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University students in England have it easy

- Weekly workload much lower than other countries
- Findings could hit non-EU intake, thinktank warns

James Meikle, education correspondent**Tuesday September 25, 2007**[The Guardian](#)

Undergraduates in England spend far less time studying than their European counterparts, casting doubt on the quality of degrees at their universities, a higher education thinktank warns today.

Students typically receive an average of about 14 hours tuition a week and spend 12 to 13 hours in private study, according to the Higher Education Policy Institute (Hepi). This 26-hour workload compares unfavourably with European figures suggesting 41 hours in Portugal, 35 in France, 34 in Germany, and over 30 in other countries. The findings could lead to fewer full-fee paying international students from outside the EU, building up huge financial and academic problems, the report suggests. British universities have recently revealed that some vital subject areas are being propped up by the income and academic interests of foreign students.

More than one in five British first-year students at English universities, the first to face £3,000 fees, also believe they are getting poor value for money.

The study, involving responses to a questionnaire from about 15,000 first and second year students, confirms earlier findings of huge differences between subjects and between individual universities, both in the work needed to be put in by students to earn a degree and the percentage of first and upper second class degrees awarded. Medical and dental students have an average weekly academic workload of more than 35 hours a week, although this varies from nearly 44 hours at Keele University, Staffordshire, to just over 28 at Queen Mary, University of London. On mass communication and documentation courses the average is around 20 hours, but varies from 27 hours at Gloucestershire University, where 66.5% of students get a first or upper second, to under 15 hours at

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University College, Falmouth, where 82.5% obtain top degrees.

Bahram Bekhradnia, director of the institute and one of the report's authors, conceded the European comparisons did not differentiate between taught hours and private study, nor "tell us anything about the quality and nature of teaching". But there might be consequences for recruitment of international students, who pay between £8,000 and £12,000 a year. "There is bound to be increasing pressure on English universities to explain how their shorter, less intensive courses match those elsewhere in Europe."

Graham Gibbs, former director of the Institute for the Advancement of University Learning at Oxford University, who was asked by Hefi to comment, said the figures indicated "a significant minority of UK students are enrolled full-time but studying part-time with their university receiving funding for full-time students". Universities UK cautioned against coming to "sweeping conclusions" on the Hefi figures or the European comparisons.

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