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Student Work in Belgium: results from the 1st wave of a quantitative survey

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Introduction

Investigating student employment in Belgium is particularly relevant due to its evolving regulatory framework and its impact on both the labour market and the day-to-day reality of many students for whom this is a first contact with the labour market. Until 2022, student employment in Belgium was limited to 475 hours per year. In 2023 and 2024, this limit was temporarily increased to 600 hours. In 2025, the maximum number of hours has been permanently set at 650 hours per year. For those 650 hours per year, students are exempt from social security contributions and income taxes, requiring only a solidarity contribution which is partly paid by the employer and partly by the student. This means that employing students is attractive for employers from a financial point of view, since it allows them to reduce labour costs. Moreover, this legislative change is shown to have an impact on the work intentions of students as well (Randstad, 2025). In a representative study among 1000 students by Randstad, 46% indicates that they would like to work more hours as a result of the increase to 650 hours. This share is significantly higher among those students receiving grants and among those students living independently (Randstad, 2025).

Evidence shows that the described legal changes have not only impacted work intentions, but have actually led to a notable increase in the number of student jobs, the number of student workers and the volume of work performed by students in the period between 2017 and 2025 (RSZ, 2025). On top of this, the tight labour market in recent years might serve as an extra explanatory factor for this increase in student work (Randstad, 2025).

Data from the RSZ (2025) show that the number of employed students was 4.2% higher in the first quarter of 2025, compared to the same period a year earlier. In the same period, the number of student jobs rose by 4.1%. Those aged 18 to 21 make up the largest group of the student workforce, but also students aged 15 to 17 or 22 to 24 are well respresented. Women are more likely than men to perform student work (RSZ, 2025).

The same data also show that the third quarter of the year is the most popular period to perform student work, as expected, given the fact that this period also contains the summer holidays (RSZ, 2025). However, it is clear from both the RSZ- and Randstad-data that the performance of student work is widespread throughout the whole year and across the entire student population (RSZ, 2025; Randstad, 2025). Moreover, the growth in student employment witnessed since 2024 is somewhat more pronounced in the other quarters of the year (RSZ, 2025).

The growing prevalence of student employment in Belgium means that work plays a more central role during many young people's educational trajectory and for these students, the once clear and linear pathway from school to work becomes more blurred. Given the importance of student employment as a phenomenon and the fact that this topic remains underexplored in the scientific literature, the objective of this study is to perform an in-depth examination of student work and its correlates among students enrolled in a Belgian institution for higher education. Studying this phenomenon in Belgium is particularly relevant, because student employment is highly prevalent in Belgium, despite relatively low tuition costs.

This report was written in the context of a Belgian project focused on the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the working lives of upcoming and recent labour market entrants. Due to both the increasing hybrid/digital nature of teaching in higher education and the legislative changes mentioned earlier, a substantial increase in student employment has been witnessed in Belgium. The part of the project concentrating on upcoming labour market entrants thus aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the work situation and career/work expectations of higher education students, taking this changed academic setting into account. The key objective is to examine the specific modalities and consequences of student work, including the job quality of student jobs and the potential impact on students' mental well-being. Therefore, several topics will be covered in order to provide an elaborate overview of student employment and its correlates among higher education students in Belgium. First, the performance of student work over the summer and during the academic year and its relations with students' sociodemographic background and study context will be studied. In a next step, attention will be devoted to the motivations of student to engage in paid employment while studying. The combination of higher education studies and the performance of student work is the next focus in this research report. The fourth topic that will be covered is the job (quality) characteristics of student jobs. Then, attention is paid to the role student work can play in the school-to-work transition. We will also present findings regarding the valued work characteristics of higher education students. Finally, two relevant outcomes for students are studied in relation to the other aspects of student work present in this report: job satisfaction with the main student job and mental well-being.

Data

The findings that will be presented in this report are derived from the first wave of a quantitative survey, conducted among students who are enrolled at a Belgian institution for higher education. Data were collected between November 2024 and March 2025 using an online survey available in Dutch, French and English (Qualtrics™). Multiple channels were used to recruit respondents for the survey: promotion through higher education institutions and through the social media channels accessible by the research team, calls to participate by individual teachers during their classes, promotion by different unions, and a paid Facebook ads campaign. After data cleaning, 3,433 valid responses remain to be used in the analyses. An overview of the sample in terms of socio-economic background characteristics is presented in table 1.

As expected within a sample of higher education students, a large majority (87%) is between 19 and 25 years old. Considering the gender composition of our sample, a large overrepresentation (81%) of female students can be noticed. Most students in our sample either live with their parents or other family members (46%) or in student accomodation (40%). A majority of the students in our sample (77%) grew up in a household where at least one parent had a degree from higher education. 68% of our sample is composed of Belgian students with Belgian origin (both the student and their parents were born in Belgium).

When it comes to the type of higher education institution, a clear overrepresentation of university students (80%) – compared to students enrolled in a university college – can be observed. This is mainly due to the fact that the survey is part of a research project carried out by three institution for higher education, each of which promoted the suvey among their own student population. The sample composition in terms of the year of study is quite balanced. The largest group is made up of students enrolled in a master's or a postgraduate programme (37%). Finally, the sample overview in table 1 shows that more than half of the students in our sample (53%) are enrolled in the humanities & social sciences field.

Table 1 additionally contains a comparison of our sample's composition to the two most important data sources on the prevalence and characteristics of student employment in Belgium: the 2025 Randstad study carried out among a representative group of 1000 students aged 15 or over and the information – available at a quarterly level – from the National Social Security Office on the number of (officially registered) job students aged 15 or over (RSZ, 2025). This comparison clearly shows that our sample deviates to a large extent from the overall population of students engaged in paid employment in Belgium. A first important difference is that our study only includes students enrolled in higher education, affecting both the age and study profile of our sample and most likely also the composition regarding living situation. Another important observation is the overrepresentation of female students in our sample, compared to the gender balance observed in the two other data sources. This difference can be partly explained by the higher presence of female students in higher education in Belgium. When interpreting the findings from this study, the non-representative nature of the sample has to be taken into account.

Table 1. Sample overview and comparison with related data sources

	OUR SAMPLE		RANDSTAD (MARCH '25)		RSZ (Q3 2025)
AGE		**AGE**		**AGE**	
17-18	8.8%	15-17	29.0%	15-17	23.8%
19-21	43.6%	18-21	47.0%	18-21	49.9%
22-25	43.6%	22-25	19.0%	22-24	20.1%
25+	4.0%	26-30	5.0%	24+	6.2%
GENDER		**GENDER**		**GENDER**	
MALE	18.3%	MALE	49.0%	MALE	46.2%
FEMALE	80.7%	FEMALE	51.0%	FEMALE	53.8%
OTHER	1%				
LIVING SITUATION					
WITH PARENTS/FAMILY MEMBERS	46.3%				
IN STUDENT ACCOMODATION	40.1%				
WITH PARTNER	4.8%				
CO-HOUSING	6.4%				
ALONE	2.5%				
HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL LEVEL IN HOUSEHOLD WHEN GROWING UP					
NO DIPLOMA	0.7%				
PRIMARY EDUCATION	2.2%				
SECONDARY EDUCATION	20.5%				
HIGHER EDUCATION: COLLEGE	37%				
HIGHER EDUCATION: UNIVERSITY	34.9%				
HIGHER EDUCATION: DOCTORATE	4.7%				
ORIGIN					
BELGIAN WITH BELGIAN ORIGINS	67.9%				
BELGIAN WITH EU/UK/SWITZ/NOR ORIGINS	6.2%				
BELGIAN WITH NON-EU ORIGINS (1 PARENT)	7.2%				
BELGIAN WITH NON-EU ORIGINS (2 PARENTS)	4.6%				
EU/UK/SWITZ/NOR	6.9%				
NON-EU	7.4%				
TYPE OF INSTITUTION					
COLLEGE	19.7%				
UNIVERSITY	80.3%				
YEAR OF STUDY		**YEAR OF STUDY**			
BACHELOR 1ST YEAR/ASSOCIATE DEGREE	19.7%	SECONDARY	54.0%		
BACHELOR 2ND YEAR	17.5%	BACHELOR	38.0%		
BACHELOR 3RD/4TH YEAR	19.9%	MASTER	8.0%		
BACH AFTER BACH/SHORT BACH/TRANSITION YEAR	5.7%				
MASTER/MANAMA/POSTGRADUATE	37.3%				
FIELD OF STUDY					
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES	53%				
BUSINESS. ADMINISTRATION & LAW	16.3%				
SCIENCE. TECHNOLOGY. ENGINEERING & MATHEMATICS	12%				
LIFE SCIENCES & HEALTH	17.7%				
OTHER	1%				

Findings

In this section of the report, results from the survey concerning the following aspects of student work will be discussed: performance, motivations, the combination with higher education studies, job (quality) characteristics of the main student job, the relationship with the school-to-work transition, valued work characteristics (related to their main job in the future) and the relationship with job satisfaction and mental well-being.

Performance of student work

A very high share of the students in our sample (> 90%) perform student work, either over the summer, during the academic year or both. Taking into account that students performing student work were potentially more likely to notice and complete the survey, it is necessary to compare this observation with information from other sources. Unfortunately, little to no information can be found about the exact share of Belgian students engaged in paid employment. In their study among a representative sample of 1000 students older than 15, Randstad (2025) found that only 15% does not engage in any type of student work.

Randstad found that 78% of students older than 15 worked as a job student during the summer holidays (Randstad, 2025). In our sample comprised of higher education students, 87% reports to have worked during the previous summer holiday. Considering those working during the rest of the year, our share among higher education students (83%) is again higher than that found by Randstad (75%). In our sample, 10% of the students worked during the summer holidays but not during the current academic year, while only 7% of students worked during the current academic year but not during the previous summer holidays. Those shares are amost identical to the ones found by Randstad (2025). Our study also provides information about the mean number of days worked during the summer holidays (31) and about the mean number of hours worked per week during the academic year (17). The data from Randstad (2025) provide us with additional information about the mean number of days students work on a yearly basis, which is 73 in their sample. Given that the median in the same sample is only 50, a highly unequal distribution among students can be assumed (Randstad, 2025). As can be derived from table 2, students in our sample are more likely to perform only one student job or no student work during the academic year, compared to their engagement in student work during the summer holidays. Students holding multiple jobs during the academic year are most likely to combine different jobs simultaneously.

Table 2. Performance of student work

	SUMMER	ACADEMIC YEAR
ONE JOB	47.6%	57.6%
MULTIPLE JOBS. NOT SIMULTANEOUS	17.4%	7.9%
MULTIPLE JOBS. SIMULTANEOUS	22.1%	17.7%
NO JOB	13%	16.8%
NUMBER OF DAYS: MEAN	31	/
NUMBER OF DAYS: MEDIAN	28	/
NUMBER OF HOURS PER WEEK: MEAN	/	16.6
NUMBER OF HOURS PER WEEK: MEDIAN	/	13

In table 3 and table 4, we present our findings regarding the performance of student work respectively during the summer and during the academic year, according to student characteristics. Considering age, we notice that not performing student work over the summer is most frequent among the oldest students (25+). However, if they do work, these students appear to work a higher number of days on average. In general, the number of days worked over the summer increases with the age of students. During the academic year, both the youngest and oldest students are more likely to not hold a student job. Again, the mean number of hours worked increases with age. Female students are more likely than their male counterparts to have performed student work over the summer and during the current academic year, a finding in line with the RSZ data about student work in Belgium (RSZ, 2025). However, in our data, only the difference for student work during the academic year is statistically significant.

When it comes to the relation with students' living situation, students living alone or with their partner worked more days during the summer than students living with family, in student accomodation or in co-housing. The same pattern can be observed for the number of weekly hours worked during the academic year, especially for those students living alone.

As can be seen in table 3, a lower educational level in the household when growing up (signaling social class background) is associated with a higher number of days worked during the summer. The pattern for social class background is less clear for the performance of student work during the academic year (see table 4). In general, students from higher social classes (who grew up in a household where at least one parent has a university degree or higher) are more likely to not engage in student work over the summer or during the academic year.

Considering origin, our analyses show that students from non-EU origin worked a higher mean number of days during the summer holidays. Students who were born outside of Belgium themselves (in another EU country or outside of the EU) report the highest number of days worked over the summer, but at the same time these groups of students are more likely not to hold a student job. A similar pattern according to student origin exists for performing student work during the academic year. This means that the absence of student work during the summer and the academic year is related to origin, with students of non-Belgian origin reporting more often that they do no hold a student job. However, if they do work, they tend to work a higher number of days/weekly hours on average.

Of course, we want to take a look at the relationship with the study context as well. Compared to university students, college students are more likely to perform student work during the summer holidays and the academic year. Moreover, the mean number of days/weekly hours worked is also higher among college students than among students enrolled in a Belgian university.

In table 4, we see that first year students are less likely to perform student work during the academic year, a pattern which is not observed for the performance of student work over the summer. For those engaged in student work, the weekly number of hours worked does not vary significantly according to study year. Considering the relation between the performance of student work and the study field in which students are enrolled, we observe that students enrolled in a science, technology, engineering & mathematics programme have performed a lower mean number of work days during the summer and are also less likely to perform student work during the academic year.

Table 3. Performance of student work during the summer according to background characteristics

		1 JOB	MULTIPLE JOBS	NO JOB	MEAN NUMBER OF DAYS
AGE	***				***
17-18		51.4%	33.5%	15.1%	26.6
19-21		46.7%	40.8%	12.5%	29.8
22-25		47.8%	41.8%	10.4%	32.4
25+		39.4%	26.8%	33.9%	37.4
GENDER	n.s.				n.s.
MALE		46.6%	35.9%	17.5%	30.2
FEMALE		47.8%	40.4%	11.8%	31.2
OTHER		47.1%	29.4%	23.5%	35.1
LIVING SITUATION	**				***
WITH FAMILY		50.3%	38.6%	11.2%	31.5
STUDENT ACCOMODATION		45.7%	40.9%	13.3%	29.4
WITH PARTNER		45.1%	34.1%	20.7%	37.1
CO-HOUSING		44.0%	41.3%	14.7%	29.7
ALONE		43.0%	37.2%	19.8%	41.8
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL HH	**				***
MAX. PRIMARY		51.3%	38.2%	10.5%	35.4
SECONDARY		49.1%	38.6%	12.3%	34.5
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE		48.4%	41.0%	10.6%	29.8
UNIVERSITY		47.6%	35.0%	17.3%	28.2
DOCTORATE		42.9%	28.6%	28.6%	28.9
ORIGIN	***				***
BE, BE ORIGIN		49.5%	39.8%	10.7%	28.8
BE, EU ORIGIN		47.9%	37.4%	14.7%	29.1
BE, NON-EU ORIGIN (1)		41.6%	42.6%	15.8%	31.7
BE, NON-EU ORIGIN (2)		50.4%	33.9%	15.7%	33.1
EU		44.5%	30.2%	25.3%	38.6
NON-EU		44.6%	22.1%	33.3%	37.9
TYPE OF INSTITUTION	*				***
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE		47.0%	45.3%	7.7%	35.6
UNIVERSITY		47.7%	38.0%	14.3%	29.9
YEAR OF STUDY	n.s.				n.s.
BACH 1/ASSOCIATE DEGREE		50.4%	34.9%	14.7%	30.7
BACH 2		47.7%	37.5%	14.7%	30.3
BACH 3/4		46.6%	42.8%	10.6%	30.9
BACH OTHER		48.2%	47.7%	4.1%	34.4
MASTER/POSTGRADUATE		46.5%	39.9%	13.6%	31.1
FIELD OF STUDY	n.s.				***
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES		48.6%	39.2%	12.2%	30.1
BUSINESS, ADMIN & LAW		46.9%	41.2%	11.9%	33.3
SCIENCE, TECHN, ENGINEERING & MATHS		45.0%	36.3%	18.7%	28.6
LIFE SCIENCES & HEALTH		46.8%	40.9%	12.4%	33.0

*n.s. p>0.05; *p<0.05; **p<0.01;***p<0.001 (based on One-Way ANOVA tests)*

Table 4. Performance of student work during the academic year according to background characteristics

		1 JOB	MULTIPLE JOBS	NO JOB	MEAN NUMBER OF WEEKLY HOURS
AGE	***				***
17-18		53.6%	16.2%	30.2%	12.1
19-21		60.1%	24.5%	15.4%	15.5
22-25		57.5%	28.9%	13.5%	17.9
25+		37.0%	26.8%	36.2%	23.5
GENDER	***				n.s.
MALE		54.4%	20.9%	24.7%	15.3
FEMALE		58.1%	26.8%	15.1%	16.9
OTHER		70.6%	17.6%	11.8%	14.8
LIVING SITUATION	**				***
WITH FAMILY		60.7%	24.0%	15.3%	17.3
STUDENT ACCOMODATION		55.6%	25.8%	18.6%	14.4
WITH PARTNER		53.0%	26.2%	20.7%	20.6
CO-HOUSING		54.6%	33.5%	11.9%	18.4
ALONE		48.8%	30.2%	20.9%	26.1
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL HH	***				***
MAX. PRIMARY		56.6%	26.3%	17.1%	22.1
SECONDARY		57.5%	25.6%	16.9%	17.8
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE		58.1%	24.7%	17.3%	15.8
UNIVERSITY		53.4%	22.2%	24.4%	14.8
DOCTORATE		46.8%	20.6%	32.5%	18.8
ORIGIN	***				***
BE, BE ORIGIN		58.0%	23.5%	18.5%	15.2
BE, EU ORIGIN		57.7%	26.4%	16.0%	16.0
BE, NON-EU ORIGIN (1)		47.9%	33.2%	18.9%	17.8
BE, NON-EU ORIGIN (2)		53.7%	23.1%	23.1%	18.3
EU		54.4%	18.1%	27.5%	19.9
NON-EU		45.6%	20.5%	33.8%	21.0
TYPE OF INSTITUTION	***				***
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE		61.7%	28.5%	9.7%	19.7
UNIVERSITY		56.6%	24.9%	18.6%	15.8
YEAR OF STUDY	***				n.s.
BACH 1/GRADUAAT		57.5%	18.3%	24.2%	15.9
BACH 2		60.5%	24.3%	15.2%	16.1
BACH 3/4		61.1%	28.5%	10.5%	17.4
BACH OTHER		61.1%	28.5%	10.4%	16.6
MASTER/ POSTGRADUAAT		54.4%	28.2%	17.3%	16.8
FIELD OF STUDY	***				**
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES		58.1%	27.4%	14.5%	16.5
BUSINESS, ADMIN & LAW		59.7%	21.7%	18.5%	17.6
SCIENCE, TECH, ENGINEERING & MATHS		49.1%	24.1%	26.8%	14.2
LIFE SCIENCES & HEALTH		59.6%	25.2%	15.2%	17.2

*n.s. p>0.05; *p<0.05; **p<0.01;***p<0.001 (based on One-Way ANOVA tests)*

In table 5, we present the distribution of student workers in our sample over the different sectors of employment and types of occupations, based on open-ended answers they provided about their main student job during the current academic year. We notice that students are drawn to two sectors in particular: the hospitality sector (accommodation & food services) and the retail sector (wholesale & retail trade). The observation that these sectors rely most heavily on student workers is also confirmed by data from the RSZ (2025) and the study performed by Randstad (2025). Related to this sectoral distribution of student work in our sample, we notice that a majority of the students in our sample indicate that the occupation of their main student job falls within the category of service personnel (service & sales workers).

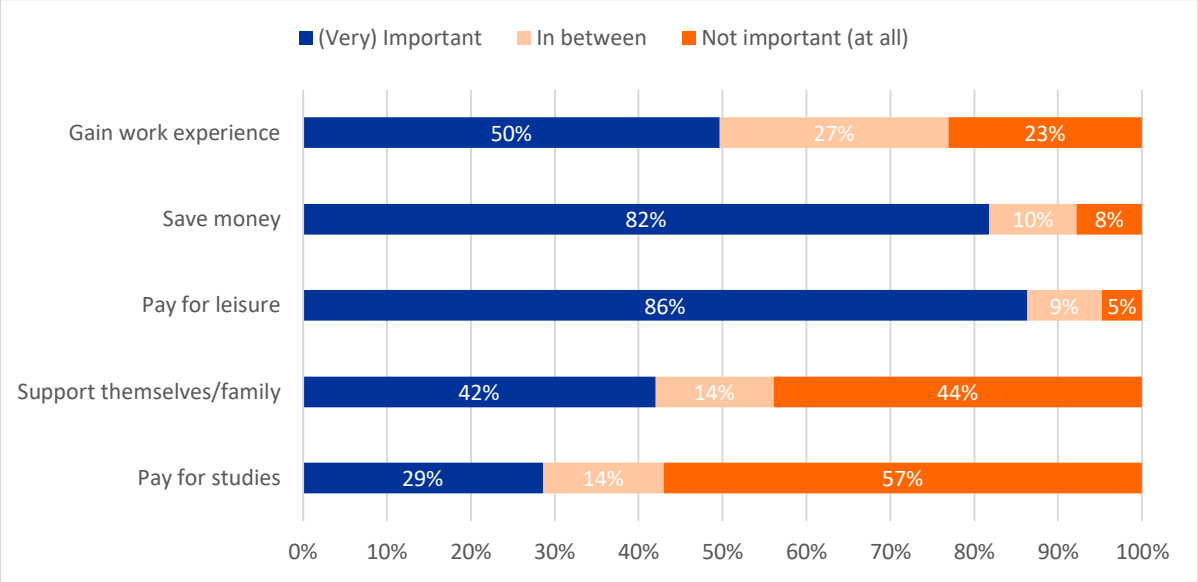
Table 5. Presence of student workers in different sectors of employment and types of occupations (based on students' self-reported main student job during the academic year)

SECTOR OF EMPLOYMENT (NACE)	
AGRICULTURE. FORESTRY & FISHING	0.2%
MANUFACTURING	1.4%
WATER SUPPLY. WASTE MANAGEMENT & REMEDIATION ACTIVITIES	0.2%
CONSTRUCTION	0.2%
WHOLESALE & RETAIL TRADE	26.8%
TRANSPORTATION & STORAGE	2%
ACCOMMODATION & FOOD SERVICES	40.1%
INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION	1.6%
FINANCIAL & INSURANCE ACTIVITIES	0.4%
REAL ESTATE ACTIVITIES	0.2%
PROFESSIONAL. SCIENTIFIC & TECHNICAL ACTIVITIES	2.4%
ADMINISTRATIVE & SUPPORT SERVICE ACTIVITIES	3.7%
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	0.5%
EDUCATION	6.2%
HUMAN HEALTH & SOCIAL WORK ACTIVITIES	8.3%
ARTS. ENTERTAINMENT & RECREATION	5.5%
OTHER SERVICE ACTIVITIES	0.3%
TYPE OF OCCUPATION (ISCO)	
MANAGERS	0.4%
PROFESSIONALS	6.4%
TECHNICIANS & ASSOCIATE PROFESSIONALS	8.8%
CLERICAL SUPPORT WORKERS	11.3%
SERVICE & SALES WORKERS	60.7%
SKILLED AGRICULTURAL. FORESTRY & FISHERY WORKERS	0.2%
CRAFT & RELATED TRADES WORKERS	1.4%
PLANT & MACHINE OPERATORS. AND ASSEMBLERS	0.9%
ELEMENTARY OCCUPATIONS	9.8%

Motivation for student work

Figure 1 presents our findings regarding the motivation of students to perform student work. The most common reasons for taking on student work are paying for leisure activities and saving money for the future, with more than four in five student workers rating these motivations as important. About half of the student workers in our sample say that gaining work experience for later is an important factor. Four in ten students report that supporting themselves or their family is an important motivation. The least important reason for working, though still mentioned by 28.5% of student workers in our sample, is paying for their own studies. These last two motivations – support themselves/family and pay for own studies – are strongly correlated to each other (r = 0.587).

Figure 1. Importance of different motivations for student work



In table 6, we show the share of students rating a specific motivation as "important", according to their background characteristics. The older students are, the more likely they are to indicate that paying for their own studies is an important motivation to perform student work. This motivation is also more prominent among students in co-housing, students living with their partner and certainly among those living alone. The higher the educational level in the students' household when growing up, the lower the share reporting that paying for their own studies is an important reason to perform student work. A strong relationship with origin can also be observed, with non-Belgian students and students from non-Belgian origin being more likely to rate this motivation as important. Compared to university students, college students are more likely to indicate that "paying for their own studies" is an important motivation for student work. For the motivation "supporting themselves or their family financially", we notice a similar pattern as was observed for "paying for their own studies". Financial support is mentioned more often as an important motivation by older students, students living with their partner or alone, students with a non-Belgian origin and college (compared to university) students. The higher the educational level in the students' household when growing up, the lower the share declaring this as an important reason to engage in student work.

Table 6. Motivations for student work according to background characteristics (% indicating this motivation is important for them)

	PAY FOR STUDIES	SUPPORT THEMSELVES/ FAMILY	PAY FOR LEISURE	SAVE MONEY	GAIN WORK EXPERIENCE
AGE	***	***	***	***	***
17-18	18.9%	24.2%	83.5%	86.0%	61.8%
19-21	23.4%	36.0%	88.0%	85.9%	51.0%
22-25	31.1%	49.2%	86.7%	77.2%	44.9%
25+	76.0%	74.2%	67.4%	61.3%	47.4%
GENDER	n.s.	n.s.	***	***	n.s.
MALE	27.0%	38.3%	81.0%	75.2%	53.8%
FEMALE	29.0%	42.8%	87.5%	83.2%	48.8%
OTHER	23.3%	46.7%	80.0%	76.7%	43.3%
LIVING SITUATION	***	***	**	***	***
WITH FAMILY	26.1%	36.0%	87.4%	87.3%	53.8%
STUDENT ACCOMODATION	26.0%	39.5%	86.7%	79.1%	46.9%
WITH PARTNER	42.1%	74.6%	79.9%	72.5%	42.0%
CO-HOUSING	40.7%	67.0%	85.9%	70.7%	43.1%
ALONE	60.0%	74.3%	73.0%	63.5%	45.9%
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL HH	***	***	n.s.	**	n.s.
MAX. PRIMARY	63.9%	66.7%	80.6%	66.7%	40.3%
SECONDARY	43.4%	51.1%	83.2%	82.6%	50.5%
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE	24.5%	40.8%	87.1%	84.4%	47.3%
UNIVERSITY	20.8%	35.4%	86.9%	81.9%	52.3%
DOCTORATE	19.4%	41.3%	85.4%	78.6%	49.0%
ORIGIN	***	***	***	***	n.s.
BE. BE ORIGIN	20.3%	35.3%	87.1%	84.9%	50.2%
BE. EU ORIGIN	26.3%	38.4%	90.1%	81.6%	50.7%
BE. NON-EU ORIGIN (1)	42.9%	55.2%	84.6%	74.9%	42.3%
BE. NON-EU ORIGIN (2)	47.2%	63.9%	89.9%	79.8%	47.2%
EU	48.7%	58.2%	80.4%	71.9%	50.3%
NON-EU	63.6%	70.1%	75.0%	76.0%	53.0%
TYPE OF INSTITUTION	***	***	n.s.	**	n.s.
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE	37.1%	51.8%	85.3%	85.8%	47.2%
UNIVERSITY	26.4%	39.5%	86.5%	80.7%	50.3%
YEAR OF STUDY	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	***	***
BACH 1/ASSOCIATE DEGREE	30.3%	39.5%	84.6%	86.3%	59.7%
BACH 2	31.2%	41.1%	86.5%	82.9%	46.8%
BACH 3/4	29.6%	43.3%	88.3%	83.6%	47.6%
BACH OTHER	30.7%	45.0%	86.8%	82.4%	45.2%
MASTER/POSTGRADUATE	25.7%	42.6%	85.9%	77.7%	47.5%
FIELD OF STUDY	n.s.	**	*	*	n.s.
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES	29.2%	41.8%	87.3%	82.0%	48.0%
BUSINESS. ADMIN & LAW	31.2%	46.0%	88.1%	84.1%	52.2%
STEM	22.4%	36.6%	83.1%	76.0%	52.6%
LIFE SCIENCES & HEALTH	28.0%	41.4%	83.8%	83.2%	50.2%

*n.s. p>0.05; *p<0.05; **p<0.01;***p<0.001 (based on One-Way ANOVA tests)*

Paying for leisure activities is clearly a very popular motivation to perform student work. However, this motivation is somewhat less prevalent among students living alone and among non-European students. “Saving money for later” is more likely to be considered an important motivation by younger and female students (compared to respectively older and male students). It is more prevalent among students living with their family and deemed less important by students living alone. Belgian students with Belgian origin are also more likely to indicate that “saving money for later” is an important motivation to engage in student work. Overall, the motivation “gaining work experience for later” is less clearly and less strongly related to student characteristics, although it is mentioned as an important motivation for student work more frequently by 1st bachelor students.

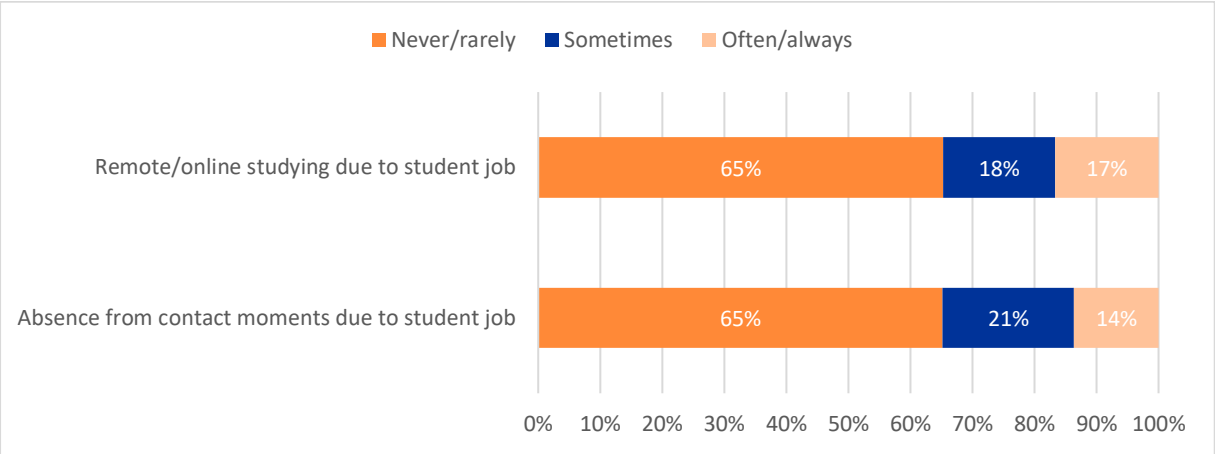
The motivations to perform student work are also examined by Randstad (2025). They conclude that, in Belgium, students primarily work to be able to enjoy leisure activities, make purchases, or save money. Randstad also reported that a significant share (25%) contributes to the family budget or partially funds their own studies (29%) through student work (Randstad, 2025). These findings are in line with our observations on the sample of higher education students. On top of this, they specifically asked the students in their sample whether or not they took on a job to deal with the rising cost of living. Half of the students responded affirmatively to this question. It is worth noting that students receiving a grant are more likely to report having to partially fund their studies themselves or contribute to the family budget and that they are also more likely to take on a student job to cope with the rising cost of living (Randstad, 2025).

The combination of higher education studies and student work

The widespread prevalence of student employment among higher education students raises questions about how students manage to combine work and study. In figure 2, we show how often students indicate that they remain absent from contact moments or choose to watch recordings (instead of attending in person) due to their student job. 1 out of 3 students indicate that they at least sometimes remain absent from contact moments or choose to watch recordings due to the fact that they perform student work. For respectively 14% and 17% of student workers in our sample, skipping contact moments or watching recordings because of their student job even occurs often. The study by Randstad (2025) also addressed this issue in their study: almost half of the 1000 surveyed students stated that employers tried to persuade them to work during school hours. This resulted in 16% of respondents indicating that they skipped classes multiple times a week in order to be able to work during those hours (Randstad, 2025). Moreover, approximately 1 out of 3 student workers in the Randstad data indicate that they sometimes work during the exam (preparation) period. Working during the exams or revision period is more common among older students and among students living alone or in student accomodation (Randstad, 2025).

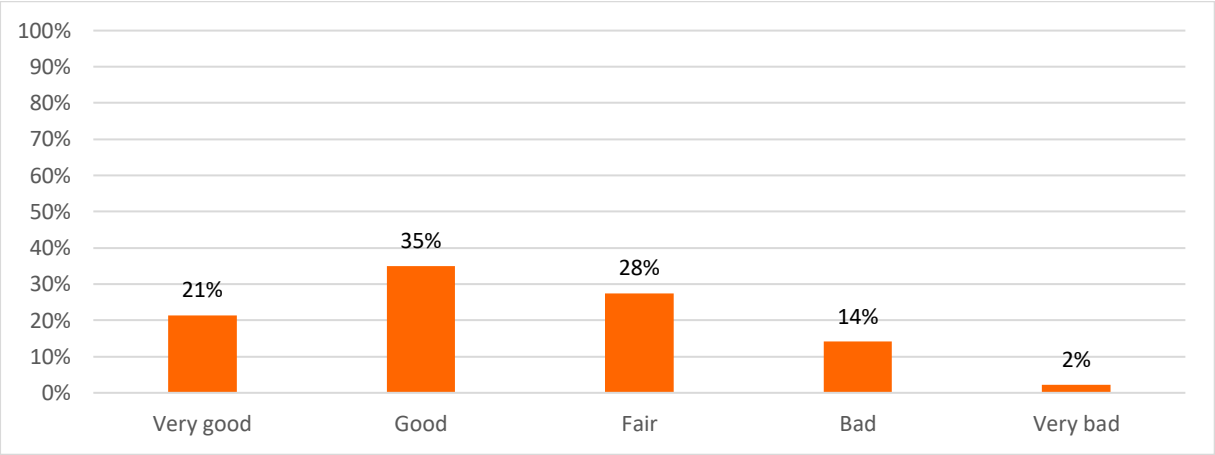
Moreover, significant correlations exist between the importance students assign to the different motivations for student work and the way in which they combine their higher education studies with student work. Students indicating that “paying for their studies” and “supporting themselves/their family” are important motivations to engage in student work are more likely to skip contact moments because of work ($r = 0.238$ and $r = 0.247$).

Figure 2. Prevalence of not attending contact moments and watching recordings (instead of attending in person) because of student work



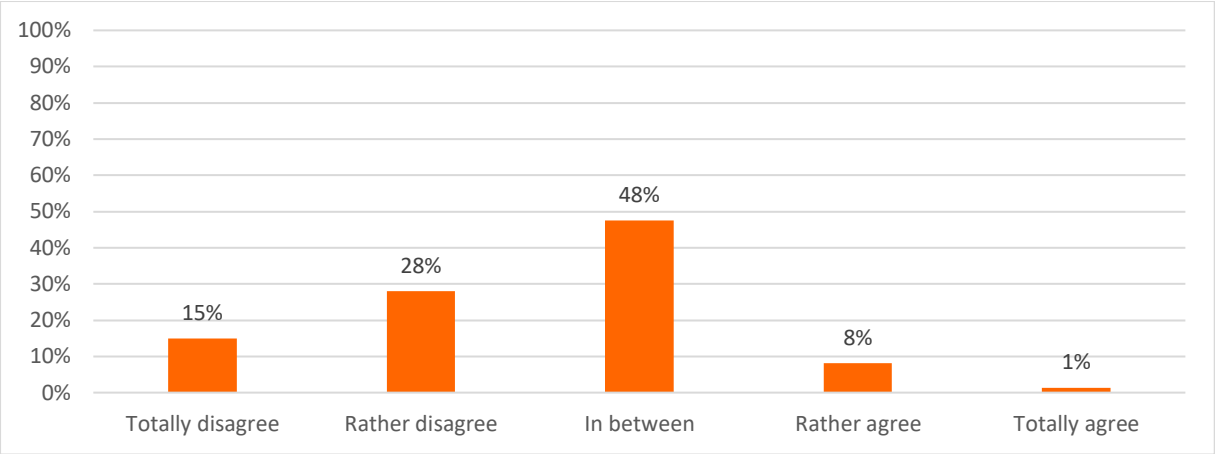
We also asked students to what extent they succeed in combining the working hours for their main student job with their school-related obligations. Figure 3 shows that 16% of students working during the academic year report difficulties to combine their student job with school-related obligations. Students indicating that paying for their studies or supporting themselves/their family are important motivations for student work more often report difficulties to combine their student job with school-related obligations (r = 0.288 and r = 0.261) .

Figure 3. Combination of student job with school-related obligations



Finally, we asked students whether they found that their student work had a positive impact on their study results (see figure 4). Only 9% of students in our sample agreed with this statement and 43% even disagreed. In the Randstad sample, 30% of the surveyed students stated that their student work had a negative impact on their study results (Randstad, 2025).

Figure 4. Positive impact of student work on study results



Job quality of student jobs

In this section, we shed light on the quality of student jobs in Belgium by examining a range of different characteristics associated with the students' main student job (see table 7 and table 8). Elaborate information on the quality of student jobs is currently lacking in other studies, making this one of the most important contributions of this study. For each of the job characteristics studied, we present the overall prevalence in the sample and the prevalence in two specific groups: those who indicate that paying for their own studies or gaining work experience for later are important motivations to engage in student work. This allows us to check whether the quality of student jobs is associated with the motivation of students to engage in student work. No statistically significant differences according to the underlying motivation for student work can be noticed.

Contractwise, we notice that the vast majority of students work with a regular (student) contract (78%), followed in prevalence by students working with an employment agency contract (16%). This finding is in line with the results obtained by Randstad (2025), indicating that more than 8 out of 10 students in their sample was employed with a contract. They additionaly provide information about the length of the contract: 32% received a monthly contract, 31% received a weekly contract, 23% received daily contracts and 15% worked with hourly contracts (Randstad, 2025). In our sample, only 2.1% of student workers indicate that they work without a contract. Even if we would add the students in the "don't know" (1.3%) and "self-employed" (0.4%) categories, this percentage still falls short of the figure (10%) reported in the Randstad study for the underage (secondary education) students in their sample (Randstad, 2025).

Hourly net earnings from the main student job are usually – for 82% of student workers in our sample – between €10 and €15. This is in accordance with the mean hourly wage of €13.70 reported by Randstad (2025). Moreover, 4 out of 10 student workers receive no additional benefits on top of this salary (results not shown in the table). Students who do receive extra benefits most often receive tips from customers (mentioned by 19%), fringe benefits (mentioned by 10%) or compensation for overtime (mentioned by 9%). Among those who indicate that gaining work experience is an important motivation for student work, the share earning higher wages is slightly higher.

Due to the nature of student work, the share of students working on atypical hours/moments is fairly high. 61% of students indicate that they often work between 5pm and 7pm, while 42% is frequently at work between 7pm and 10pm. Night work is less common, with 15% of students mentioning that they often work between 10pm and 5am. Weekend work is very prevalent among students: 62% and 45% of student workers work on respectively saturdays and sundays/public holidays. A clear relation with the motivation for student work exists. For each of the time frames mentioned, a higher share of students who work to finance their own studies reports often or always working at that moment.

For changes to the work schedule, we notice that 30% reports an absence of changes, while 27% indicates that their working time arrangements are flexible in nature. If changes to the work schedule occur regularly, they are most often announced several days in advance. No significant differences appear when relating this characteristic to the underlying motivation for student work.

Table 7. Characteristics of the main student job, overall and for those students indicating that "paying for their own studies" or "gaining work experience for later" are important motivations

	OVERALL	PAY FOR STUDIES	GAIN WORK EXPERIENCE
TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT		n.s.	n.s.
STUDENT OR REGULAR CONTRACT	78%	75.9%	78.8%
AGENCY CONTRACT	15.9%	18.6%	16.5%
NO CONTRACT	2.1%	3.1%	1.4%
VOLUNTEER	2.2%	1.0%	1.8%
DON'T KNOW	1.3%	1.0%	1.1%
SELF-EMPLOYED STUDENT	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%
HOURLY NET EARNINGS		n.s.	**
< €5	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
€5 - €10	2.6%	3.6%	2.8%
€10 - €15	81.6%	81.3%	79.0%
€15 - €20	12.5%	12.7%	14.6%
€20 - €25	1.8%	1.2%	1.8%
> 25€	0.7%	0.6%	0.7%
DON'T KNOW	0.6%	0.4%	1.0%
WORKING HOURS (OFTEN/ALWAYS)			
5PM – 7PM	61.2%	66.6% (***)	59.2% (n.s.)
7PM – 10PM	42.3%	45.6% (**)	39.0% (**)
10PM – 5AM	15.4%	16.9% (*)	13.5% (**)
SATURDAYS	62.2%	68.1% (***)	61.9% (n.s.)
SUNDAYS/HOLIDAYS	45.3%	50.9% (***)	43.5% (n.s.)
CHANGES TO WORKING TIME ARRANGEMENTS		n.s.	n.s.
NO CHANGES	30.2%	25.1%	30.1%
THE SAME DAY	7.3%	9.9%	6.5%
THE DAY BEFORE	8.6%	11.4%	8.5%
SEVERAL DAYS IN ADVANCE	20.3%	22.7%	20.4%
SEVERAL WEEKS IN ADVANCE	6.3%	5.5%	6.7%
FLEXIBLE WORKING TIME ARRANGEMENTS	27.4%	25.5%	27.9%
VULNERABILITY (RATHER/TOTALLY AGREE)			
AFRAID TO ASK FOR BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS	32.2%	36.6% (***)	28.6% (***)
WORRIED TO BE FIRED IN CASE OF DISOBEDIENCE	22.4%	30.8% (***)	20.8% (n.s.)

*n.s. p>0.05; *p<0.05; **p<0.01;***p<0.001 (based on One-Way ANOVA tests)*

Considering vulnerability, our data show that almost 1 out of 3 student workers agrees with the statement that they would be afraid to ask for better working conditions if they wanted to do so. Approximately 1 out of 5 students report that they would worry about being fired if they did not immediately do what they were told. Compared to the overall sample, students who indicate that paying for their own studies is an important motivation for student work are more likely to agree with both statements reflecting vulnerability. These differences are statistically significant.

Studying table 8, we notice that the average scores for the indicators 'autonomy', 'skills', 'ergonomic exposures' and 'workload' – each calculated as a scale from 1 to 5 – are around 3, thus placing them neatly in the middle of the distribution. Those who indicate that they find student work important to gain work experience for later report slightly higher levels of autonomy and skills and a lower level of ergonomic exposures. Students working to pay for their own studies report a higher level of ergonomic exposure and a higher workload. Both support from the supervisor (M = 3.9) and from colleagues (M = 4.4) appear to be high in our sample of student workers. However, experienced support of both appears to be somewhat lower among those students indicating that paying for their own studies is an important motivation to perform student work.

Most student jobs are non-sedentary jobs: 70% of student workers report that they never or rarely sit down for periods of at least half an hour at a time. Only 25% of student workers indicate that sitting for periods of at least half an hour occurs often or always. This share is higher among those who find student work important to gain work experience for later. 35% of student workers report that they often or always deal with angry persons while carrying out their student job. This job characteristics is significantly more prevalent among students who find student work important to pay for their own studies. The three most frequently reported forms of toxic behaviour encountered during the performance of student work are 'stereotypes and prejudices' (17%), 'verbal abuse' (13%) and 'unwanted sexual attention' (11%). In general, forms of toxic behaviour appear to be reported more frequently by students who work to pay for their own studies.

Table 8. Characteristics of the main student job, overall and for those students indicating that "paying for their own studies" or "gaining work experience for later" are important motivations

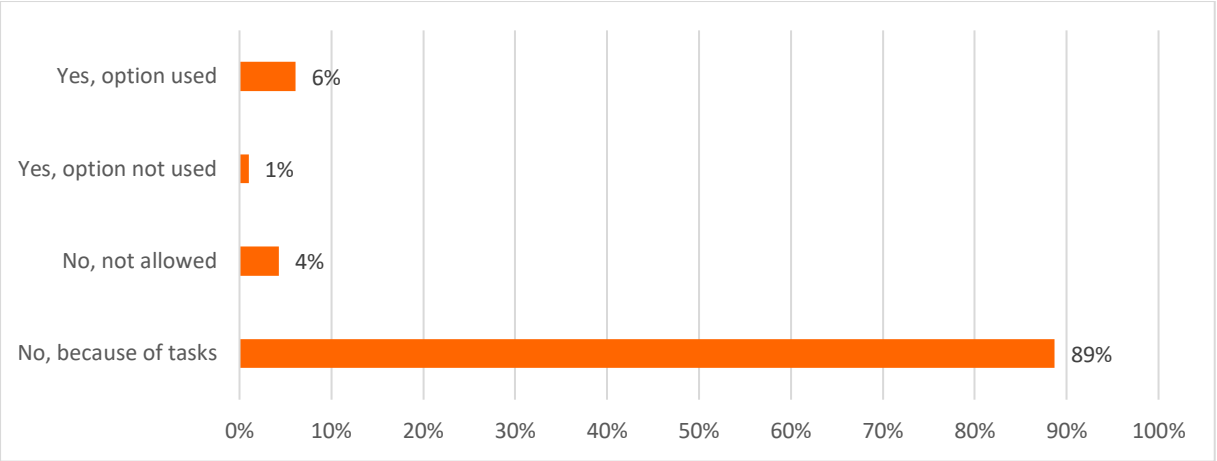
	OVERALL	PAY FOR STUDIES	GAIN WORK EXPERIENCE
AUTONOMY (1-5 SCALE)	3.0	3.0 (n.s.)	3.1 (***)
SKILLS (1-5 SCALE)	2.9	2.9 (n.s.)	3.0 (***)
ERGONOMIC EXPOSURE (1-5 SCALE)	3.2	3.4 (***)	3.0 (***)
SITTING (OFTEN/ALWAYS)	24.9%	26.5% (n.s.)	29.6% (***)
WORKLOAD (1-5 SCALE)	3.0	3.3 (***)	3.0 (n.s.)
DEALING WITH ANGRY PEOPLE (OFTEN/ALWAYS)	35.3%	46.9% (***)	34.8% (n.s.)
SUPPORT FROM SUPERVISOR (1-5 SCALE)	3.9	3.8 (**)	4.0 (***)
SUPPORT FROM COLLEAGUES (1-5 SCALE)	4.4	4.3 (***)	4.5 (n.s.)
TOXIC BEHAVIOUR			
VERBAL ABUSE	13.5%	22.3%	14.5%
UNWANTED SEXUAL ATTENTION	11.1%	17.4%	12.2%
THREATS	2.9%	5.5%	3.3%
PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	2.2%	3.7%	2.8%
HARASSMENT	3.8%	7.2%	4.1%
DISCRIMINATION	4.6%	10.3%	4.2%
STEREOTYPES/PREJUDICES	17.3%	27.8%	17.5%
NONE OF THE ABOVE	43.1%	42.4%	54.0%

*n.s. p>0.05; *p<0.05; **p<0.01;***p<0.001 (based on One-Way ANOVA tests)*

Finally, we assess the possibility for remote work in student jobs. On this aspect, our results differ from those of the study conducted by Randstad (2025). From figure 5, we can conclude that remote work is by no means a frequent occurrence in our sample of student workers. 9 out of 10 student workers indicate that they cannot work remotely because of the nature of the tasks they (have to) perform. Only 6% indicate that they sometimes works from home or from another location outside the employer's workplace. In contrast, the Randstad sample contained 14% full-time remote working students and 12% combining remote work with office work, suggesting that they reached a slightly different group of student workers compared to the one in this study (Randstad, 2025).

When considering the sector of employment (results not shown), an overrepresentation of remote work is found among students working in 'education', 'professional, technical & scientific activities' and 'information & communication'. There is no clear relationship between the ability to work remotely on the one hand and the perceived difficulty to combine student work with school-related obligations or the attendance of school contact moments on the other hand. However, students who (sometimes) work remotely are more likely to agree with the statement that their student job has a positive impact on their study results. The group of students working remotely also has a higher average score on the job satisfaction scale (results not shown).

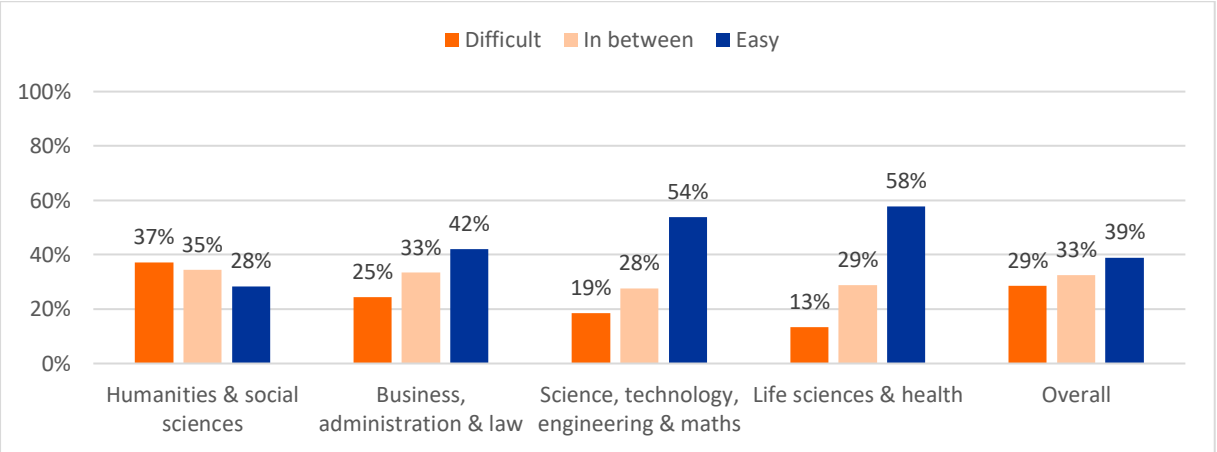
Figure 5. Ability to work remotely in student jobs



Student work and the school-to-work transition

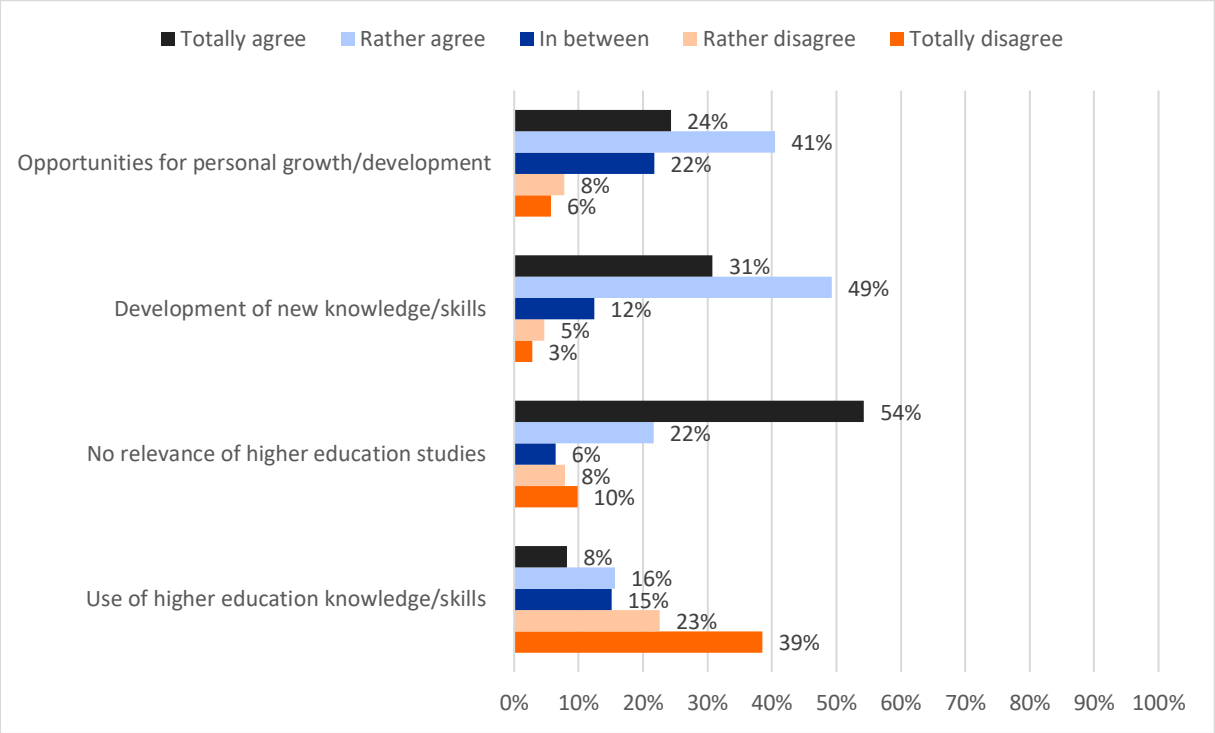
Another topic of interest is the role of student work in students' school-to-work transition. Overall, 29% of students in our sample expect to face difficulties in finding a job aligned with their field of study (see figure 6). This share is notably higher (37%) among students enrolled in the field of 'social sciences & humanities'. Students in the 'science, technology, engineering & maths' field and certainly those in 'life sciences & health' are more optimistic about their chances to easily find a job aligned with their field of study. Randstad (2025) assessed this aspect by asking how quickly respondents expect to find a job after graduation. They find that 36% of the students believes that they will find a job one to three months after graduation. 24% expects to be employed within the first month after graduating. Only 3% fears that it will take more than a year to find a job (Randstad, 2025).

Figure 6. Expected difficulty to find a job aligned with field of study, according to field of study



A question that arises is whether student employment can play a role in the transition from higher education to work. Therefore, we asked students to which extent their student work is related to their current field of study and if their student job provides them with opportunities to develop new skills and/or knowledge. Results from the descriptive analyses (see figure 7) clearly show that student jobs are usually not linked to students' field of study. Only 1 out of 4 students agrees with the statement that they use higher education knowledge or skills in their student work. In turn, 3 out of 4 students are in agreement with the statement that their higher education studies are not relevant for what they do in their student job. Randstad (2025) also concluded that opportunities for the future only play a minor role in selecting a student job. In their sample, 54% of the students reported that they based their choice of a student job wholly or partly on their studies. Student work does provide opportunities for the development of new knowledge and/or skills, according to 4 out of 5 student workers in our sample.

Figure 7. Characteristics of student work concerning the school-to-work transition



In table 9, we present the correlations between the four indicators presented in figure 7 and the importance attributed to the different motivations for student work. It is clear that correlations with "gaining work experience for later" as a motivation are strongest. Students who indicate that gaining work experience is an important motivation to engage in student work are more likely to agree that they use higher education knowledge or skills in their student job ($r = 0.296$), that their student job holds opportunities for personal growth ($r = 0.330$) and that their student job provides opportunities to develop new knowledge or skills ($r = 0.272$).

Strong correlations can also be found between the indicators on the school-to-work transition and the scale for skills use (results not shown in the table). Those students reporting a more elaborate use of complex skills in their main student job are more likely to agree with the statements that they use higher education skills or knowledge (r = 0.317) and that they develop new skills or knowledge in this student job (r = 0.466). This finding suggests that students who have the feeling that they are learning things in their student job tend to hold student jobs with a more interesting job content profile.

Table 9. Correlations between the motivations for student work and the value of student work in the school-to-work transition

	PAY FOR STUDIES	SUPPORT THEMSELVES/ FAMILY	PAY FOR LEISURE	SAVE MONEY	GAIN WORK EXPERIENCE
USE OF HIGHER EDUCATION SKILLS	0.031	-0.039	-0.068***	0.016	0.296***
NO RELEVANCE OF STUDIES	0.016	0.047*	0.087***	0.002	-0.264***
DEVELOPMENT OF NEW SKILLS	-0.045*	-0.017	0.046*	0.041*	0.272***
OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH	-0.071***	-0.078***	0.028	0.066**	0.330***

Finally, significant correlations also exist between the relevance of higher education studies, the use of higher education skills/knowledge and the opportunities for growth and skills development on the one hand and the expected ease to find a job aligned with field of study on the other hand (see table 10). A higher relevance of higher education studies for the student job and more opportunities for growth and to develop new skills/knowledge during student work are associated with more optimism about easily finding a job aligned with field of study.

Table 10. Correlations between the expected ease to find a job aligned with field of study and the value of student work in the school-to-work transition

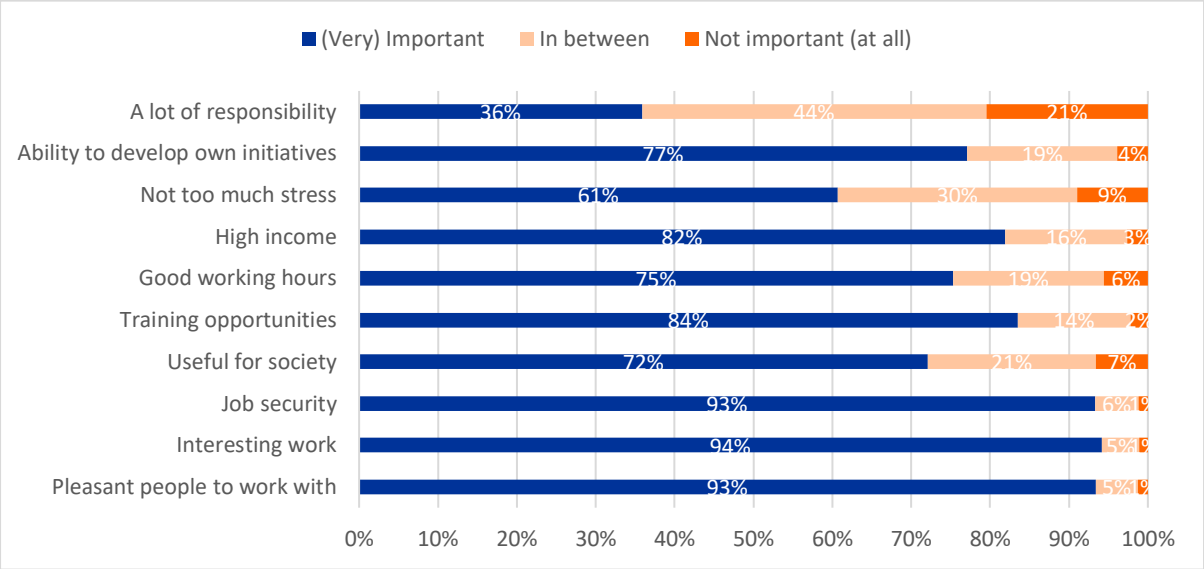
	EXPECTED EASE TO FIND A JOB ALIGNED WITH FIELD OF STUDY
USE OF HIGHER EDUCATION SKILLS	0.126***
NO RELEVANCE OF STUDIES	-0.110***
DEVELOPMENT OF NEW SKILLS	0.078***
OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH	0.125***

Valued work characteristics of higher education students

All students participating in the survey – whether they are performing student work or not – were asked to indicate how important they would rate ten different work characteristics if they could choose any job at all. Results are presented in figure 8 and show that three aspects are mentioned by almost all (more than 9 out of 10) students as important characteristics of their future job (assuming that they can freely choose any job they want): “pleasant people to work with”, “interesting work” and “job security”. Having “a lot of responsibility” is mentioned least often as an important job feature (by 1 out of 3 students).

Some correlations exist between the different job characteristics (results not shown). The strongest correlation can be observed between “good working hours” and “not too much stress”, indicating that the preference for both of these job features is often combined in students (r = 0.502). Other strong correlations can be seen between the following aspects as valued job characteristics: “ability to develop own initiatives” and “a lot of responsibility” (r = 0.320), “interesting work” and “useful for society” (r = 0.287), “pleasant people to work with” and “not too much stress” (r = 0.279), “a lot of responsibility” and “interesting work” (r = 0.275), “interesting work” and “ability to develop own initiatives” (r = 0.273) and finally “job security” and “high income” (r = 0.266).

Figure 8. Importance of different employment features



Additional interesting findings emerge when examining the bivariate correlations between the valued work characteristics and the background characteristics of students (results not shown). Female students are more likely to mark “job security” (r = 0.181), “not too much stress” (r = 0.170) and “good working hours” (r = 0.121) as important job features. Students from non-Belgian origin more often select “high income” (r = 0.125) and “good working hours” (r = 0.103) as important job characteristics.

In table 11, we explore the relationship between the importance assigned to the different job features and students’ background characteristics. We find no or only boundary significant correlations for age, type of higher education institution, living situation and the highest educational level in the household when growing up. We do see some relations with gender: female students are more likely to mark not too much stress, good working hours, job security, work that is useful for society and pleasant people to work with as important job features, whereas having a lot of responsibility appears to be somewhat less important for them. For study year, we observe that a higher year of study is related with a significantly higher importance assigned to pleasant people to work with, work that is useful for society and interesting work. Considering the field of study, we find that students from social sciences and humanities are more likely to mark good working hours as an important work characteristic. Finally, for origin, we find that in particular Belgians from non-EU origin (both parents born outside the EU) are less likely to assign importance to the ability to develop own initiatives, interesting work and having pleasant people to work with, while they are more likely to mark good working hours as an important job characteristic.

Table 11. Correlations between the importance assigned to different work characteristics and background characteristics

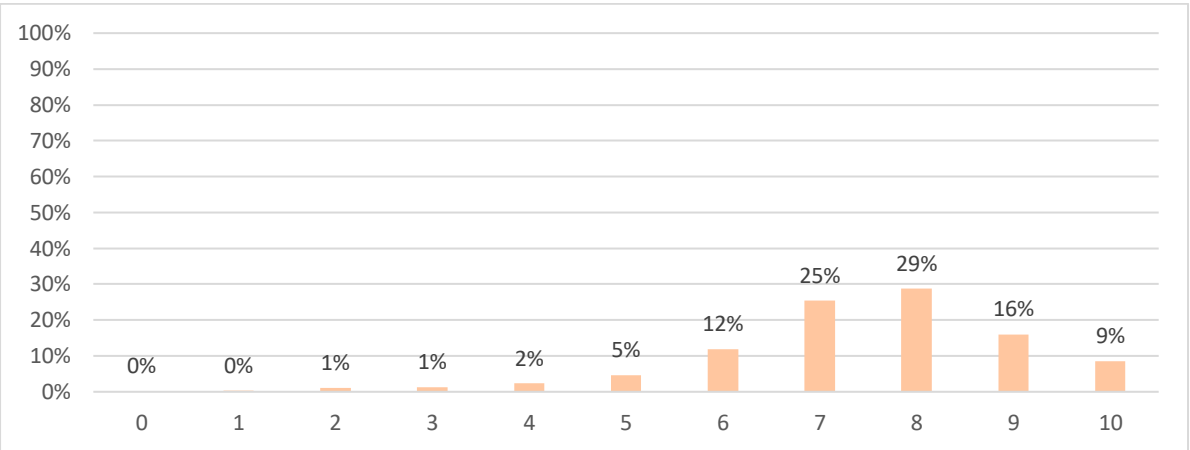
	AGE	GENDER	STUDY YEAR	STUDY FIELD	TYPE OF INSTITUTION	LIVING SITUATION	ORIGIN	EDUCATION LEVEL HH
ABILITY TO DEVELOP OWN INITIATIVES	0.039	-0.021	0.051 *	-0.028	-0.008	0.044 *	-0.061 **	0.024
JOB SECURITY	-0.010	0.150 ***	-0.006	-0.010	-0.007	-0.034	-0.005	-0.012
HIGH INCOME	-0.023	0.035	-0.009	0.033	0.024	-0.038	0.041 *	-0.042 *
TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES	0.031	0.014	0.011	0.039 *	-0.010	-0.007	0.015	-0.033
PLEASANT PEOPLE TO WORK WITH	0.030	0.099 ***	0.068 ***	0.008	-0.036	-0.005	-0.075 ***	-0.007
NOT TOO MUCH STRESS	-0.041 *	0.160 ***	-0.037	-0.034	-0.011	-0.051 *	0.047 *	0.012
GOOD WORKING HOURS	0.019	0.109 ***	0.030	-0.070 ***	0.004	-0.043 *	0.080 ***	0.004
USEFUL FOR SOCIETY	0.030	0.075 ***	0.053 **	-0.003	0.038	0.032	-0.049 *	0.050 *
A LOT OF RESPONSIBILITY	0.010	-0.055 **	0.032	0.010	0.017	0.015	-0.030	-0.004
INTERESTING WORK	0.039	0.034	0.100 ***	-0.004	0.013	-0.008	-0.105 ***	0.018

Job satisfaction and mental well-being

Job satisfaction

In this section, we will first of all examine job satisfaction levels for those who perform student work. The mean score on the 0-10 scale for job satisfaction with the main student job performed during the academic year is 7.5. Figure 9 shows the distribution of this outcome across the sample. Based on the observation that the vast majority of student workers rates their main student job as 7 or higher on the scale, we can conclude that overall job satisfaction is fairly high. This finding is supported by Randstad based on their research, where students gave their most recent student job a mean score of 7.6 on the scale for job satisfaction (Randstad, 2025).

Figure 9. Job satisfaction scale; distribution across sample



Bivariate correlations between job satisfaction with the main student job and different features of student work are presented in table 12. First of all, small negative correlations can be seen between job satisfaction and the amount of hours worked during the academic year (both during the week and on weekends). Considering the motivation to engage in student work, we notice that two motivations are negatively correlated to job satisfaction: to pay for their own studies and to support themselves or family members. Small positive correlations with job satisfaction are observed for two other motivations: to save money or to gain work experience for later. Reported difficulties to combine student work with school-related obligations are clearly negatively associated with job satisfaction. The same is true for the reported absence from school contact moments due to student work. Agreement with the statement that student work has a positive impact on study results is positively related to the level of job satisfaction. Several job quality characteristics are related to job satisfaction. Support from colleagues and from the supervisor show the highest correlations with job satisfaction, but significant correlations can also be noticed for the two items on the vulnerability of students in their student job, for autonomy, for ergonomic exposures, for skills and for workload. Finally, we take a look at the correlations between the school-to-work transition indicators and job satisfaction. The perceived value of the main student job in terms of providing opportunities for growth and developing new skills is positively related to job satisfaction. The presence of a link between the higher education studies and the content of the student job also appears to be beneficial for the job satisfaction level.

Table 12. Correlations between job satisfaction and different characteristics of student work

	JOB SATISFACTION
PERFORMANCE OF STUDENT WORK	
STUDENT WORK OVER THE SUMMER	n.s.
DAYS OF STUDENT WORK OVER THE SUMMER	n.s.
STUDENT WORK DURING ACADEMIC YEAR	n.s.
WEEKEND HOURS DURING ACADEMIC YEAR	-0.126***
WEEK HOURS DURING ACADEMIC YEAR	-0.074**
MOTIVATION FOR STUDENT WORK	
PAY FOR STUDIES	-0.167***
SUPPORT THEMSELVES/FAMILY	-0.179***
PAY FOR LEISURE	n.s.
SAVEY MONEY	0.043*
GAIN WORK EXPERIENCE	0.176***
COMBINATION OF HE AND STUDENT WORK	
ABSENCE FROM CONTACT MOMENTS	-0.147***
REMOTE/ONLINE STUDYING	-0.134***
COMBINATION WITH SCHOOL-RELATED OBLIGATIONS	-0.298***
POSITIVE IMPACT ON STUDY RESULTS	0.336***
JOB QUALITY OF STUDENT WORK	
EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT	n.s.
HOURLY NET EARNINGS	0.134***
WORKING BETWEEN 5PM & 7PM	-0.054*
WORKING BETWEEN 7PM & 10PM	n.s.
WORKING BETWEEN 10PM & 5AM	n.s.
WORKING ON SATURDAYS	-0.054*
WORKING ON SUNDAYS	-0.044*
CHANGES TO WORKING TIME ARRANGEMENTS	n.s.
SUPPORT FROM SUPERVISOR	0.563***
SUPPORT FROM COLLEAGUES	0.420***
AUTONOMY	0.316***
SKILLS	0.266***
ERGONOMIC EXPOSURES	-0.288***
WORKLOAD	-0.227***
AFRAID TO ASK BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS	-0.394***
WORRY ABOUT BEING FIRED	-0.369***
SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION	
USE OF HIGHER EDUCATION KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS	0.129***
NO RELEVANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDIES	-0.125***
DEVELOPMENT OF NEW KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS	0.239***
OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL GROWTH/DEVELOPMENT	0.339***

Mental well-being

Next, we turn to another important outcome: the mental well-being of students (assessed using the validated WHO-5 scale). The mean score on the 0-100 scale for mental well-being is 48.3, which means that the level of overall mental well-being among students (regardless of whether they performed student work during the academic year) is rather low, given that a percentage score below 50 is considered as indicative of poor mental well-being (WHO, 2024). A clear, positive correlation exists between job satisfaction with the main student job and the mental well-being of those students performing student work during the academic year (r = 0.330).

Table 13 provides an overview of the bivariate correlations between mental well-being on the one hand and different student work characteristics on the other hand. In general, the association patterns are similar to the ones observed for job satisfaction as an outcome although some differences can be noticed as well. Correlations between mental well-being and the indicators regarding the performance of student work are either non-significant or very small. Clear correlations can be observed with three out of the five motivations for student work: engaging in student work to pay for own studies or to support themselves/family is related to lower overall mental well-being scores. The opposite is true for gaining work experience as an important motivation to perform student work. Mental well-being also shows a relationship with the indicators referring to the combination of higher education studies and student work. The absence from contact moments, studying remotely (instead of attending in person) and the perceived difficulty to combine higher education studies with student work show a negative correlation with mental well-being, whereas the perception that student work has a positive impact on study results shows a positive correlation with mental well-being. Several job quality features are also related to students' mental well-being. Support from the supervisor and the items on vulnerability show the highest correlation with mental well-being, but significant correlations can also been seen for support from colleagues, autonomy, ergonomic exposures, skills and workload. Finally, students indicating that their student job provides opportunities for personal growth and enables the development of new knowledge/skills have significantly higher scores on the mental well-being scale.

Table 13. Correlations between mental well-being and different characteristics of student work

	MENTAL WELL-BEING
PERFORMANCE OF STUDENT WORK	
STUDENT WORK OVER THE SUMMER	n.s.
DAYS OF STUDENT WORK OVER THE SUMMER	-0.067**
STUDENT WORK DURING ACADEMIC YEAR	n.s
WEEKEND HOURS DURING ACADEMIC YEAR	-0.074**
WEEK HOURS DURING ACADEMIC YEAR	n.s.
MOTIVATION FOR STUDENT WORK	
PAY FOR STUDIES	-0.201***
SUPPORT THEMSELVES/FAMILY	-0.189***
PAY FOR LEISURE	n.s.
SAVEY MONEY	0.047*
GAIN WORK EXPERIENCE	0.132***
COMBINATION OF HE AND STUDENT WORK	
ABSENCE FROM CONTACT MOMENTS	-0.150***
REMOTE/ONLINE STUDYING	-0.131***
COMBINATION WITH SCHOOL-RELATED OBLIGATIONS	-0.259***
POSITIVE IMPACT ON STUDY RESULTS	0.287***
JOB QUALITY OF STUDENT WORK	
EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT	n.s.
HOURLY NET EARNINGS	0.045*
WORKING BETWEEN 5PM & 7PM	n.s.
WORKING BETWEEN 7PM & 10PM	n.s.
WORKING BETWEEN 10PM & 5AM	n.s.
WORKING ON SATURDAYS	-0.047*
WORKING ON SUNDAYS	-0.046*
CHANGES TO WORKING TIME ARRANGEMENTS	n.s.
SUPPORT FROM SUPERVISOR	0.258***
SUPPORT FROM COLLEAGUES	0.198***
AUTONOMY	0.181***
SKILLS	0.147***
ERGONOMIC EXPOSURES	-0.164***
WORKLOAD	-0.125***
AFRAID TO ASK BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS	-0.247***
WORRY ABOUT BEING FIRED	-0.255***
SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION	
USE OF HIGHER EDUCATION KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS	0.075***
NO RELEVANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDIES	-0.072***
DEVELOPMENT OF NEW KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS	0.123***
OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL GROWTH/DEVELOPMENT	0.181***

Conclusion

This report provides an in-depth overview of student employment among higher education students in Belgium, based on the first wave of a large-scale quantitative survey conducted between November 2024 and March 2025. The findings clearly demonstrate that student work has become a structural component of the lives of many higher education students, rather than a marginal or temporary activity. An overwhelming majority of students engage in paid employment, not only during the summer holidays but also during the academic year, often for a substantial number of hours per week. This conclusion is supported by information derived from two important data sources on student employment in Belgium: the representative Randstad study on student work (Randstad, 2025) and the administrative data from the National Social Security Office (RSZ, 2025).

Another important conclusion is that the performance of student employment is shaped by clear socio-economic and socio-demographic factors. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, older students, those living independently, students with a non-Belgian origin and students enrolled in colleges rather than universities are more likely to work more intensively and to perform student work out of financial necessity. This report also shows that motives for engaging in paid work while studying are diverse and related to the socio-economic background of students. While paying for leisure and saving money for later are the most frequently cited motivations overall, financial pressure clearly plays a central role for specific groups of students. For them, student work is less a choice than a necessity, which has important implications for their work choices and work-study experiences. In this regard, our results align with research from other countries demonstrating that motivations to perform student work can be grouped in two broad categories: necessity-driven versus opportunity-driven motives (Beerkens et al., 2011; Evans & Lean, 2025; Hillman, 2024; Hordósy et al., 2018) and that necessity-driven motivations are disproportionately concentrated among students from less advantaged backgrounds (Crockford et al., 2015; Evans & Lean, 2025; Hauschildt, 2024).

The findings from this study also point to a growing tension between (the time devoted to) student work and higher education studies. A sizable share of students skips contact moments, studies remotely or experiences difficulties to combine work and study due to their student job. Only a small minority of students perceives a positive impact of their student work on their academic performance. These findings suggest that the recent expansion of the number of student work hours exempt from taxes and social security contributions risks to further blur the boundary between studying and working, potentially at the expense of educational engagement and performance.

Student jobs are predominantly located in a limited number of sectors, most notably hospitality and retail. In terms of job (quality) features, student jobs are characterised by irregular hours, frequent evening/weekend work and limited opportunities for remote work. Although most students work with a formal (student) contract and report relatively high overall job satisfaction, significant vulnerabilities can be noticed. A considerable proportion of students state that they would feel reluctant to ask for better working conditions or fear dismissal if they do not immediately do as they are told, particularly those students working out of necessity. Exposure to high workloads, physical strain and various forms of toxic behaviour is far from exceptional in student jobs, something that is again more apparent among the student workers with a necessity-driven motive to work.

Student work appears to play only a limited or a more indirect role in facilitating the school-to-work transition. Most student jobs are unrelated to students' fields of study, and higher education skills are rarely applied on the job. This is regrettable, since prior research shows that study- or career-aligned student employment yields stronger labour market returns (Beerkens et al., 2011; Geel & Backes-Gellner, 2012; Masevičiūtė et al., 2018). Nevertheless, many students do report opportunities for skill development and personal growth, especially those for whom gaining work experience for later is a key motivation. Importantly, the presence of opportunities for skill development and personal growth are positively associated with both job satisfaction and students' optimism about their future labour market prospects.

Finally, this report highlights the close interconnections between (the modalities and characteristics of) student employment, job satisfaction and mental well-being. While average job satisfaction levels are relatively high, overall mental well-being among students is worryingly low. Moreover, poorer mental well-being is systematically associated with necessity-driven motivations for student work, difficulties to combine work and studies, high workloads and vulnerable employment relations. Conversely, supportive work environments, autonomy, skill development and perceived relevance of student work for the higher education studies are linked to better outcomes.

Taken together, these findings underline that student employment in Belgium cannot be assessed solely in terms of labour market participation or income supplementation. Student work is deeply embedded in broader social inequalities and has tangible consequences for students' academic lives and well-being that are likely to also impact their future (labour market) trajectories. Policymakers, higher education institutions and employers therefore face the shared challenge of ensuring that student employment remains compatible with educational objectives and does not reinforce existing inequalities. Future research, including longitudinal follow-up data, will be crucial to assess potential longer-term consequences of the recent expansion of the number of student employment hours exempt from standard social security contributions and taxes in Belgium.

Policy implications

The conclusions derived from this study raise several important policy questions, touching upon different policy domains: education, labour market regulation and social protection.

The results suggest that investing a significant amount of time in student work carries risks, particularly for students with a vulnerable socio-economic background. From a policy perspective, it therefore seems advisable to reduce the potential time investment in student employment or keep it within reasonable limits, rather than opting for a further relaxation of the permitted number of working hours. A policy aimed at maximising support for students' educational opportunities is therefore best served by lowering financial barriers, so that students are less dependent on income from student work.

A key policy challenge thus concerns the observation that student employment appears to exacerbate existing socio-economic inequalities between students. Students who engage in student work out of financial necessity – more often older students, students living independently, students with a migration background and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds – are more likely to work intensively during the academic year and report greater difficulties in combining their work and higher education studies. This may hamper the educational achievement/progress of the most vulnerable student groups. From a policy perspective, this calls for an elaborate reflection on the adequacy and targeting of financial support schemes for students, especially for those who cannot rely on substantial family resources. Low study costs combined with adequate and well-targeted financial support mechanisms are essential to avoid necessity-driven (intensive) time investments in paid employment while studying.

Another important policy challenge relates to student job quality, given that the results from this study highlight that a substantial degree of vulnerability persists. Many students report reluctance to request better working conditions or fear negative consequences such as dismissal if they are not obedient enough. Moreover, exposure to high workloads and undesirable/toxic behaviours remains quite common. Students who depend on student work to finance their studies or to support themselves financially appear to be particularly vulnerable in this respect. These findings underscore the need for more consistent and better monitoring of the quality and characteristics of student jobs, especially in student-intensive sectors such as retail and hospitality.

A potential policy recommendation relates to the alignment between student employment and higher education studies. The limited connection between student jobs and students' field of study indicates that student work currently only plays a modest role in facilitating a smooth school-to-work transition. At the same time, students who experience opportunities for skill development and personal growth in their jobs report greater confidence regarding their future labour market prospects. Furthermore, existing research has already proven that study- or career-aligned student work yields better labour market returns.This points to the potential value of policies aimed to increase the availability of high-quality, study-relevant or even curriculum-integrated student jobs, for example through partnerships between educational institutions and employers. This type of student work would allow students to earn money while building relevant skills and contacts at the same time.

Finally, the findings presented in this report show that (the modalities of) student employment are relevant from the perspective of student well-being. The clear association with both financial pressure as a motivation to engage in student work and with work-study conflict suggest that policies on student employment should be embedded within an integrated framework for student support. In this context, higher education institutions, student services, policymakers and labour market actors each have an important role to play.

In sum, the results establish the need for a policy approach that recognises student employment as a socially differentiated phenomenon that is structurally embedded in the lives of most students. It is important to prioritise the protection of students and their well-being, by tackling issues related to job quality and the combination of work with studies. Finally, it is crucial to ensure that student employment does not unintentionally become an additional source of inequality within higher education.

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