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Abstract

Successive governments, agencies and employer organisations have stressed the need for school leavers to be better prepared for working life, in particular, to achieve what are frequently termed employability skills; schools are expected to contribute to this policy agenda. Some academic commentators, however, criticise the concept of employability and schools' role in it although others argue that the concept does have value and utility. While there are strongly held opposing stances on employability and employability skills, an aspect that has been largely ignored is the experience of the workplace that many pupils already have through their part-time employment while at school. This paper addresses this gap, drawing on a national study of pupils' part-time employment to consider the place of part-time work in the employability skills policy agenda. It asks if schools should utilise the opportunities for skill development that much part-time work offers and whether employers should take more responsibility for the development of their 'pupil workers'. It suggests that pupils' part-time work may represent an opportunity for greater employer involvement in initial vocational education and training, constituting a small step in re-dressing the uneven balance of responsibility between education and employers that has developed in recent decades.

Keywords: school pupils' part-time work; employability skills; work related learning; student employment

Introduction

It has become commonplace to read that current and future economic success requires a different set of skills from workers than in the past. The need for young people to acquire such skills – variously defined and referred to as generic, soft, core/key or employability skills – that go beyond the type of knowledge and skills previously fostered by the traditional school curriculum is widely endorsed by policy makers, employers, employer organisations,

trade unions and many educationalists both nationally and internationally (eg SE 2002; 2007; SG 2010; OECD 2004; EU 2006; NESTA 2008; HMIE 2009; UKCES 2010). The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), for example, states baldly: 'Without employability skills, UK Plc ceases to be a global economic force and individuals don't get and progress in rewarding jobs' (UKCES 2009, 9). Schools are expected to contribute to this policy agenda by promoting the employability skills of their pupils.

A majority of school pupils, however, have direct experience of the workplace themselves through their own part-time work (Payne 2001; Canny 2002; Howieson, McKechnie and Semple 2006; Percy 2010) yet the potential contribution of this employment to the employability skills agenda is scarcely mentioned in a range of policy documents (NESTA 2008; HMIE 2009; UKCES 2010) with only a very few exceptions, notably Determined to Succeed and the Tomlinson Report (Scottish Executive 2002, Tomlinson 2004). Equally, pupils' experience in the workplace is generally overlooked by schools in their efforts to deliver work related learning and employability skills (Howieson 1990; Rikowski 1992; Hodgson and Spours 2001; Semple et al 2002; McKechnie et al 2010). Given the importance attached in education and training policy to the employability skills of school leavers and the expectation on schools to deliver them, this seems a surprising omission. This paper addresses this gap in the debate. It outlines the reasons behind the invisibility of school pupils' part-time employment, examines the activities that pupils undertake in their work and the opportunities it can offer them to learn and attain skills, especially employability skills and it reports on the perceptions of young people, educationalists and employers of its value. It then considers if and how the potential contribution of part-time work might be developed; in doing so we question whether schools should play a role and whether employers should give more attention to their 'pupil workers' to enhance their skill development and levels of employability skills – an aspect that they continually voice dissatisfaction with when

surveyed (eg Future Skills Scotland 2006; CBI 2007; UKCES 2010; SG 2011). The answer to some of these questions depends largely on one's stance in the debates about employability, employability skills and the role of schools and these are the focus of the next section.

Contested territory

The policy interest in the type of skills now frequently labelled 'employability skills' can be traced back to the growth in youth unemployment in late 1970s when the perception developed that at least some young people lacked certain core or generic skills required for employment. In response different sets of skills were formulated over the following decades, often as part of youth training initiatives, variously referred to as core or key, generic, soft or essential skills and from the late 1980s, employability skills (McGrath undated; Payne 2000; Hayward and Fernandez 2004; Keep and Payne 2004; Hart and Howieson 2008). The CBI's and UK Sector Skills Council's definitions of employability skills are among the more widely used in policy and in training provision (UKCES 2009); both of these formulations cover: *communication and literacy; use or application of numbers; team-working/working with others; problem solving; customer and business awareness; demonstrating a positive attitude and behaviours; self-management skills such as punctuality and time management; being responsible; being adaptable*; and the CBI also lists *application of information*.[1]

Successive governments have expected schools and other sectors of education to help deliver employability skills whether embedded within subjects, taught separately or as part of work-related learning – all part of a wider policy conviction that in a high skills globalised

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[1] In this paper we use the term 'employability skills' to refer to the range of skills and attributes in these two definitions while noting that some authors use other terms such as generic skills and acknowledging the contested nature of the concept as outlined in the paper.

economy, the UK's education and its economic competitiveness is inextricably linked and that education must contribute to the needs of the economy, raising skill levels and preparing pupils for working life (HM Treasury 2006; DCSF 2007; SE 2002; SG 2007 and 2008, DCSF 2010; HMIE 2009; SG 2010). This view has been termed the 'Education Gospel' (Grubb and Lazerson 2006 quoted in Lauder 2009) and is strongly contested: it is argued that the case for globalisation and the premise of a high skills knowledge economy remains unproven (Hughes and Tight 1998; Brown et al 2002) while the role of education in serving narrow economic imperatives focused on producing future workers rather than fully rounded citizens is disputed (eg Dearden 1984; Coffield 1999; Keep and Payne 2004; Furedi 2009; Ball 2009; Lakes 2011).

Similarly, while the concept of employability and employability skills has become an accepted part of education and training policy discourse, it has also been the subject of a sustained critique by academic commentators and others on the grounds that it lacks conceptual clarity and, especially as used by policy makers, gives undue weight to supply side factors while ignoring structural and demand side issues (Peck and Theodore 2000; Brown et al 2002; Moore 2009; Simmons 2009; Fejes 2010; Lakes 2011). In this critique, employability is perceived as part of a wider policy process by which responsibility for unemployment is shifted from the state to the individual, a process that frames the issue as a matter of individual deficit and reformulates the employment question as the employability question, largely disregarding structural inequalities and problems in the labour market (Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Peck and Theodore 2000; Brown et al 2002; Simmons 2009; Moore 2009; Lakes 2011). The inclusion of personal attributes and attitudes and what have been termed 'aesthetic skills' within employability skills has been especially criticised as a normative process in which all aspects of an individual are a legitimate target for intervention

and control and where education is placed in the role of reproducing rather than challenging patterns of disadvantage (Keep and Payne 2004; Moore 2009).

But other commentators maintain that the concept of employability can be useful and have sought to develop it to include external dimensions such as labour market demand, macroeconomic aspects and enabling policy support factors and to take account of sector specific conditions (eg Hillage and Pollard 1998; de Grip et al 2004; McQuaid and Lindsay 2005). McQuaid and Lindsay, for example, contend that employability deployed as a broad concept is valuable in enabling an analysis of the multi-dimensional barriers to work, thereby enabling more comprehensive explanations and solutions that reflect the complex combination of factors affecting the labour market interactions of those in and out of work. Nickson et al while acknowledging some concerns about social control, consider that training in employability skills improves the prospects of the long-term unemployed and that such provision has a role in addressing social exclusion in the labour market (Nickson et al 2003).

Hayward and Fernandez reject much of the critique of what they term .generic skills' policy as too simplistic, that the business community is not simply seeking to appropriate the education system to meet its own instrumental needs. They cite the view expressed by Unwin that the 'often genuine concerns of employers in regard to young people's basic skill levels has been demonized as part of the ideological battle around vocationalism' and that there is nothing in the literature to suggest how allowing schools and colleges to remain 'untainted' by vocationalism would improve this situation (Hayward and Fernandez 2004, 119). They contend that there is objective evidence of a real demand for generic or employability skills in the English economy as evidenced by data on the changing distributions of jobs across occupational sectors and in employer and employee surveys of skills.

There are thus strongly held and opposing stances on employability and employability skills but as we have pointed out, an aspect that has been largely ignored in these debates is the experience of the workplace that many school pupils *already have* through their part-time employment while at school.

The invisibility of pupils' part-time work

The relative invisibility of school pupils' part-time work can be partly explained by concern about its possible negative impact on educational attainment. Much of the research in the UK has focused on this (McKechnie and Hobbs 2001) but there is now a substantial body of work to show that part-time working of itself is not associated with poorer academic outcomes. The issue is the number of hours worked: the research demonstrates that working above a certain number of hours or 'threshold' does impact negatively on academic qualifications but working below this threshold does not. Indeed, working for a small number of hours has a positive effect on academic attainment compared with no part-time employment (McKechnie and Hobbs 2001; Payne 2001; Stern and Briggs 2001; McKechnie et al 2002; Percy 2010).

Concern about the exploitation of pupils who work part-time is another part of the explanation; this is compounded for pupils in the compulsory stage of schooling by the ineffectiveness of the system for regulating the employment of these younger pupils.

The marginalisation of part-time work is also related to the view that pupils' work is only 'pocket money jobs' involving low levels of skill and little opportunity for learning and development (Mizen, Pole and Bolton 1999; Furnham 2006). Nevertheless, a different perspective exists and a number of studies suggest that part-time work can be a valuable introduction to the workplace, help in the attainment of skills, encourage a greater sense of responsibility and the development of an adult perspective (Stern and Briggs 2001; Leonard

2002; Semple et al 2002; McKechnie, Anderson and Hobbs 2005). However, a lack of data on the activities that school pupils actually carry out in their part-time job and the skills they have to employ have made it difficult to investigate fully the potential for skill development. In the following sections we address this gap by reporting on pupils work activities and skill deployment. We also bring the employer perspective on the value of part-time work into the picture: an aspect that has been almost totally neglected in research (McKechnie, Lavalette and Hobbs 2000). We first describe the research study and data on which the paper is based.

Data sources and methodology

The main research that the paper draws on is a national study of school pupils' part-time employment (Howieson, McKechnie and Semple 2006). The research comprised a number of inter-related elements; in this paper we draw on:

- a survey of a nationally representative 10% sample of S3/Y10 – S6/Y13 pupils in both local authority and independent schools across Scotland administered to pupils at school. An 89% response rate was achieved with a total of 18,430 respondents (S3/Y10: 6,043; S4/Y11: 5,919; S5/Y12: 4,135; S6/Y13: 2,333). To ensure that the sample was geographically representative, the data was weighted on the basis of the school rolls in each of the local authorities. The survey included both term-time and holiday part-time employment;

- pupil focus groups (48 groups involving 376 pupils);

- telephone survey of a sample of 42 employers;

- in-depth case studies of 12 pupils to investigate their activities in the workplace;

- interviews and group work with teachers (46 participants);

- telephone interviews with members of the Scottish Councils Education Industry Network in all local authorities in Scotland;

- interviews with seven Careers Scotland staff.

An overview of pupils' involvement in part-time work

In line with other research, the survey found that part-time work is a common experience among school pupils (Hobbs and McKechnie 1997; Payne 2001; Percy 2010). Participation rose in line with pupils' age and stage of schooling: over half of S4/Y11 pupils were currently or had been in part-time work (56%) and by the S6/Y13 stage, 83% of them had done so (Table 1). By this point, pupils who had never had a part-time job were the exception. Gender differences in part-time work are apparent after S3/Y10 with higher levels of part-time employment amongst young women.

[Table 1 about here]

Among those currently in a part-time job at the time of the survey, three sectors predominated: retail (28%); catering (28%) and delivery work (18%). The remaining school pupils were employed across a range of job types: babysitting, hairdressing, office work, farm work, manual trades; cleaning, and a miscellaneous category. But the type of work that pupils were involved in varied across the school stages. Delivery work was mainly carried out by S3/Y10 and S4/Y11 pupils; the proportions employed in retail rose over the years and especially after S4/Y11. Overall there was a trend away from less structured employment in S3/10 and S4/Y11 to more formal types of employment in subsequent years.

In other analysis using multivariate techniques we found no significant differences between pupils from working class, intermediate and managerial and professional backgrounds being in part-time employment after controlling for a range of other factors. Nor was pupils' attainment a key factor in whether or not they had a part-time job (Howieson et al 2012).

Learning from part-time work?

In the national survey pupils who were currently working part-time when surveyed ('current workers') were asked about their activities at work, the skills required, training received and whether their job allowed them to learn skills and develop personal attributes. We restricted these questions to current workers since pupils who were not currently working might have not be able to answer these questions accurately.

Activities in the job

The 'current workers' were asked to indicate the extent to which they had to undertake certain activities and employ particular skills in their part-time job, responding on a four point scale from 'never' to 'all of the time'. Their responses demonstrate that inter-personal skills are a key requirement in pupils' jobs: a large majority responded that they had to co-operate with others all or some of the time to get the job done and also that they had to deal directly with customers all or some of the time (81% and 76%, Table 2). Their jobs were less demanding in respect of literacy related skills; they offered some opportunity to work with equipment such as computers, cash registers and photocopiers but less scope to work with tools and machinery. It may be surprising to find that over one-fifth of pupils were involved in supervising or training other staff all or some of the time (22%, Table 2). The case study element of the research where we looked in-depth at the job activities of working pupils tells a very similar story in terms of the activities undertaken: dealing with customers, team working; cash handling and working tills and, for a minority (two of the 12 case study participants), supervisory duties.

[Table 2 about here]

The extent of pupils' activities differed by gender, school stage and job type which is unsurprising since these three variables are inter-linked: since younger pupils tend to work in

different sorts of jobs, it follows that current workers' stage of school made a substantial difference to the extent to which they carried out the different activities as part of their job (Figure 1). For example, co-operation with others and dealing directly with customers rose in line with pupils' stage from 62% of S3/Y10s who had to deal directly with customers all or some of the time compared with 89% of S6/Y13s. S6/Y13 pupils were most likely to supervise/train others.

[Figure 1 about here]

The extent to which pupils undertook certain activities did vary by their type of job, nevertheless, a large majority of pupils in all jobs except delivery reported that they had to co-operate with others all or some of the time to get the job done. Dealing with customers was another common activity for most pupils except those employed in babysitting, farming, and cleaning. The extent of involvement in the other activities varied more depending on the type of job that pupils had.

Opportunities to learn
Pupils were asked to judge the extent to which their current job gave them opportunities for learning and development on a four point scale from 'never' to 'all the time'. Their responses were generally positive about the opportunities provided by their part-time job. Most thought that their job enabled them to develop their skills and abilities and to learn a lot of new things (70% and 62%, Table 3) as well as allowing them the scope to make decisions and organise their own time at work (65% and 59%, Table 3). Just under a half judged their job as challenging to them (49%, Table 3).

[Table 3 about here]

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Figure 2 shows the variation in opportunities for learning according to school stage. Positive responses rose in line with year group for the three items: learn a lot of new things; develop skills and abilities; and the opportunity to make decisions with S5/Y12 and S6/Y13 pupils thinking that they had the most scope. This may well reflect the types of jobs that the older pupils work in and changes in their employers' expectations of them.

[Figure 2 about here]

The scope that pupils' thought they had for learning differed by job type, for example, those working in delivery were least likely to perceive their job as offering opportunities for learning a lot/some of the time.

In the focus groups (375 participants), while pupils perceived earning money as a major advantage of working part-time, an equally cited advantage was that provided opportunities for them to develop, encouraging them to become more independent and more responsible and helping to increase their confidence . Once again aspects such as team working, problem solving and communication skills were mentioned. And along with the opportunity part-time work provided to earn money, a number of pupils commented that it also gave them a sense of the value of money and the need for budgeting.

These findings are self-reported by pupils in the survey and in the focus groups but we have a third source of information from the case studies: pupils recorded the activities they were carrying out in their job, were observed at work by a researcher who also interviewed them and their employer about their job. The case studies support the picture gained through the national survey and the focus groups with identified benefits in respect of communication skills (with customers and co-workers); working with others/working with

different people and greater confidence (eg with customers/strangers) (McKechnie et al 2010). The multiple methods employed in the case studies, especially the observation, enable us to have confidence in the self report by pupils: they are not being unrealistic in their assessment of the scope of their part-time job. Indeed, the case studies showed that the pupils tended to under-report what they did and the interviews and observation identified additional activities and skill demands.

Overall, the findings indicate that at least some part-time employment provides opportunities for learning and attaining skills, supporting the argument that such employment provides young workers with the potential to attain a range of employability skills.

Training received by school pupils in their part-time work
Half of the pupils who currently had a part-time job had received some training when they started the job. Young women were more likely to have done so (female: 53% vs male: 46%) but the main difference was that S5/Y12 and S6/Y13 pupils had a much higher incidence of training than younger pupils (S3/Y10: 33% vs S6/Y13: 75%). This is not surprising since older pupils are employed in more formal types of work than are the younger pupils.

The extent of initial training varied across different types of jobs, a high proportion of pupils employed in supermarkets, chain stores and fast food outlets reported initial training (89%, 88 % and 70%). Pupils working in these three areas were more likely to be employed by a major employer and other analysis showed that major employers were more likely to provide initial training.

A key question is the duration of any training. For a substantial minority of the pupils, their training had lasted for 1-2 hours (42%). For just under a third, their training had taken a

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whole morning or afternoon or a whole day (32%). A quarter received training of more than a day's duration. Older pupils tended to experience longer duration training.

Just under half of pupils who had received initial training reported that they were being given training on an on-going basis (47%). Again, the same pattern is evident in respect of school stage - older pupils were more likely to report continuing training than younger pupils (S6/Y13: 59% vs 30% S3/Y10). The extent of continuing training also varied by type of work with pupils employed in hairdressing, manual trades, supermarkets and chain stores reporting the highest levels (72%, 67%, 64% and 62% respectively). For the majority of pupils their training did not result in any formal certification: 11% had received a certificate.

Our data on training from the pupils' survey is supplemented by information from the employers' survey on the training they provide to their young pupil workers. A majority (35 of 42, 83%) indicated that their pupil employees receive initial training and a large minority (17, 40%) were able to point to ongoing training. In the Delivery sector training appeared to be restricted to familiarising the employee with the delivery route but in the other sectors we found a wide variety of initial and ongoing training. This variation did not appear to be sector dependent, in most sectors there were examples of low and high intensity training. Employers also noted opportunities for employees to gain some certification for their training ranging from certification of attendance at training days through to specific certificates relating to food hygiene and lifesaving.

The extent of the training received by school pupils in their part-time employment is perhaps surprising but is highly relevant to debates about the quality of the work they undertake and the extent to which it might support their skills development.

The employer perspective

In this section we present data from the telephone survey of 42 employers to shed some light on the employer perspective. The employers surveyed reflect the range and type of employment undertaken by school pupils in four contrasting local authority areas. The two types of employer that are missing from our sample are hairdresser and large chain stores, the former due to pressure of work in salons and the latter because of the need for local stores to gain clearance from Head Office which was then not forthcoming. The employers who took part were categorised into delivery (4), retail (13), catering (12) and miscellaneous (13). Of the 42 employers, 25 employed ten or fewer employees; 16 had between 11 and 50 and only one had more than 50 employees.

It is evident from employers' responses that many young people are pro-active in seeking out employment: this was how a number of them had recruited pupil workers. Informal networks and "word of mouth" also play a role in recruitment. A few employers used advertisements although it was rare for these adverts to specifically ask for school pupils.

A common assumption is that employers turn to young workers to save on costs. Such a view has its roots in the international literature of child labour and the historical practices in developed economies such as Britain (Lavalette 1999). The evidence was mixed about this. We did find examples of cost based reasons for employing school aged workers, for example in the Delivery and Retail sectors. Flexibility and availability of pupils were cited as important reasons in the Retail, Hotel/Catering and Miscellaneous sectors and these might be regarded as cost related since school pupils were willing both to work at less popular times and also to work fewer hours per week than adults. Employing pupils for only a small

number of hours reduces costs such as National Insurance although this would also apply to other workers prepared to work under the NI hours threshold. Nevertheless, other employers were recruiting school pupils because of what they brought to their business, sometimes in respect of specific skills or interests, or linked to their motivation and attitude eg 'a breath of fresh air'. A small number of employers expressed an altruistic reason, that it was good for the young person to be employed and it would give them useful experience. The data on pay from the pupil survey suggest that while cost might be a factor for some employers, pupils were being paid on average more than the Minimum Wage: the average hourly pay rate for pupils was £4.22 which is considerably above the Minimum Wage for 16-18 year olds of £3.00 at the time of the survey (there is no Minimum Wage for under 16s); overall, 78% of pupils were being above the Minimum Wage level.

We asked the employers to compare part-time work and work experience[2] in terms of their value to a young person's development or future career. (Under half of the employers had participated in work experience.) Just under two thirds of employers (27 of 42) thought part-time work was more valuable than work experience while seven judged work experience as the more useful. Four others rated both equally useful and four responded 'don't know'. One reason for judging part-time work as the more valuable experience was that it indicated initiative on the part of the pupil in gaining employment. They also argued that part-time employment involved a more extended experience of work and the workplace than did work experience and allowed school pupils to engage with the workplace as a "real" employee: 'part-time work is more real' and 'part-time work gives you the full picture'. In a study that examined the learning from Education for Work activities and from part-time work, employers participating in school work experience programmes were able to identify

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[2] Typically a one week unpaid placement with an employer offered to S3/Y10 and S4/Y11 pupils.

differences in the pupils they had on placement depending on whether or not they had part-time work (Semple et al 2002). Those with experience of part-time work were thought to use their initiative more; recognise that the job 'had to be done'; had more insight into the requirements of the workplace and were better at dealing with the public.

The extent of use of pupils' part-time work in schooling

The evidence from this research suggests that much part-time work can provide the scope for pupils to develop certain employability skills. Given this potential and the challenges schools face in meeting the policy imperatives to deliver work related learning, for example, difficulties in finding work experience placements, to what extent did they draw on their pupils' part-time work? Our research, in common with other studies, found that the extent to which schools made any structured use of pupils' part-time work was extremely limited (Smith and Green 2001; Semple et al 2002; NSW 2005). Both teachers and pupils were able to identify some classes where part-time work was mentioned or drawn on but there was no evidence of any systematic use in classes or embedding in the curriculum. A number of pupils in the focus groups commented that teachers sometimes referred negatively to part-time work and consequently they avoided any mention of their part-time job since they expected the disapproval of school staff.

School staff and those involved in education industry links were reluctant to bring up the topic of part-time work not only because of perceptions of its adverse effect on school performance but also because of anxiety about the current system of permits for working pupils under 16. These pupils should have a permit from their local authority but this system was widely seen as ineffective, a view borne out by our surveys of local authorities and of pupils which found that only 11% of pupils had the required work permit (Howieson,

McKechnie and Semple 2006). Educationalists were wary of appearing to endorse an activity that many younger pupils were, in effect, undertaking illegally.

Looking specifically at the various work related learning activities being offered by schools - work experience, vocational pathways and enterprise in education inputs – we found little evidence of any links being made with pupils' part-time work or even an acknowledgement that some pupils already had exposure to the world of work through their current or previous part-time work.

Educationalists, employers and pupils all perceived that work experience – the most common work related activity for pupils - served a different purpose from part-time work. Certainly our analyses of the job sector profile of each indicated that work experience and part-time work tend to relate to different job sectors. In the study on the learning from Education for Work activities and part-time work referred to earlier (Semple et al 2002), pupils thought that what might be termed employability skills were more likely to be gained from part-time employment than work experience. In reporting these findings we are not making a judgement on the value (or otherwise) of work experience, our point is rather that part-time work and work experience offer different but complementary opportunities for learning and that part-time work can contribute to the aims of work related learning.

Discussion

The evidence from this study suggests that much part-time work offers pupils the opportunity to develop certain employability skills and raises the question whether schools, in a policy context that requires them to help pupils gain such skills, should seek to draw on this potential learning experience. Whether this is a strategy to be pursued depends partly on one's stance in the debates about employability, employability skills and the role of schools.

As Gore observes employability is a term with multiple meanings, deployed according to organisational objectives, political necessity or ideological leanings and is 'a classic example of a contested concept, with seemingly little hope of reconciliation between rival factions' (Gore 2005, 341). Thus the answers to the question we pose may be sharply divided. At the risk of being overly optimistic, we nevertheless suggest that it is possible to agree that employability as used in the policy arena is too narrowly focused but also to accept that the ability of individuals to communicate with a range of people, to work as part of a team and to engage in problem solving may be useful qualities to develop (whether or not these abilities really deserve the appellation of 'skills'). The opportunity to develop these skills may be especially important for young people; Keep and James hypothesise that the importance employers say they give to soft and generic skills may matter more in the selection of young people than adults (Keep and James 2010).

The role of schools in part-time work

It could be suggested that schools, in their efforts to meet the work-related learning agenda set by government, should draw on their pupils' part-time work. At a practical level this would ease the burden, for example, of obtaining work experience placements. But it would also meet the objection that, by their very nature as educational institutions, schools cannot provide the conditions for acquiring employability skills (Young 1999, 2009; Keep and Payne 2004).

Gleeson and Keep suggest that if cognition is indeed culturally situated inside and interacting with the settings in which it is being developed and deployed, then 'expecting classrooms to mimic or anticipate the workplace may be something of a lost cause' (Gleeson and Keep 2004, 55). But schools could draw on pupils' experience in the 'real' workplace as a basis for reflection within pupils' personal reviews or in the subject curriculum (in Business

Studies or Personal and Social Education, for example) to address educational goals in respect of learning about work and help pupils reflect on what they are gaining from their part-time job. In Australia Billett and Ovens (2007) devised a series of guided reflection exercises for use within school with the aim of using pupils' part-time employment in this way. Critically they found that the success of their intervention depended partly on the teacher's knowledge of, and the value they ascribed to, the pupils' part-time employment. Given the ignorance about pupils' part-time work and negative perceptions of it that this study has revealed, the success of such an approach in the UK context would require considerable awareness-raising and a significant attitude change among educationalists. It would also require an effective system of regulating the part-time employment of pupils in the compulsory education stage. The Department for Employment has recently published research on possible revision or reform which may lead to changes in England (McKechnie et al 2011). Without changes to the way the current work permit system operates, it is unlikely that schools will be prepared to engage with the part-time employment of this pupil group.

While linking into pupils' part time work would help schools meet the demands placed on them to develop work related learning and might assist pupils to be more reflective about it as a learning experience, would the involvement of schools undermine the very aspects of part-time work identified as worthwhile? For example, would school involvement affect the role of part-time work in developing pupils' maturity and independence, diminish the experience of operating as an adult in an adult environment or limit the scope for problem solving? What might the effect be on the relationship between employer and employee: might it run the risk of changing it from an employer-employee relationship to that of employer-pupil? Any approach involving schools would need to respect the autonomy of the pupil as an independent worker in the workplace.

The role of employers: redressing the balance

The potential that pupils' part-time employment offers for young people to develop some employability skills need not be confined to schools but might involve employers, trade unions, careers advisers, youth workers, coaches/mentors and parents/carers. We are particularly interested in the role of employers: while employers identify a lack of employability skills among school leavers, some of them are in a position to address this by giving more conscious attention to developing the employability skills of their part-time pupil workers. In suggesting this we are drawing on the argument made by Gleeson and Keep, that unequal relationship between the state, employers and education has developed in which employers have been able to transfer to the education system the burden and costs associated with initial skill formation that they might legitimately be expected to carry themselves (Gleeson and Keep 2004). They suggest a need to review the respective rights, responsibilities and duties of education and employers, arguing that employers should be more active in training rather than expecting education to produce 'job ready' workers.

Following their argument we suggest employers should take more responsibility for their pupil workers' skill development rather than expecting schools to deliver this and we conclude by offering a few examples of how they might do so. Before doing so we must however refer to the issue of pupils' working hours and employers' responsibilities here.

In our study we found that while most working pupils (around two-thirds) were employed for a reasonable number of hours, a substantial minority who were working hours associated with a damaging effect on their school work. Employers have a responsibility to address this, for example, using contracts that limit the hours, ensuring their pupil workers are employed at appropriate times and being flexible at periods when pupils are under pressure such as exam periods.

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Returning to how employers might develop their pupil workers' employability skills, one approach would be the use of Skills Passports that have been developed by a number of Sector Skills Councils for their sectors: employers could include their pupil workforce in this system as a way of capitalising on the learning potential of part-time work. The basic principle of Skills Passports is that they provide a verified record of an employee's skills, qualifications and achievements which is hosted online and automatically transfers to their CVs (Inspire Scotland 2008). There is currently considerable interest and development in e-portfolios in schools, further and higher education and there would seem to be potential for developing linkages between these different record systems.

Another approach might be the development of an 'Investors in Young People' Award which would involve employers with, where possible, the TU Learning Representative. This might encourage good practice with young people in the workforce, and include not only pupil workers but also other young workers and young people on work-related learning activities from school, college and university.

A final example concerns skills review could be mapped against benchmarks. A pilot in Scotland to develop a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Profiling Tool for use within the career guidance process with school pupils and with redundant workers offers an example (Whittaker and Anderson 2010). The project involved a careers adviser working with pupils to help them review and map the learning and skills gained in an experiential activity chosen by the pupil (which could be part-time work) enabling them to benchmark their learning and skills to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and plan further learning and development. This approach could be used in a pupils' part-time workplace by, for example, a Trade Union Learning Representative or by an N/SVQ Assessor.

We started this paper by noting the importance attached to employability skills by government, employers and their representative organisations. We end by posing them a challenge: if the employability skills of school leavers really are important, then part of the remedy lies in employers' hands in the shape of their pupil workers and the steps that they can take to help develop the employability skills of this workforce.

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Table and Figure Captions

Table 1: School pupils' experience of part-time work

Table 2: Current workers: activities in their job

Table 3: Current workers: opportunities for learning in their job

Figure 1: Current workers: how often do the following activities in their job by school stage (% responding all or some of the time)

Figure 2: Current workers: opportunities for learning in their part-time job by school stage (% responding some or all of the time)

Table 1: School pupils' experience of part-time work

School year	Current job %	Former job %	Never worked %	(n)
All	**38**	**21**	**41**	**(18207)**
S3/Y10	29	19	52	(5936)
S4/Y11	34	23	44	(5847)
S5/Y12	43	21	35	(4099)
S6/Y13	63	20	18	(2325)

Table 2: Current workers: activities in their job

% responding all or some of the time	All	M	F
How often do you do the following to get your job done?			
Co-operate with others	81	74	87
Deal directly with customers	76	67	82
Spend time reading/writing/paperwork	24	24	25
Equipment eg computers, cash reg	48	38	55
Work with tools, machinery	28	39	19
Supervise/train others	22	20	24
	(n= 6164)	(n=2647)	(n=3517)

Table 3: Current workers: opportunities for learning in their job

% responding all or some of the time	All	M	F
How often my job…			
... allows me to learn a lot of new things	62	57	66
... allows me to develop my skills and abilities	70	63	75
... allows me to organise my own time at work	59	58	60
... is challenging to me	49	47	50
... allows me to make decisions	65	62	68
	(n= 6165)	(n=2775)	(n=3683)

Figure 1: Current workers: how often do the following activities in their job by school stage (% responding all or some of the time)
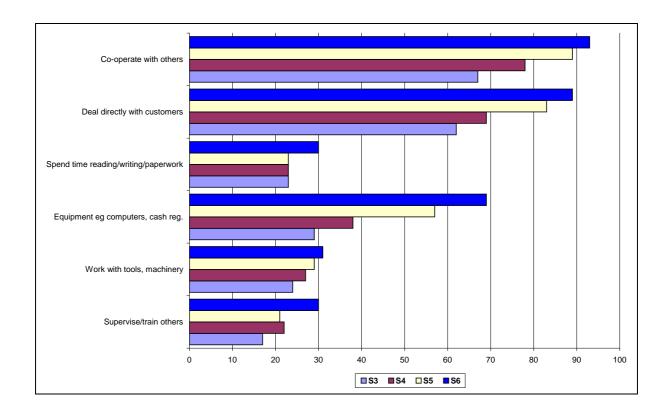
Figure 2: Current workers: opportunities for learning in their part-time job by school stage (% responding some or all of the time)