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STUDENTS' UNION University of Manchester

THE UNION | MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN STUDENTS' UNION

UGM SU | FOR EVERY STUDENT IN EVERY WAY

SALFORD SU

UNCW students' union

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Good Student Employment in Greater Manchester

The Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter is a voluntary membership and assessment scheme that is aimed at raising employment standards across Greater Manchester. Specifically, the charter champions secure, flexible work that supports employee health and wellbeing. Within this, the charter promotes certain employer practices within recruitment, pay, people management and engagement and voice that promote good quality work.

The charter is integral for driving up standards of living across Greater Manchester, helping to create more secure, well-paid employment across the city-region during a time where many are suffering from the effects of the cost-of-living crisis. Through the charter, over 3.3 million employees across Greater Manchester have been supported to benefit from good quality work that empowers them to work hard and be both confident and comfortable in their work.

Students are a particularly vulnerable group of workers across Greater Manchester and would benefit greatly from the improved working conditions that the charter generates. Black bullion (2026) found that, on average, students need £421 more every month to feel that they could complete their degree. This shortfall effectively means that part-time work is not optional for students, and the availability of part-time, flexible work is a necessity for students to remain in their universities. In a 2025 survey, students from Manchester Metropolitan University highlighted the 'impossibility of surviving as a student without a part-time job' (The Union, 2025).

Nationally, students who are employed work an average of 14 hours a week in addition to their course (HEPI, 2026). For students at The University of Salford, this number was even higher, working 22 hours a week on average (Salford Students' Union, 2025). When considered alongside academic commitments, this takes a Salford student's working week to over 54 hours of work and study.

Last academic year, 49% of undergraduate students at The University of Manchester missed classes to take part in paid work (UMSU, 2026). Finding work that can be balanced alongside academic commitments is therefore incredibly important for students. Unfortunately, this can often leave them vulnerable to insecure working arrangements, with little workplace protections.

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Over a fifth of workers in the hospitality and retail sector are students, despite them only being 4% of the work force (WonkHE, 2026). The hospitality and retail sectors typically are significantly less secure than others. Research from ACAS highlights higher levels of workplace conflicts in these sectors, with these conflicts more likely to end in resignation, than resolution (ACAS, 2025). Additionally, workers from these sectors frequently report having shifts cancelled with late notice, being penalised for not picking up shifts, and working extremely unsocial hours.

Additionally, research from Zhong et al (2025) found there is a 'studentness' penalty, consisting of lower pay for students than non-student workers of the same age. Other research from Allen et al (2026) has found that student work is typically understood as trivial, 'a temporary rite of passage in which young people must endure'. However, evidence clearly shows that this is not the case. Over 40% of young people have been in their job for a year or longer (Zhong et al, 2025).

Together, the over-representation of students in sectors with higher levels of insecure work, alongside the necessity of work for the majority of students in Greater Manchester, makes them a vulnerable group within employment. Students are likely to accept any work they can find that fits around their studies, making them vulnerable to insecure working arrangements.

GMSP believes that, due to the unique vulnerability of students in the workplace, a student-specific framework should be present within the Good Employment Charter that requires employers to support students in employment. Developing such a framework would work towards ensuring that work does not come at the expense of students' education and would help address some of the precarious working conditions student workers face today.

Greater Manchester is heavily reliant on student workers for their contribution to its growing economy. As such, a student specific employment framework would benefit both students and the city-region, with students in secure, long-term employment that brings value to Greater Manchester's employers. GMSP also believes that students who have a better experience of the city whilst studying here will be the most likely to remain in the city-region after graduating and contribute their valuable skills to the local economy.

Previously, GMSP has worked with the Good Landlord Charter to develop a student focused framework for purpose-built student accommodation, and university owned accommodation. Through this involvement, GMSP was able to help the Good Landlord Charter develop a framework that benefitted both students and landlords alike. GMSP would greatly value the opportunity to work with the Good Employment Charter to develop a similar framework for students that would benefit students, employers and the wider city-region.

Tentatively, GMSP suggests that a student focused framework should incorporate the following requirements of 'good' student employers. Though these could be amended through development of the framework alongside the Charter.

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Academic Leave Policies

Academic leave policies that accommodate students having time off over exam periods, or times where their student housing contracts do not allow them to be in Manchester, will benefit both students and employers. For students, the flexibility to take time off and focus on their studies during busy periods will allow them to achieve more academically and not feel forced to choose between either university or work, when we know that university without work is becoming increasingly less realistic.

For employers, having academic leave policies employed as standard practice will allow for less unnecessary recruitment cycles. Oftentimes students are forced to quit their jobs over summer and are then rehired upon their return. This practice is unnecessary, expensive for the employer and stressful for the student worker and should be abolished.

Trade Union Education

Employers should educate their student staff on trade unions, and their rights as workers in general. This could be through offering educational information about different trade unions, the option to pay union fees through payroll to simplify the process, and the organisation itself should recognise a union within their workplace. For many, part-time work alongside study is their first experience of the workplace and therefore employers who are 'student worker' accredited should work towards educating employees of their workplace rights.

Within trade union education, employers should also support initiatives championed by trade unions, such as Unite's 'Get me Home Safely' campaign. Many students feel unsafe travelling on public transport and have serious safety concerns when travelling late at night. Where students are working unsocial shifts across Greater Manchester, this is unavoidable, and campaigns such as this are working to ensure workers do not have to choose between working a shift and personal safety.

Security alongside Flexibility

The value of security alongside flexibility should be emphasised within a student-centred framework. Whilst the charter already emphasises secure work, which is really valuable, it should also understand the value of flexibility for students who are managing multiple workloads at once, with last-minute schedule changes and deadlines. For students, the ability to move shifts and be flexible without being penalised is extremely valuable, and a specific framework that can accommodate this should be developed.

Students now find themselves in a space where work alongside study is overwhelmingly unavoidable in cities like Manchester, where the cost of living is increasing dramatically. Part-time work is becoming such an important and integral aspect of the student experience. The possibility of a university education now hinges upon the very availability of good quality, part-time work that can be flexible around full-time study for many students.

As such, a student focused good employment framework that drives better employment conditions for students across the city-region would enable more students to attend university and thrive whilst studying in Greater Manchester. Not only this, where students' first experience of employment here is a positive one, they are more likely to remain in the city-region after graduating and contribute their valuable skills to the local economy.

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