part-time if they are not normally required to attend a higher education institution for at least 21 hours per week for 24 weeks per year of study. This definition of part-time includes students on block release from their places of employment and those studying during the evenings.

The employer survey on which this report is based had its genesis in a survey of 3288 part-time HE **students** across the UK in 2008, a proportion of whom were re-interviewed in 2010 (Callender, Hopkin and Wilkinson, 2010; Callender and Wilkinson, 2012). By design the student survey was fairly evenly divided between first-year 'starters' and final-year 'completers' and was confined to students aiming for one of three different qualifications:

- First degrees
- Foundation degrees
- Higher National Certificates or Diplomas

In order to identify firms or organisations which might be willing to participate in the first **employer** survey (Wave 1), student survey participants were asked if they would be willing to provide contact details for their employers. Some 908 (28%) of the 3288 student employees did so and from this information we obtained 294 completed and usable interviews for the employer survey which was carried out in 2009.⁴ The main findings of this survey are described in detail in Mason and Hopkin (2011).

³ The HESA definition of full-time students is those who are normally required to attend a higher education institution for at least 21 hours per week over at least 24 weeks per year of study, or who are on thick or thin sandwich courses, or are on a study-related year away from their institution.

⁴ Of the 908 employers for whom we had contact details, some 474 were found to be potentially available for interview during the required time period. Of these, 294 (62%) completed interviews and 180 (38%) refused to participate (Mason and Hopkin, 2011).

As part of a longitudinal research process, a further set of telephone interviews with a subset of these employers was carried out in 2011. This Wave 2 survey sample consisted of 145 employers, just under half of those who had participated in the Wave 1 survey. Some three quarters (77%) of the Wave 2 employers were represented in the survey by the same individual respondent as had participated in the Wave 1 survey. The remaining 23% of employers were represented by a different managerial respondent.

As shown in Table 2.1, the mix of size groups and sectors in the achieved Wave 2 sample was much the same as in Wave 1. In both waves about two thirds of employers were engaged in largely public sector activities (public administration, education, health and social work), reflecting the disproportionate involvement of public sector employees in part-time higher education.⁵ In both surveys there were several employers who were aware of employees studying part-time for more than one HE qualification and the mix of qualification aims in the Wave 2 sample was also fairly similar to Wave 1 (Table 2.2). However, this conceals a considerable amount of change in the participating firms and organisations between 2009 and 2011. In this time period some employees had completed part-time studies and others had commenced studying, often aiming for different qualifications than had their predecessors. Overall, only 56% of employers in the Wave 2 survey reported having employees studying for the same HE qualifications as they had in Wave 1 (Table 2.3, Row 1).

This apparently large number of changes in involvement with different types of HE qualification aims is partly exaggerated by the fact that for some employers the individual managerial respondent to the 2011 survey was not the same as in 2009. The proportion of employers reporting the same qualification aim drops to 46% when the individual respondents differed between Waves 1 and 2 (Row 3) compared to 59% when the respondents were the same (Row 2). This suggests that knowledge of part-time HE studies by employees may be unevenly distributed among managers in some firms and organisations. However, that still leaves a large minority of employers where the qualification aims had changed between the two years. For both these reasons – changes in qualification aims and in individual

⁵ Analysis of Labour Force Survey data suggests that part-time students aiming for First degrees, Foundation degrees and/or Higher National qualifications represent 1.0-1.3% of total employment in public service sectors compared to only 0.7% of employment in the economy as a whole (Mason and Hopkin, 2011).

respondents -- comparisons between 2009 and 2011 in the employer samples need to be treated with caution.

Table 2.1: Samples of employers of part-time HE students in 2009 and 2011, analysed by employment size-group and sector

| | 2009 (Wave 1) | 2011 (Wave 2) |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | <i>% of employers</i> | |
| A. Number of employees: | | |
| 1-9 | 10 | 8 |
| 10-24 | 16 | 17 |
| 25 – 49 | 14 | 14 |
| 50 – 99 | 11 | 13 |
| 100 – 199 | 9 | 8 |
| 200 – 499 | 12 | 12 |
| 500-999 | 8 | 8 |
| 1000+ | 19 | 19 |
| Size group not known | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| | | |
| B. Sector: | | |
| Manufacturing, utilities, construction | 14 | 12 |
| Professional, scientific and technical services | 7 | 6 |
| Public administration | 16 | 19 |
| Education | 33 | 30 |
| Health | 5 | 5 |
| Social work | 14 | 15 |
| Other services | 9 | 10 |
| Sector not known | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| | | |
| <i>n</i> = | 294 | 145 |

Source: Employer Surveys, 2009 (Wave 1) and 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Column percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. This note applies to all tables in this report.

Table 2.2: Employer samples, analysed by qualification aims of employees studying part time

| | Wave 1 (2009) | Wave 2 (2011) |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| | % of employers | |
| Awareness of part-time HE students: | | |
| At least one First degree student | 55 | 64 |
| At least one Foundation degree student | 38 | 43 |
| At least one Higher National student | 37 | 43 |
| At least one HE (not specified) student | 21 | 5 |
| Not aware of any part-time HE students | 15 | 13 |
| n = | 294 | 145 |

Source: Employer Surveys, 2009 (Wave 1) and 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Multiple responses allowed if employees were studying part-time towards more than one HE qualification in each year.

Table 2.3: Employer sample, 2011, analysed by awareness of qualification aims of employees studying part time in 2009

| | First degree | Foundation degree | Higher National | HE (Not specified) | TOTAL |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------|
| | % of 2011 employers | | | | |
| % aware of study at same level in 2009 - All | 61 | 52 | 57 | 29 | 56 |
| % aware of study at same level in 2009 - Same respondent | 62 | 58 | 62 | 29 | 59 |
| % aware of study at same level in 2009 - Different respondent | 59 | 35 | 44 | na | 46 |
| n = | 93 | 62 | 63 | 7 | 225 |

Source: Employer Surveys, 2009 (Wave 1) and 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Multiple responses allowed if employer has employees studying part-time towards more than one HE qualification in each year.

Many of the survey questions covered in this report were directed at all employers of part-time HE students but in some cases (indicated in the notes to each table) where employers had employees that between them were studying part-time towards three or more different HE qualifications, the survey questions relating to particular qualifications were confined to employers who reported that that qualification was one of the top two HE qualification aims pursued by their employees. Many of the survey questions were followed up by inviting respondents

to clarify and illustrate their answers in more detail in their own words and the report draws heavily on these verbatim responses.

In addition, in April-May 2012, about twelve months after completion of the Wave 2 survey, semi-structured follow-up interviews were carried out with 12 respondents in order to help evaluate the responses to certain survey questions (particularly those relating to the impact of higher tuition fees and growth in apprenticeship training). Details of these additional interviewees are shown in Table 2.4.

Given that only a minority of participants in the original student survey were willing to supply us with contact details for their employers, and only a minority of these employers could be contacted for interview in 2009, and even fewer in 2011, it is likely that employers in our achieved Wave 2 sample are above average in terms of their interest in supporting employees to study part-time. Therefore, our main findings cannot be taken as representative of employers of part-time HE students, let alone employers in general. However, the findings shed light on the many issues that employers take into account when deciding whether or not to provide support for employees to engage in part-time HE study.

Table 2.4: Firms and organisations which participated in semi-structured follow-up interviews, Wave 2 survey

| ID Code | Sector | Employment size-group | Awareness of HE study | Level of fee support for students |
|----------------|---|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 3333 | Manufacturing, utilities, construction | 100 - 199 | Foundation degrees, Higher Nationals | Some fee support, extent unknown |
| 2639 | Manufacturing, utilities, construction | 250-499 | First degrees, Higher Nationals | Pay full fees for majority |
| 1425 | Manufacturing, utilities, construction | 1000+ | First degrees, Higher Nationals | Pay full fees for majority |
| 3663 | Professional, scientific and technical services | 25-49 | First degrees | Pay full fees for majority |
| 2040 | Professional, scientific and technical services | 100 - 199 | First degrees | Pay full fees for majority |
| 2158 | Education | 10-24 | First degrees, Foundation degrees | Some fee support, extent unknown |

| | | | | |
|------|-----------------------|---------|---|-------------------------------------|
| 432 | Education | 25-49 | First degrees, Foundation degrees | No fee support |
| 3275 | Education | 50-99 | Higher Nationals | Pay part fees for majority |
| 2539 | Education | 500-999 | Foundation degrees | Pay full fees for majority |
| 545 | Public administration | 50-99 | Higher Nationals | Pay full fees for majority |
| 2479 | Other services | 100-199 | Foundation degrees | Pay full fees for majority |
| 552 | Other services | 5-9 | First degrees | Some fee support, extent unknown |

3. Employers' evaluations of employees' participation in part-time HE study

When asked what types of skills and knowledge employees gain from part-time HE studies, the respondents for each employer in 2011 put most emphasis on skills and knowledge specific to job roles (cited by roughly two thirds of respondents). Specific examples included:

First degree students:

'[Knowledge of] current legislation and working techniques'
[765: Professional, scientific and technical services, 10-24 employees]

'After being on the course they were better able to explain things to outside people so it makes it look like the organisation is more knowledgeable and professional'
[1051: Other services, 100-199 employees]

'Part of their nursing requirements and about providing evidence-based practice for patients'
[1325: Health, 250-499 employees]

Foundation degree students:

'Youth worker and community building skills'
[2242: Social work, 1-4 employees]

'Depth of understanding in special educational needs and child development understanding'
[1383: Education, 25 – 49 employees]

'Subject knowledge and pedagogy and applications to the workplace.... Also they cascade that information to others [through] presentation skills'
[1589: Education, 25 – 49 employees]

Higher National students:

'Business awareness, literacy and numeracy, decision-making, team-working'
[1784: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 1000+ employees]

'Theoretical skills around subject matter and making connections to practice'
[5: Education, 10-24 employees]

‘Knowing the standards and the theory of applying it to the practice of the job’
 [3402: Public administration, 1000+ employees]

Thus, the skills mentioned by respondents as important for all levels of HE qualification under consideration included practical or technical skills and generic skills such as those relating to communication and problem-solving. Reference was also made to the development of personal attributes such as ‘greater confidence’ and improved suitability for promotion to management or supervisory roles (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Employers with part-time HE students: types of skill and knowledge gained through HE study, analysed by qualification aim of employees

| | First degree | Foundation degree | Higher National |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| | <i>% of employers</i> | | |
| Practical or technical skills | 38 | 37 | 57 |
| Communication skills | 28 | 30 | 39 |
| Problem-solving skills | 26 | 19 | 45 |
| Skills or knowledge specific to job roles | 64 | 63 | 73 |
| More potential for promotion | 6 | 9 | 10 |
| More suitable for management or supervisory roles | 21 | 17 | 18 |
| Improved relations with work colleagues | 8 | 7 | 10 |
| Greater confidence | 22 | 15 | 18 |
| Wider horizons | 5 | 4 | 8 |
| Useful contacts, better networking skills | 8 | 11 | 10 |
| Other skills (write in) | 26 | 22 | 12 |
| None | 3 | 4 | 0 |
| Don't know | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| <i>n =</i> | 86 | 54 | 51 |

Source: Employer Survey 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Multiple responses permitted. Employers were asked about employees studying towards the two most common HE qualification aims in their organisation.

When asked how part-time HE study actually contributed to their firms or organisations, only a small proportion of respondents (15-16%) were prepared to say that such study contributed ‘a lot’ to a measurable objective such as increased profitability (Table 3.2). Much more emphasis was placed on indirect contributions made by the individual employees gaining in confidence (64% of employers of First degree students thought this contributed ‘a lot’, not just ‘to a certain extent’, as did 59% of employers of Foundation degree students and 57% of employers of Higher National students). Other factors seen as making positive contributions at all three

levels of qualification included HE student employees becoming more proactive, better prepared for their next roles within organisations and more likely to stay with their current employers. They were also seen by sizeable proportions of employers as developing better analytical skills and being better able to identify new ways of working, get more out of new technologies and ‘think ahead more’ (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Employer responses to question: ‘In your assessment, when employees study part-time for HE qualifications, do they contribute to your firm/organisation in any of the following ways?’ (analysed by qualification aim of employees) *Ordered by responses saying ‘Yes, a lot’*

| | Yes, a lot | Yes, to a certain extent | Not at all | Total |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------|-------|
| | <i>% of employers</i> | | | |
| First degrees (n=86) | | | | |
| Increased confidence | 64 | 31 | 5 | 100 |
| Better prepared for next role | 45 | 47 | 8 | 100 |
| More likely to stay employed in your organisation | 44 | 40 | 16 | 100 |
| More proactive | 41 | 47 | 13 | 100 |
| Improved problem-solving ability | 38 | 52 | 9 | 100 |
| More able to analyse (situations, data) | 37 | 50 | 13 | 100 |
| Think ahead more | 37 | 48 | 15 | 100 |
| Improved ability to relate to others | 34 | 50 | 16 | 100 |
| Better able to identify new ways of working | 33 | 57 | 10 | 100 |
| Greater ability to get best out of new technologies or equipment | 29 | 55 | 16 | 100 |
| More able to lead others | 24 | 48 | 28 | 100 |
| More able to support others in their development | 24 | 58 | 17 | 100 |
| Improved efficiency | 23 | 70 | 7 | 100 |
| Higher profitability | 15 | 48 | 37 | 100 |
| Increased commercial awareness | 9 | 49 | 42 | 100 |
| | | | | |
| Foundation degrees (n=54) | | | | |
| Increased confidence | 59 | 39 | 2 | 100 |
| More proactive | 44 | 52 | 4 | 100 |
| Better prepared for next role | 44 | 46 | 9 | 100 |
| More likely to stay employed in your organisation | 43 | 50 | 7 | 100 |
| More able to analyse (situations, data) | 41 | 54 | 6 | 100 |
| Better able to identify new ways of working | 39 | 56 | 6 | 100 |
| Greater ability to get best out of new technologies or equipment | 35 | 48 | 17 | 100 |
| Improved ability to relate to others | 33 | 57 | 9 | 100 |
| Improved problem-solving ability | 31 | 65 | 4 | 100 |
| Think ahead more | 31 | 67 | 2 | 100 |
| Improved efficiency | 28 | 67 | 6 | 100 |
| More able to support others in their development | 28 | 57 | 15 | 100 |
| More able to lead others | 24 | 56 | 20 | 100 |
| Higher profitability | 15 | 56 | 30 | 100 |
| Increased commercial awareness | 15 | 43 | 43 | 100 |
| | | | | |

| Higher Nationals (n=51) | | | | |
|--|----|----|----|-----|
| Increased confidence | 57 | 37 | 6 | 100 |
| More likely to stay employed in your organisation | 49 | 39 | 12 | 100 |
| Improved efficiency | 43 | 51 | 6 | 100 |
| Greater ability to get best out of new technologies or equipment | 41 | 49 | 10 | 100 |
| Better prepared for next role | 41 | 53 | 6 | 100 |
| More proactive | 35 | 53 | 12 | 100 |
| Improved problem-solving ability | 33 | 63 | 4 | 100 |
| More able to analyse (situations, data) | 29 | 65 | 6 | 100 |
| Improved ability to relate to others | 29 | 65 | 6 | 100 |
| Think ahead more | 29 | 63 | 8 | 100 |
| Better able to identify new ways of working | 24 | 71 | 6 | 100 |
| More able to support others in their development | 22 | 71 | 8 | 100 |
| More able to lead others | 18 | 55 | 27 | 100 |
| Higher profitability | 16 | 51 | 33 | 100 |
| Increased commercial awareness | 10 | 57 | 33 | 100 |

Source: Employer Survey 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Multiple responses permitted. Employers were asked about employees studying towards the two most common HE qualification aims in their organisation.

Specific examples of such contributions included:

First degree students:

‘Identifying improvements, being more analytical, more commercially aware’
[319: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 1000+ employees]

‘Initiating better systems of working.... showing greater awareness and initiative to look at the way we do things and how to do it better’
[383: Education, 10-24 employees]

‘When the individuals finish their studies they.... get more involved in project management, working alongside senior management in preparation for handing over vessels to the customer’
[1425: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 1000+ employees]

‘They developed a new scheme to combat knife crime.... They would not have been able to...design and deliver a new programme... if they had not done their First degree’
[3286: Social work, 5-9 employees]

‘We’ve got somebody who.... was doing a business and management degree and he’s taken on the project to restructure all of our business support within the council’
[3484: Public administration, 10-24 employees]

Foundation degree students:

'We had someone come in as a volunteer, then do a Foundation degree and.... go through our personal development plan and work as a registered professional, and this helps us in terms of we are growing our own skills from within the organisation instead of having to head hunt'
[1927: Health, 1000-plus employees]

'Improved use of IT: a student researched and found a new [way to use existing equipment] and saved the organisation £175,000'
[2955: Other services, 1000-plus employees]

'Improved all round customer support is the main thing..... more awareness of the customer'
[476: Public administration, 100 – 199 employees]

'[The employee] has a better knowledge of child development and issues with child care, it helps on a practical level to understand why things might be happening'.
[711: Social work, 10-24 employees]

'We had a young person who was a volunteer and is now a staff member. He did a Foundation degree and is now able to assist in management duties and also partake in supervision of volunteers. His knowledge base has built and increased in terms of youth work and community worker skills'.
[2242: Social work, 1-4 employees]

'[Improvements] in terms of curriculum knowledge, planning and assessment, monitoring, team building..... becoming more confident, dealing with and supporting other staff, and also enhancing their own knowledge [and] understanding, especially child development, and making them better practitioners in some ways. [They have] far more knowledge of assessing, monitoring and planning, and the way forward to the next stage and supporting their learning journey'.
[106: Education, 25 – 49 employees]

Higher National students:

'Generally, they become more committed to their course and their job and.... end up doing more tasks rather than doing their basic main job. They take on more responsibilities'
[3: Other services, 25 – 49 employees]

'A clinical example is where we're enhancing the skills of non-registered workers, particularly in community settings, which reduces hospital admissions so we can look after people at home better'
[1121: Health, 1000+ employees]

'[They] have greater confidence to apply for higher positions in the company so we don't need to seek recruitment from external candidates. They are known to the company and that would be a greater cross-saving for the company'
[1425: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 1000+ employees]

'We have had some employees studying HNCs and HNDs [who] have improved their knowledge and expertise in Technology and Design and they've been able to pass on their knowledge to students and other members of the team'
[1977: Education, 100 – 199 employees]

'Much improved problem-solving skills and organisational skills [which] when put into practice saved at least 20 percent of the pest control department's budget'
[2505: Public administration, 1000+ employees]

These positive assessments by employers are consistent with part-time students' responses to a follow-up survey in 2010 which found that two thirds of them thought that part-time study had contributed to them being more confident about their work and better able to carry it out (Callender and Wilkinson, 2012, Figure 7.2). About half said that their studies had also contributed to them taking on more responsibilities at work although they had yet to complete those studies (ibid). About 40% of students working for the same employer in 2010-11 as they had done in 2007-08 said that their studies had helped to improve their pay and promotion prospects (ibid, Figure 7.1).

These student views on career prospects were corroborated in the follow-up employers' survey. At all three levels of qualification, a large majority of employers said that HE study often led to employees being asked to take on more demanding tasks and responsibilities and about half of them said it could often lead to promotion to higher-paying jobs (Table 3.3). As many as 70% said that staff appraisals would very often take account of study achievements. However, only around 30% of employers said that success in HE studies could often lead directly to pay increases. In addition, one in five employers of First degree students said that 'very often' or 'quite often' employees experienced some disappointment at not being able to make use of their new skills and knowledge in their current jobs. This view was also expressed by one in three employers of Foundation degree and Higher National students. Thus the positive outcome of new skills leading to enhanced responsibilities and career prospects applies to a large majority of part-time HE students but not to all of them.

Table 3.3: Employer responses to question: When employees are studying part-time for HE qualifications, how often does this lead to the following changes? (analysed by qualification aim of employees)

| | Very often | Quite often | Not very often | Not at all often | Don't know | Total |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| | <i>% of employers</i> | | | | | |
| First degrees (n=86) | | | | | | |
| In-house training for these employees is adapted to take account of their studies | 10 | 38 | 30 | 14 | 7 | 100 |
| Staff appraisals take account of study achievements | 72 | 19 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 100 |
| Pay increases are related to study achievements | 17 | 13 | 16 | 52 | 1 | 100 |
| Employees are asked to take on more demanding tasks and responsibilities | 21 | 44 | 21 | 10 | 3 | 100 |
| Employees are promoted to higher-paying jobs | 14 | 36 | 30 | 16 | 3 | 100 |
| Employees are disappointed at the lack of opportunities to make use of their new skills and knowledge in their current jobs | 6 | 16 | 47 | 23 | 8 | 100 |
| Employees are likely to carry on studying to a higher level | 17 | 53 | 20 | 7 | 2 | 100 |
| Employees are likely to leave your firm/organisation in the near future for employment elsewhere | 3 | 15 | 63 | 14 | 5 | 100 |
| | <i>% of employers</i> | | | | | |
| Foundation degrees (n=54) | | | | | | |
| In-house training for these employees is adapted to take account of their studies | 19 | 30 | 35 | 13 | 4 | 100 |
| Staff appraisals take account of study achievements | 70 | 22 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 100 |
| Pay increases are related to study achievements | 7 | 26 | 31 | 33 | 2 | 100 |
| Employees are asked to take on more demanding tasks and responsibilities | 13 | 54 | 22 | 9 | 2 | 100 |
| Employees are promoted to higher-paying jobs | 4 | 37 | 44 | 11 | 4 | 100 |
| Employees are disappointed at the lack of opportunities to make use of their new skills and knowledge in their current jobs | 4 | 28 | 54 | 11 | 4 | 100 |
| Employees are likely to carry on studying to a higher level | 13 | 67 | 15 | 4 | 2 | 100 |
| Employees are likely to leave your firm/organisation in the near future for employment elsewhere | 2 | 9 | 74 | 11 | 4 | 100 |

Table 3.3 (continued): Employer responses to question: When employees are studying part-time for HE qualifications, how often does this lead to the following changes?

| | Very often | Quite often | Not very often | Not at all often | Don't know | Total |
|---|------------|-------------|----------------|------------------|------------|-------|
| Higher Nationals (n=51) | | | | | | |
| In-house training for these employees is adapted to take account of their studies | 22 | 47 | 20 | 10 | 2 | 100 |
| Staff appraisals take account of study achievements | 67 | 31 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| Pay increases are related to study achievements | 10 | 29 | 16 | 43 | 2 | 100 |
| Employees are asked to take on more demanding tasks and responsibilities | 25 | 51 | 20 | 4 | 0 | 100 |
| Employees are promoted to higher-paying jobs | 12 | 43 | 29 | 10 | 6 | 100 |
| Employees are disappointed at the lack of opportunities to make use of their new skills and knowledge in their current jobs | 4 | 25 | 43 | 18 | 10 | 100 |
| Employees are likely to carry on studying to a higher level | 22 | 49 | 20 | 4 | 6 | 100 |
| Employees are likely to leave your firm/organisation in the near future for employment elsewhere | 2 | 18 | 63 | 10 | 8 | 100 |

Source: Employer Survey 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Employers were asked about employees studying towards the two most common HE qualification aims in their organisation.

When employers were asked whether their views about part-time HE study had changed in recent years, only about one in four said they had changed. In the great majority of situations where views had changed, they were overwhelmingly in a positive direction (Table 3.4). As one health employer of Foundation degree students explained:

‘[We are] more in favour – having used the apprentice model for four or five years we’re seeing the benefits of that - It’s about developing on-the-job skills, a true understanding of the complexity of the NHS’.
[1121: Health, 1000-plus employees]

Other similar comments were made by employers in other sectors:

‘We have a strong ethos for staff development whilst being in our employment, employees become more skilled at their job [and have the] potential to move on and develop themselves within the [organisation]’
[1571: Education, 500 – 999 employees]

‘We see it as a development programme both for the individual and the company, we feel that it’s more cost effective and we get the benefit of the knowledge’.
[1425: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 1000-plus employees]

‘I think in terms of employees’ professional development and their own personal circumstances, with employees becoming more mature and hence they want to develop their own career, it’s having that opportunity that they can study, and it’s an opportunity that we never had before’
[106: Education, 25 – 49 employees]

‘We can’t get the external skills and so need to develop our own people’
[2401: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 250 – 499 employees]

Table 3.4: Employer responses to question: Have your views about the benefits of employees studying part-time changed in recent years? (analysed by qualification aim of employees)

| | First degree | Foundation degree | Higher National |
|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| | <i>% of employers</i> | | |
| More in favour | 17 | 28 | 22 |
| Less in favour | 5 | 0 | 6 |
| No change | 78 | 72 | 73 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| <i>n =</i> | <i>86</i> | <i>54</i> | <i>51</i> |

Source: Employer Survey 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Employers were asked about employees studying towards the two most common HE qualification aims in their organisation.

But one employer strongly favoured vocational education to Higher National level over other types of higher education:

‘[We are] more in favour of vocational learning at any point – [it is] far more sustainable - youth workers, if they go to university we have no control over what they do – and they then have to undergo several hours of internal training because they’ve only learnt the theory but on vocational courses it’s all built in’.
[3402: Public administration, 1000-plus employees]

And the small minority of respondents who had developed negative views about part-time HE study emphasised factors such as cost and accessibility of courses:

‘There are financial implications in terms of budget cuts and [our] main focus is to keep people in a job’
[1528: Social work, 10-24 employees]

‘We are concerned that the content of the courses is not being aimed at people who are in work. The local university has changed a module to two split days so it involves more travel’
[2031: Professional, scientific and technical services, 50 – 99 employees]

In consequence of these generally positive findings on employers' evaluations of the benefits of employees studying part-time for HE qualifications, it is not surprising to find that 55% of employers disagreed with a statement that 'It is more cost effective to recruit First degree graduates straight from university than it is to support employees to study part-time for their degrees' (Table 3.5, Row 1). Similar large proportions disagreed with equivalent statements in respect of Foundation degree graduates (61%) and holders of Higher National qualifications (55%) (Rows 4 and 7).

Almost as many employers at each level of qualification disagreed that it is more cost-effective to recruit experienced HE-qualified people on the labour market than it is to support employees to study part-time for HE qualifications (Rows 3, 6 and 9). Consistent with these assessments, some 75% of employers agreed with a differently-phrased statement that the skills and knowledge gained by part-time study for First degrees while in employment tended to be superior to those gained through study on full-time courses (Row 2). In the case of Foundation degrees, 61% of employers agreed with an equivalent statement about the superior skills and knowledge that could be gained by combining employment with part-time study (Row 5) as did 68% of employers in the case of Higher National qualifications (Row 8).

Table 3.5: Employer responses to question: Please can you say to what extent you agree with the following statements? (analysed by qualification aim of employees)

| | Agree strongly | Agree to some extent | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree to some extent | Disagree strongly | Total |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-------|
| First degrees (n=86) | <i>% of employers</i> | | | | | |
| It is more cost-effective to recruit First degree graduates straight from university than it is to support employees to study part-time for their degrees | 14 | 13 | 19 | 36 | 19 | 100 |
| First degree graduates who gain their degrees by studying part-time while in employment tend to have superior skills and knowledge compared to new graduates from full-time courses | 40 | 35 | 14 | 8 | 3 | 100 |

Table 3.5 (continued): Employer responses to question: Please can you say to what extent you agree with the following statements? (analysed by qualification aim of employees)

| | Agree strongly | Agree to some extent | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree to some extent | Disagree strongly | Total |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-------|
| It is more cost-effective to recruit experienced First degree graduates on the labour market than it is to support employees to study part-time for their degrees | 10 | 26 | 21 | 28 | 15 | 100 |
| Foundation degrees (n=54) | <i>% of employers</i> | | | | | |
| It is more cost-effective to recruit Foundation degree graduates straight from university than it is to support employees to study part-time for their degrees | 7 | 11 | 20 | 39 | 22 | 100 |
| Foundation degree graduates who gain their degrees by studying part-time while in employment tend to have superior skills and knowledge compared to new graduates from full-time courses | 30 | 31 | 15 | 17 | 7 | 100 |
| It is more cost-effective to recruit experienced Foundation degree graduates on the labour market than it is to support employees to study part-time for their degrees | 6 | 13 | 24 | 43 | 15 | 100 |
| Higher Nationals (n=51) | <i>% of employers</i> | | | | | |
| It is more cost-effective to recruit people with Higher National qualifications straight from college than it is to support employees to study part-time for their qualifications | 10 | 18 | 18 | 39 | 16 | 100 |
| Higher National holders who gain their qualifications by studying part-time while in employment tend to have superior skills and knowledge compared to newly qualified people from full-time courses | 33 | 35 | 20 | 8 | 4 | 100 |
| It is more cost-effective to recruit experienced people with Higher National qualifications on the labour market than it is to support employees to study part-time for their qualifications | 6 | 27 | 24 | 41 | 2 | 100 |

Source: Employer Survey 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Employers were asked about employees studying towards the two most common HE qualification aims in their organisation.

4. The effects of the economic downturn on employer support for part-time higher education study

In a longitudinal study of part-time HE students in recent years, Callender and Wilkinson (2012) found that average tuition fees rose by 27% between 2007-08 and 2010-11, substantially above the prevailing rate of retail price inflation. These fee increases were largely met by the students themselves as employers were less likely to pay for tuition fees in full in 2010-11 than in 2007-08.

This finding is largely consistent with results from the two employer surveys in 2009 and 2011. Focussing solely on the 145 employers who participated in both surveys, Table 4.1 shows that the proportion of employers paying full fees for the majority of employees engaged in part-time HE study dropped from 54% in 2009 to 46% in 2011. Furthermore, the proportion who were aware of employees studying part-time but did not provide any support at all rose from 6% to 9%. However, the comparison is rendered unclear by an increase between 2009-2011 in the proportion of employers whose level of support could not be established with precision (Table 4.1, Row 3) at the same time as the mix of qualification aims among employees in these 145 firms and organisations had changed (Section 2).

Table 4.1: Employer support for part-time HE students, 2009 and 2011

| | 2009 | 2011 |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| | <i>% of employers</i> | |
| Pay full fees for majority | 54 | 46 |
| Pay part fees for majority | 11 | 12 |
| Some fee support, extent unknown | 14 | 19 |
| Aware of HE study, no support | 6 | 9 |
| Not aware of HE study, no support | 15 | 13 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| <i>n</i> = | 145 | 145 |

Source: Employer Surveys 2009 (Wave 1) and 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Base is total sample of employers who participated in both the 2009 and 2011 surveys. The table refers to highest reported level of support for at least one HE qualification aim

Further evidence on trends in employer support comes from survey findings on the impact of the 2008-09 recession and the subsequent economic downturn. About one in four respondents to the 2011 survey said that the recession had led them to reduce support for First degree course fees (Table 4.2, Row 1) while 17% said that they had also reduced the amount of paid time off work for study purposes that they were willing to allow (Row 2). In the case of employers of Foundation degree students, about 21% had decreased support with fees (Row 5) while the same was true of 24% of employers of Higher National students (Row 6). In response to follow-up questions, the great majority of employers who had reduced fee support for part-time HE students as a result of the recession said that, subsequently, they had not restored their support to pre-recession levels.

Table 4.2: Employer responses to question: Did the recent recession affect your support for employees studying part-time for HE qualifications in any of the following ways? (analysed by qualification aim of employees)

| | Decrease | Increase | No change | Never existed before or after recession | Total |
|--|-----------------------|----------|-----------|---|-------|
| | <i>% of employers</i> | | | | |
| First degrees (n=86) | | | | | |
| Paying course fees, in whole or part | 25 | 0 | 70 | 5 | 100 |
| Paid time off work to study | 17 | 0 | 77 | 6 | 100 |
| Allowing unpaid time off work to study | 6 | 0 | 83 | 11 | 100 |
| Contribute towards course-related expenses other than fees | 6 | 4 | 62 | 28 | 100 |
| | | | | | |
| Foundation degrees (n=54) | | | | | |
| Paying course fees, in whole or part | 21 | 2 | 72 | 6 | 100 |
| Paid time off work to study | 13 | 2 | 83 | 2 | 100 |
| Allowing unpaid time off work to study | 6 | 2 | 79 | 13 | 100 |
| Contribute towards course-related expenses other than fees | 6 | 4 | 62 | 28 | 100 |
| | | | | | |
| Higher Nationals (n= 51) | | | | | |
| Paying course fees, in whole or part | 24 | 2 | 70 | 4 | 100 |
| Paid time off work to study | 22 | 2 | 76 | 0 | 100 |
| Allowing unpaid time off work to study | 14 | 0 | 80 | 6 | 100 |
| Contribute towards course-related expenses other than fees | 24 | 0 | 62 | 14 | 100 |

Source: Employer Survey 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Employers were asked about employees studying towards the two most common HE qualification aims in their organisation.

The overall message of this analysis is positive, namely, that the majority of employers maintained their pre-recession levels of support for part-time HE study during and following the recession. However, the survey findings are consistent with other research which has shown a tendency for some employers to cut back on off-the-job education and training of different kinds during the recession while making greater use of internal training resources (Mason and Bishop, 2010; Felstead, Green and Jewson, 2011).

In the present sample of employers of part-time HE students, it is notable that there was a sharp decrease in the numbers of employers providing short courses of initial training for new employees, which may reflect the lack of new recruitment during the economic downturn (Table 4.3, Rows 1, 5, 9 and 13). By contrast, more of this sample of employers had increased apprentice training during the recession than had cut it (Rows 2, 6, 10 and 14), reflecting a much greater commitment to apprentice training in this sample than is found in the wider population of employees.

⁶ At the same time the proportion of employers increasing training to enable existing employees to take on different jobs (or different tasks or responsibilities) was much the same as the proportion which had reduced this type of training (Rows 4, 8, 12 and 16). Hence, support for part-time HE study seems to be more vulnerable to pressures on firm budgets than many other kinds of training. We now go on to assess the potential impact of future planned increases in HE tuition fees on employer support for part-time study.

⁶ The UK Employer Perspectives Survey in 2010 found that only 5% of establishments had employees currently undertaking Apprentice training (UKCES, 2011). By contrast, in the present study roughly 53% of all firms/organisations in the sample reported having at least one employee undergoing Apprenticeship training (Table 4.3, Row 2). This proportion is even higher among employers who were aware of employees studying part-time for HE qualifications (Rows 6, 10 and 14). Clearly, willingness to provide Apprenticeship training is highly correlated with employment of part-time HE students.

Table 4.3: Employer responses to question: How did the recent recession affect your support for the following kinds of training?

| | Decrease | Increase | No change, carried on at same level | Never existed before or after recession | Total |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------|--|--|--------------|
| | <i>% of employers</i> | | | | |
| A: All employers (n=145) | | | | | |
| Short courses of initial training for new employees | 26 | 2 | 69 | 4 | 100 |
| Apprenticeship training | 12 | 15 | 26 | 46 | 100 |
| Skills upgrading for existing employees in their current jobs | 31 | 8 | 61 | 0 | 100 |
| New skills development for existing employees to take on different jobs (or different tasks or responsibilities) | 22 | 18 | 57 | 3 | 100 |
| | | | | | |
| B: Analysed by qualification aim of employees | | | | | |
| First degrees (n=86) | | | | | |
| Short courses of initial training for new employees | 21 | 2 | 76 | 1 | 100 |
| Apprenticeship training | 13 | 16 | 34 | 37 | 100 |
| Skills upgrading for existing employees in their current jobs | 34 | 8 | 58 | 0 | 100 |
| New skills development for existing employees to take on different jobs (or different tasks or responsibilities) | 19 | 17 | 60 | 3 | 100 |
| | | | | | |
| Foundation degrees (n=54) | | | | | |
| Short courses of initial training for new employees | 24 | 2 | 70 | 4 | 100 |
| Apprenticeship training | 15 | 19 | 24 | 43 | 100 |
| Skills upgrading for existing employees in their current jobs | 24 | 11 | 65 | 0 | 100 |
| New skills development for existing employees to take on different jobs (or different tasks or responsibilities) | 26 | 22 | 52 | 0 | 100 |
| | | | | | |
| Higher Nationals (n=51) | | | | | |
| Short courses of initial training for new employees | 37 | 2 | 57 | 4 | 100 |
| Apprenticeship training | 16 | 14 | 29 | 41 | 100 |
| Skills upgrading for existing employees in their current jobs | 41 | 10 | 49 | 0 | 100 |
| New skills development for existing employees to take on different jobs (or different tasks or responsibilities) | 24 | 25 | 51 | 0 | 100 |

Source: Employer Survey 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Part B refers to employers who were asked about employees studying towards the two most common HE qualification aims in their organisation.

5. The impact of higher tuition fees on employer support for part-time HE study

The steep increases in HE tuition fees which were planned to begin in English universities in September 2012 raised concerns during 2011 that some employers could be deterred from paying course fees for employees engaging in part-time HE study. As shown in Table 5.1, almost half (47%) of employers of part-time Foundation degree students said that the planned increases in HE tuition fees were likely to lead to a reduction in their provision of full fee support for employees, as did 43% of employers of part-time First degree and Higher National students. In some cases these employers were still willing to consider providing partial fee support but about one in five employers providing partial support for course fees in 2011 considered it likely that even partial fee support would be cut back. As discussed above, this response may have been affected by difficult economic circumstances at the time as well as planned increases in tuition fees.

Table 5.1: Employer responses to question: It is likely that students will have to pay higher tuition fees for higher education courses in the future. How will this affect your willingness to provide support for employees to study part-time for HE qualifications?

| | Provide full support with fees | Provide partial support with fees |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | <i>% of employers</i> | |
| First degrees (n=93) | | |
| Less likely | 43 | 20 |
| More likely | 1 | 18 |
| No change | 38 | 42 |
| Never have provided fee support | 18 | 19 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| Foundation degrees (n=62) | | |
| Less likely | 47 | 27 |
| More likely | 2 | 19 |
| No change | 39 | 40 |
| Never have provided fee support | 13 | 13 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| Higher Nationals (n=63) | | |
| Less likely | 43 | 22 |
| More likely | 5 | 22 |
| No change | 38 | 40 |
| Never have provided fee support | 14 | 16 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Source: Employer Survey 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Employers were asked about each qualification which they were aware of employees pursuing through part-time HE study.

Employers who had provided fee support in the past were then asked about how the availability of student loans for part-time students might affect their willingness to provide such support in the future. Just over half of employers (55%) were aware that, from 2012 onwards, eligibility for student loans would be extended to some people studying part-time in higher education. About three quarters of employers did not think that the availability of student loans would affect their provision of fee support. However, Table 5.2 suggests that, at all three levels of qualification under consideration, the increased availability of student loans would prompt a minority of employers to shift from full support with fees to partial support with fees.

Table 5.2: Employer responses to question: How will the availability of student loans affect your willingness to provide support for employees to study part-time for higher education qualifications?

| | Full support | Partial support |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| | <i>% of employers</i> | |
| First degrees (n=75) | | |
| Less likely | 13 | 8 |
| More likely | 9 | 16 |
| No change | 77 | 77 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| Foundation degrees (n=53) | | |
| Less likely | 15 | 11 |
| More likely | 11 | 15 |
| No change | 74 | 75 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| Higher Nationals (n=53) | | |
| Less likely | 13 | 4 |
| More likely | 6 | 13 |
| No change | 81 | 83 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Source: Employer Survey 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Employers were asked about employees studying towards HE qualification aims for which they had previously provided fee support.

Just over a third (36%) of employers felt that they needed more information about tuition fees and student loans but only 46% of employers seeking information thought they knew where to go to find it (for example, government department websites). Indeed, several employers in the survey were still thinking through how

best to adapt their skills resourcing practices in response to changes in HE tuition fees and student loan availability.

Table 5.3 shows how responses to the 2011 survey on these issues compared with information gathered through semi-structured interviews with 12 firms and organisations one year later. In 2011 seven of these 12 employers said that they did not expect their policy on fee support for employees studying part-time to be affected by the planned increase in tuition fees. By 2012 only three of these seven employers reported that their support policies remained completely unchanged (Table 5.3, Rows 1, 3 and 8). Two organisations said that fee support would be provided for a smaller number of students in future (Rows 2 and 9). One manager at a manufacturing firm said that the reduction had more to do with slow economic growth than with the fee increase itself:

‘We’re already starting to [support fewer people].... It’s already gone down substantially from where it was before, so you know there will probably still be... 10 or 12 [next year]..... but a year ago it would have been 20 or more, but it’s already going down, it’s more to do with the economic situation here than to do with funding or fees’

[2639: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 250 – 499 employees]

The other two of the seven organisations which, in 2011, expected no change said in 2012 that support was now likely to fall but that no formal decisions had yet been taken (Rows 4 and 5). One respondent at a professional services organisation also attributed the decline in support to the current economic climate more than the higher level of fees:

‘I think we’re inevitably going to have to look at [fee support] because I mean the money’s just not available and, you know, if we’re not recruiting qualified people, then we’re not going to be sending so many unqualified people to college’

[2040: Professional, scientific and technical services, 100-199 employees]

One of the respondents who said that their support policy remained unchanged gave the impression that this was largely because they had not yet started thinking about it (Row 1). Others had decided to consider each application for fee support on a case-by-case basis and could not predict what the overall trend in support would be.

‘[We pay tuition fees in full] provided they complete the course and they stay with the company for a period of.... a year after the training.... I wouldn’t have thought [this would be affected by the fees increase].... The company would obviously take a view over the training budget, but I assume that all depends when the application goes in and what the position is at that moment in time’

[1425: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 1000-plus employees]

Among the five organisations whose financial support of students had gone down in 2012 in line with their expectations in 2011, there was a stronger emphasis on the effects of the increased fees themselves but these had been reinforced by budget constraints. Two education establishments in this group of respondents said that employees would now be encouraged to apply for student loans in order to cover their costs (Table 5.3, Rows 6-7). Two private service firms said that they had not yet given any thought to the availability of student loans (Rows 11-12). The fifth organisation (in public administration) said that, although support levels had been cut, employees would not be expected to apply for student loans if their course was work-related as the employing organisation itself could make loans available (Row 10).

Taken together with the survey results, these interview findings suggest that, even among this sample of employers with an above average interest in supporting part-time HE study, the levels of support available have declined in many firms and organisations in the last 12 months, not just because of the increase in tuition fees but also because of difficult economic conditions (including cuts in government spending in the case of public sector organisations).

Table 5.3: The impact of higher tuition fees and the availability of student loans on employer support for students, survey (2011) and follow-up interview (2012) responses

| | Code | Sector | Size group | Employee qualification aims | 2011 survey responses | 2012 interview responses |
|---|-------------|---|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | 3333 | Manufacturing, utilities, construction | 100 - 199 | Foundation degrees, Higher Nationals | Pay full fees for 90% of employees studying part-time. Planned fee increase not expected to change this policy. | Still have not looked into what fee increases will entail, nor given any thought to availability of student loans. |
| 2 | 2639 | Manufacturing, utilities, construction | 250-499 | First degrees, Higher Nationals | Pay full fees for all employees studying part-time. Planned fee increase not expected to change this policy. | Have decided to maintain policy of full fee support but for smaller number of students. Only beginning to think through implications of loan availability. |
| 3 | 1425 | Manufacturing, utilities, construction | 1000+ | First degrees, Higher Nationals | Pay full fees for all employees studying part-time. Planned fee increase not expected to change this policy. | Still no change in policy but training budget may be reduced in future. This decision will be unaffected by availability of student loans. |
| 4 | 3663 | Professional, scientific and technical services | 25-49 | First degrees | Pay full fees for majority of employees studying part-time. Planned fee increase not expected to change this policy. | Higher fees may deter firm from providing support in future. The level of support will be decided on a case by case basis. Still want employees to apply for support from firm before applying for student loan. |
| 5 | 2040 | Professional, scientific and technical services | 100 - 199 | First degrees | Pay full fees for majority of employees studying part-time. Planned fee increase not expected to change this policy. | Now plan to review fee support policy. Firm may cut back on support for part-time study just because it is easier to recruit people who already have HE qualifications. Haven't thought much about availability of student loans but are unlikely to suggest to employees that they take out loans. |

Table 5.3 (continued): The impact of higher tuition fees and the availability of student loans on employer support for students, survey (2011) and follow-up interview (2012) responses

| | Code | Sector | Size group | Employee qualification aims | 2011 survey responses | 2012 interview responses |
|----|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|---|--|
| 6 | 2158 | Education | 10-24 | First degrees, Foundation degrees | Support some employees to study part-time but cannot be precise about extent of this support. Planned fee increases make it likely that this support will be reduced. | Will no longer provide support now that fees have been increased. Employees will be encouraged to apply for student loans. |
| 7 | 432 | Education | 25-49 | First degrees, Foundation degrees | No support for part-time study by employees. | Now encourage employees to apply for student loans. |
| 8 | 3275 | Education | 50-99 | Higher Nationals | Pay part fees for all employees studying part-time. Planned fee increase not expected to change this policy. | Still expect to maintain fee support policy. Employees not expected to apply for student loans. |
| 9 | 2539 | Education | 500-999 | Foundation degrees | Pay full fees for majority of employees studying part-time. Planned fee increase not expected to change this policy. | Likely to cut back on number of employees receiving support with tuition fees. Will recommend employees to take out student loans. |
| 10 | 545 | Public administration | 50-99 | Higher Nationals | Pay full fees for majority of employees studying part-time. Planned fee increases make it likely that this support will be reduced. | Level of support reduced due to cuts in public expenditure. Employees not expected to apply for student loans if the course is work-related. |
| 11 | 2479 | Other services | 100-199 | Foundation degrees | Pay full fees for majority of employees studying part-time. Planned fee increases make it likely that this support will be reduced. | Will no longer provide support for employees starting new courses. Looking into information about availability of student loans. |
| 12 | 552 | Other services | 5-9 | First degrees | Support some employees to study part-time but cannot be precise about extent of this support. Planned fee increases make it likely that this support will be reduced. | Fee support cut due to budget constraints. Have not yet considered effect of student loans being available. |

6. Recruitment, training and support for part-time higher education study

One possible consequence of the substantial increase in HE tuition fees is that some well-qualified school-leavers who might in past years have elected to study full-time at university may now be motivated to look for less costly ways of studying for HE qualifications. If high-quality young people start looking for opportunities to study part-time while in employment, this may conceivably attract more employers to this mode of staff recruitment and development. In order to assess how readily employer recruitment and training practices might adapt to this potential source of high-quality trainees, employers in the Wave 2 survey were first asked about the relative importance of several different ways of sourcing high level skills.

As might be expected, greatest emphasis was placed on providing internal training for existing employees to upgrade their skills (deemed very important by 80% of employers). However, as many as 42% of all employers in the sample attached similar levels of importance to supporting existing employees to study part-time for HE qualifications, well ahead of the use of external recruitment to secure new employees who already hold HE qualifications (Table 6.1, Part A). Similar degrees of emphasis on upgrading existing employees were expressed in relation to all three levels of qualification under consideration (Parts B-D).

Table 6.1: Employer responses to question: Looking ahead to future skill needs, how important will the following alternative ways of finding or developing high level skills be?

| | Very important | Quite important | Not very important | Not at all important | Total |
|---|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------|
| <i>% of employers</i> | | | | | |
| A: All employers (n=145) | | | | | |
| Recruiting experienced people with HE qualifications | 30 | 55 | 8 | 7 | 100 |
| Recruiting newly qualified people with HE qualifications | 23 | 51 | 17 | 8 | 100 |
| Supporting existing employees to study part-time for HE qualifications | 42 | 43 | 12 | 3 | 100 |
| Providing internal training for existing employees to upgrade their skills | 80 | 17 | 3 | 1 | 100 |
| Using university short courses to help existing employees to upgrade their skills | 28 | 41 | 21 | 10 | 100 |
| Using other external training providers (not universities) to help existing employees to upgrade their skills | 41 | 46 | 10 | 3 | 100 |

| <i>Analysed by qualification aims of employees:</i> | Very important | Quite important | Not very important | Not at all important | Total |
|---|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------|
| <i>% of employers</i> | | | | | |
| B: First degrees (n=93) | | | | | |
| Recruiting experienced people with HE qualifications | 31 | 56 | 6 | 6 | 100 |
| Recruiting newly qualified people with HE qualifications | 24 | 47 | 19 | 10 | 100 |
| Supporting existing employees to study part-time for HE qualifications | 46 | 44 | 10 | 0 | 100 |
| Providing internal training for existing employees to upgrade their skills | 84 | 15 | 1 | 0 | 100 |
| Using university short courses to help existing employees to upgrade their skills | 32 | 41 | 19 | 8 | 100 |
| Using other external training providers (not universities) to help existing employees to upgrade their skills | 40 | 48 | 11 | 1 | 100 |
| | | | | | |

| C: Foundation degrees (n=62) | | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|----|-----|
| Recruiting experienced people with HE qualifications | 29 | 58 | 6 | 6 | 100 |
| Recruiting newly qualified people with HE qualifications | 23 | 52 | 16 | 10 | 100 |
| Supporting existing employees to study part-time for HE qualifications | 56 | 35 | 8 | 0 | 100 |
| Providing internal training for existing employees to upgrade their skills | 85 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 100 |
| Using university short courses to help existing employees to upgrade their skills | 42 | 35 | 16 | 6 | 100 |
| Using other external training providers (not universities) to help existing employees to upgrade their skills | 42 | 47 | 8 | 3 | 100 |
| | | | | | |
| D: Higher Nationals (n=63) | | | | | |
| Recruiting experienced people with HE qualifications | 35 | 59 | 5 | 2 | 100 |
| Recruiting newly qualified people with HE qualifications | 27 | 59 | 11 | 3 | 100 |
| Supporting existing employees to study part-time for HE qualifications | 46 | 41 | 13 | 0 | 100 |
| Providing internal training for existing employees to upgrade their skills | 81 | 17 | 2 | 0 | 100 |
| Using university short courses to help existing employees to upgrade their skills | 30 | 44 | 21 | 5 | 100 |
| Using other external training providers (not universities) to help existing employees to upgrade their skills | 38 | 51 | 10 | 2 | 100 |

Source: Employer Survey 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Part A refers to all employers in the survey. Parts B-D refer to employers who were aware of employees pursuing the specified qualifications through part-time HE study.

When specific questions were asked about the possibility of recruiting school-leavers with a view to combining work-based training with part-time HE study, as many as 73% of these employers said that they would be 'very willing' or 'fairly willing' to do so (Table 6.2). The main reasons cited were the ability to develop staff with better job-specific skills and knowledge, improved staff retention and the need to prepare for a future without some of their currently ageing employees:

'For us it is around appropriate recruitment and we have real recruitment issues around certain skill sets so it will [help] our ability to maintain a stable workforce'

[1121: Health, 1000-plus employees]

'In the future you've got [a better] link with individuals to assess their abilities'

[1425: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 1000-plus employees]

'To support the retention of staff in the longer term - to bring local people into the organisation'

[3402: Public administration, 1000-plus employees]

'To gain some work experience and further knowledge whilst studying, [especially] work-based knowledge'

[935: Education, 5-9 employees]

'If they're interested in the area, if you're in practice and you're developing at the same time as your academic qualifications, it's embedding everything together rather than being disjointed'

[1325: Social work, 250 – 499 employees]

'Because we want our workforce to mirror our community and have a diverse age profile'

[1174: Education, 250 – 499 employees]

'[It's an] opportunity to give young people work based skills'

[1113: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 1000+ employees]

'Because the employees are studying, they will bring fresh ideas into their work based job roles'

[3110: Education, 500 – 999 employees]

'It's easier to mould them to be a good employee for our organisation'

[506: Social work, 10-24 employees]

'[It helps to] create fresh talent within our industry'

[1719: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 500 – 999 employees]

Table 6.2: Employer responses to question: How willing would you be to take on young people who left school recently to study part-time for higher education qualifications while receiving work-based training with your firm/organisation?

| Percentages | All employers | First degrees | Foundation degrees | Higher Nationals |
|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------|
| | <i>% of employers</i> | | | |
| Very willing | 32 | 38 | 44 | 40 |
| Fairly willing | 41 | 40 | 35 | 43 |
| Not very willing | 13 | 10 | 11 | 8 |
| Not willing at all | 14 | 13 | 10 | 10 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| <i>n =</i> | 145 | 93 | 62 | 63 |

Source: Employer Survey 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Column 1 refers to all employers in the survey. Columns 2-4 refer to employers who were aware of employees pursuing the specified qualifications through part-time HE study.

Another issue of interest to policy-makers is the extent to which employers' efforts to develop high-level skills could be integrated with apprenticeship training. In the Wave 2 survey questions about potential recruitment of young people which emphasised combining part-time HE studies with apprenticeship training also elicited positive responses from a majority of employers. Almost three in five of them said they would be very or fairly willing to recruit school-leavers on this basis (Table 6.3)

Table 6.3: Employer responses to question: How willing would you be to take on young people who left school recently to study part-time for higher education qualifications while doing an apprenticeship with your firm/organisation?

| | All employers | First degrees | Foundation degrees | Higher Nationals |
|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------|
| | <i>% of employers</i> | | | |
| Very willing | 33 | 34 | 39 | 39 |
| Fairly willing | 25 | 27 | 23 | 23 |
| Not very willing | 10 | 10 | 8 | 8 |
| Not willing at all | 32 | 29 | 31 | 31 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| <i>n =</i> | 145 | 93 | 62 | 62 |

Source: Employer Survey 2011 (Wave 2)

Note: Column 1 refers to all employers in the survey. Columns 2-4 refer to employers who were aware of employees pursuing the specified qualifications through part-time HE study.

The reasons given for these positive responses were much the same as were expressed in relation to combining part-time HE study with work-based training without specifically referring to apprenticeships: building up firm-specific skills for the

future and improving staff retention and providing support for young people in general.

‘We're looking for technical apprentices that would go on to be technicians so it's important that that avenue is available’

[1425: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 1000-plus employees]

‘We think that people are more likely to stay with you if you've paid for their training’.

[383: Education, 10-24 employees]

‘Cost effectiveness and giving young people a chance - young people have just as much to offer as anybody else’.

[437: Education, 1000-plus employees]

‘To provide skills for the future for the organisation’

[1784: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 1000+ employees]

‘We offer them quite a lot of good packages in the school in being able to support them in practical and theoretical training and to give young people a chance in life and it benefits us because we learn from them as well’.

[1589: Education, 25 – 49 employees]

‘We want young people to come in who want to learn and develop’

[649: Social work, 50 – 99]

‘We have an ageing staff so are taking on apprentices to take NVQs and graduate apprentices for higher qualifications for social work for the future, we are also taking on young school leavers to help with the young unemployed’

[2634: Public administration, 1000+ employees]

‘[It gives us] greater potential to develop within the organisation’

[3400: Health, 500 – 999 employees]

On the face of things the large majority of respondents expressing support for combining part-time HE study with apprenticeship training for young people suggests that there is fertile ground for the Higher Apprenticeship scheme which was first introduced in 2009 and received additional funding in 2011 with the express intention of ‘[putting] practical learning on a level footing with academic study’.⁷ However, there are several reasons for interpreting these results with caution. First, employers participating in this survey were selected on the basis of information supplied by employees already studying part-time in HE; thus, they are not

⁷ Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, ‘Government funding for 19,000 degree-level apprenticeships’, Press Release, 1 Dec 2011: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/news/topstories/2011/Dec/19000-new-higher-apprenticeships-to-deliver-skills-for-growth>

representative of the wider population of employers. As discussed above in Section 4, in this sample the proportion of employers who already support apprentice training is well above average for the UK economy. Second, even among this particular sample, those employers who said they would not be willing to recruit school-leavers with a view to future involvement in part-time HE study gave plausible reasons for their stance which may well apply to other employers not covered by the survey. Third, follow-up interviews with some of the employers who had expressed a positive interest in this approach to recruitment and staff development did not find much evidence of follow-through on previous positive responses.

Among employers who did not favour supporting young people to study part-time for HE qualifications while undertaking apprenticeship training or any other kind of work-based training, the main reasons given focussed on a perceived lack of relevance and value of such training to their firms or organisations, preferences for training existing staff or recruitment of older people with more experience, concerns about paying for training which went beyond their immediate skill needs, limited numbers of vacancies, disruption to established recruitment and training routes, lack of supervisory staff and the potential lack of maturity among school-leavers:

‘We only sponsor [training] where we would get something in return and be able to use their skills within the job they are already doing’
[367: Other services, 1000+ employees]

‘We have limited staff vacancies for non-qualified staff’
[1381: Social work, 10-24 employees]

‘It's complicated because we only support [trainees] in doing qualifications that are relevant to their role, because it's a very specialist area, so we wouldn't support them in doing something that was irrelevant. If there was a training need, we would look to supplying that ourselves. It would be more cost-effective’.
[2783: Public administration, 25-49 employees]

‘What we've got is a qualified workforce to [Higher National Certificate level], so we would support people to go on to degrees or Masters once they are qualified, but we need people to be qualified to a certain level before they work with us. All staff have to be qualified to HNC before joining the organisation’
[3314: Public administration, 100 – 199 employees]

‘Basically, if you're talking about young people who are just leaving school - they haven't got the maturity to work within this organisation and train at

the same time. So the people who tend to do training.... tend to be mature people who are coming back into the world of work’.

[1383: Education, 25-49 employees]

‘We don’t tend to do apprenticeships because you need the mature outlook - not something we've thought about and the time we would have to put in to train somebody if they've come without life skills

[1261: Health, 25 – 49 employees]

‘We don't have the resource to do this [kind of training]’

[1719: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction 500 – 999 employees]

‘There are no vacancies so we prefer to take from staff already in the organisation’

[1723: Other services, 500 – 999 employees]

‘Because I feel an allegiance to the staff that I've got. When you look at it we’re a very small business so why would I look outside to employ somebody.... I would rather support my current staff to upgrade themselves’

[3167: Social work, 10-24 employees]

‘We support them through to NVQ levels 3 and 4 but it's all done [on a residential [block basis]... We work 365 days a year, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, because of these shift patterns we can't afford day release and training.... so our apprenticeship training has to be done in block’

[780: Professional, scientific and technical services, 1000+ employees]

‘We don't do apprenticeships and don't have the resources to mentor these people’

[2475: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 50 – 99 employees]

‘University courses are quite expensive – [and it’s the] nature of the organisation as well, a lot of people have to already be qualified to get the jobs in the first place’

[1554: Education, 1000+ employees]

‘We don’t have appropriate work for new staff or the human resources to train them’

[3012: Public administration, 25 – 49 employees]

These responses show how many different variables employers have to take into account when considering the arguments for and against supporting young people through part-time HE study combined with apprenticeship training or other work-based training. Similar issues emerged during follow-up interviews 12 months later with respondents who had earlier expressed a positive interest in recruiting school-leavers to follow this kind of education and training route.

Table 6.4 shows how responses to the 2011 survey on school-leaver and apprentice recruitment compared with information gathered through semi-structured interviews with 12 firms and organisations one year later. The 2012 responses suggest that, in this sample, when school-leavers are taken on, it is primarily as a source of entrants to apprenticeship training. In five out of the 12 cases – Rows 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8 – small minorities of apprentices may go on to study part-time for HE qualifications but this is not a key objective at the time of their recruitment. In eight cases apprentice training levels had held up in spite of difficult economic conditions (Rows 1-3 and 7-11).

However, in a minority of cases, firms and organisations that had responded positively to 2011 survey questions on recruitment of school-leavers and apprentices showed much more interest in 2012 in upgrading the skills of their existing workers or in sourcing high-level skills directly through recruitment of graduates. For example, the manager responding for one manufacturing firm stated that none of its Higher National students were doing apprenticeships because they were more in need of education than additional skills training:

'We already have the staff here with the skills... that have been promoted within the company or they're technicians... They just required more education.... Some of them asked to do it, requested through their appraisals to do it, and a couple of them it's a requirement for the job so they were offered the job on the basis that they would complete the qualification.... I'm not saying that we wouldn't [take on school-leavers], I'm just saying that we haven't in the past.
[3333: Manufacturing, Utilities, Construction, 100 – 199 employees]

A professional services firm had taken on school-leavers over the years and started them off on a path that led to HE qualifications. However, it was increasingly attracted to direct recruitment of graduates as a speedier way of obtaining high-level skills:

'[School-leavers] come in with GCSEs and then start ONC [Ordinary National Certificate]. Sometimes it just happens by default and by that I mean a school might write to us and say they've got some good candidates here and they want to get into engineering and it's as much about the schools being proactive probably as us I would say.....[But] if we take somebody on who's just 17 they're not going to get a degree possibly until they're 22 or something whereas we could take a graduate who's frankly got his degree and ready to go'.
[2040: Professional, scientific and technical services, 100-199 employees]

Finally, a manager responding for an education provider felt that recent changes in education and training policy were putting less emphasis on progression through HE:

'[In the past] there was a big focus on Train to Gain for instance and a lot of people doing NVQs and ensuring that progression through to a HE qualification. And we did do some work, I think it was working in partnership with [name of university] two or three years ago where we did a bridging course for people who were from an NVQ background to give them advanced study skills to bridge that gap into HE because I think there's always been a widespread recognition that not enough people who go into level three, level four vocational programmes progress through into HE. That's something that the likes of Aim Higher would have looked at in the past....Now there's a big emphasis on adult apprenticeships and I don't think there is the same sort of emphasis on progression beyond that. I know there are initiatives with higher apprenticeships but that to me is still developing and getting off the ground'
[2539: Education, 500-999 employees]

We conclude from these interviews that some of the positive responses to the 2011 survey questions on school-leaver recruitment may have had more to do with apprentice training itself than with part-time study for HE qualifications. In some firms a small proportion of apprentice trainees may eventually find their way to HE study. Furthermore, the continuing commitment to apprentice training in this sample of employers is notable in itself. However, due to the special nature of this sample, these positive responses cannot be generalised to the wider population of employers. Hence, even if large numbers of high-attaining school-leavers do apply for apprenticeship training, many of them may be unable to find suitable training places. Newspaper reports suggest that many high-quality apprenticeship schemes are already heavily oversubscribed.⁸

⁸ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/jobs/8710305/School-leavers-scramble-for-apprenticeships.html>;

Table 6.4: Willingness to recruit school-leavers or apprentices and support them to study part-time in higher education, survey (2011) and follow-up interview (2012) responses

| | Code | Sector | Size group | Survey qualification aims | 2011 survey responses | 2012 interview responses |
|---|-------------|---|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | 3333 | Manufacturing, utilities, construction | 100 - 199 | Foundation degrees, Higher Nationals | Very willing to recruit school-leavers with view to supporting them through part-time HE study and to combine this support with apprentice training. | Not against taking on school leavers but haven't done so recently. No current apprentices within firm. Higher National students are all skilled people who just need extra education. |
| 2 | 2639 | Manufacturing, utilities, construction | 250-499 | First degrees, Higher Nationals | Fairly willing to recruit school-leavers with view to supporting them through part-time HE study and very willing to combine this support with apprentice training. | Have maintained apprentice training. School leavers only taken on as apprentices. Small minority of apprentices go on to HE study. |
| 3 | 1425 | Manufacturing, utilities, construction | 1000+ | First degrees, Higher Nationals | Fairly willing to recruit school-leavers with view to supporting them through part-time HE study and to combine this support with apprentice training. | Have maintained apprentice training for mix of experienced workers and school leavers. Apprentices go on to HE study if get support of department managers. |
| 4 | 3663 | Professional, scientific and technical services | 25-49 | First degrees | Fairly willing to recruit school-leavers with view to supporting them through part-time HE study. Not very willing to combine this support with apprentice training. | Prefer to recruit graduates rather than school leavers. Prefer student placements to apprentice training. |
| 5 | 2040 | Professional, scientific and technical services | 100 - 199 | First degrees | Fairly willing to recruit school-leavers with view to supporting them through part-time HE study. Not very willing to combine this support with apprentice training. | Apprentice training reduced due to economic slowdown. School leaver recruitment also reduced for same reason. |

Table 6.4 (continued): Willingness to recruit school-leavers and/or apprentices and support them to study part-time in higher education, survey (2011) and follow-up interview (2012) responses

| | Code | Sector | Size group | Survey qualification aims | 2011 survey responses | 2012 interview responses |
|---|-------------|---------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| 6 | 2158 | Education | 10-24 | First degrees, Foundation degrees | Very willing to recruit school-leavers with view to supporting them through part-time HE study and to combine this support with apprentice training. | No current apprentices in training. Usually prefer to recruit experienced workers rather than school leavers. Some older workers progress to HE study. |
| 7 | 432 | Education | 25-49 | First degrees, Foundation degrees | Very willing to recruit school-leavers with view to supporting them through part-time HE study and to combine this support with apprentice training. | Have maintained apprentice training so far but numbers likely to reduce due to economic slowdown. School leavers only taken on as apprentices. Small minority of apprentices go on to HE study. |
| 8 | 3275 | Education | 50-99 | Higher Nationals | Very willing to recruit school-leavers with view to supporting them through part-time HE study and to combine this support with apprentice training. | Have maintained apprentice training. School leavers only taken on as apprentices. Small minority of apprentices go on to HE study. |
| 9 | 2539 | Education | 500-999 | Foundation degrees | Very willing to recruit school-leavers with view to supporting them through part-time HE study. Fairly willing to combine this support with apprentice training. | Have maintained apprentice training, with emphasis on adult apprenticeships. No school leaver recruitment with HE study in mind. |

Table 6.4 (continued): Willingness to recruit school-leavers and/or apprentices and support them to study part-time in higher education, survey (2011) and follow-up interview (2012) responses

| | Code | Sector | Size group | Survey qualification aims | 2011 survey responses | 2012 interview responses |
|----|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| 10 | 545 | Public administration | 50-99 | Higher Nationals | Very willing to recruit school-leavers with view to supporting them through part-time HE study and to combine this support with apprentice training. | Have maintained apprentice training for mix of experienced workers and school leavers. Some progression to higher apprenticeships involving HE study. |
| 11 | 2479 | Other services | 100-199 | Foundation degrees | Very willing to recruit school-leavers with view to supporting them through part-time HE study. Fairly willing to combine this support with apprentice training. | Have maintained apprentice training. No recent recruitment of any kind. |
| 12 | 552 | Other services | 5-9 | First degrees | Very willing to recruit school-leavers with view to supporting them through part-time HE study and to combine this support with apprentice training. | No apprentice training at present. Prefer to recruit graduates rather than school leavers. |

7. Summary and assessment

This report draws on a 2011 telephone survey of 145 employers of part-time HE students who had previously been interviewed in 2009. A large majority of these employers see part-time HE study as increasing the confidence of employees and equipping them to become more proactive, better prepared for their next roles within organisations and more likely to stay with their current firms or organisations. As a result many employers are willing to pay for employees' HE tuition fees (in whole or in part). About seven in ten employers in the sample thought that the skills gained from combining part-time study with employment were superior to those acquired by graduates from full-time university courses.

However, since 2009 there have been a number of changes in the HE policy environment such as increased tuition fees and the extension of student loan facilities to part-time students. Comparison of employers who employed HE students in both 2009 and 2011 shows a reduction in some employers' willingness to provide support with tuition fees for employees. About one in four employers had cut back on such support during the recession and the great majority of them had not subsequently restored support to pre-recession levels. One in six employers had also cut back on allowing employees to have paid time off work to study for exams.

Furthermore, about 45% of employers of part-time HE students said that increases in HE tuition fees were likely to lead to a reduction in their provision of full fee support for employees. In some cases these employers were still willing to consider providing partial fee support but one in five employers considered it likely that even partial fee support would be cut back. Follow-up interviews with some employers suggested that cuts in fee support reflected difficult economic conditions as well as higher fees. These findings may overstate employer willingness to support part-time HE study because this sample of employers contains a much larger proportion who are generally supportive of part-time HE study than would be found in a nationally representative sample of British employers. (The special nature of the current sample reflects the fact that they were identified through an earlier survey of part-time HE students).

One possible effect of increased HE tuition fees is that well-qualified school-leavers may increasingly choose to seek opportunities for part-time HE study while in employment, and may choose to do so through apprenticeship training. In order to assess whether employer recruitment and training policies might adapt to this potential source of high-quality trainees, employers in the 2011 survey were asked a series of questions about their future willingness to recruit young people who were interested in combining part-time HE study with work-based training. About seven out of ten employers expressed some willingness to undertake this kind of recruitment while six out of ten were positive about combining part-time HE study with apprenticeship training. Follow-up interviews with some employers suggested that these positive responses had more to do with apprentice training itself than with part-time study for HE qualifications. In some firms a small proportion of apprentice trainees may eventually find their way to HE study. Furthermore, the continuing commitment to apprentice training in this sample of employers is notable in itself. However, due to the special nature of this sample, these positive responses cannot be generalised to the wider population of British employers.

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to:

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
1 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0ET
Tel: 020 7215 5000

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