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**Issues paper**

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This report examines course and student data for 2008-09, collected from eight institutions piloting flexible learning in the HEFCE-funded Flexible Learning Pathfinder project. The data are compared to those for similar, traditionally delivered courses for the same year.

# Flexible Learning Pathfinders: key statistics 2008-09

## Flexible Learning Pathfinders: key statistics 2008-09

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions Heads of HEFCE-funded further education colleges
Of interest to those responsible for	Student data, Planning, Student experience, Widening participation, Learning and teaching
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### Executive summary

#### Purpose

1. This report examines Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)<sup>1</sup> course and student data for 2008-09, collected from eight institutions piloting different types of flexible learning in the HEFCE-funded Flexible Learning Pathfinder project<sup>2</sup>. The data are compared to those for similar, traditionally delivered courses for the same year.
2. We plan to enhance this data analysis using 2009-10 HESA data, both to take into account later cohorts of students and to continue tracking the 2008-09 students as they graduate and progress into further study and/or employment.

#### Key points

3. This study reports on the findings of a data analysis relating to a particular group of students taking specific types of courses in a particular year. Therefore their principal value is in demonstrating possible tendencies and directions in relation to the different types of flexible provision, which may be borne out in further studies. With this in mind, no formal statistical significance tests have been performed and readers should consider the practical significance of the results in the first instance.
4. For the purposes of this analysis, the types of flexible learning piloted have been grouped into three main categories:

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<sup>1</sup> HESA runs a database of information collected on every higher education student attending a UK institution.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/flexible](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/flexible) for more information on the Flexible Learning Pathfinder project.

- two-year accelerated honours degrees<sup>3</sup>
- accelerated four-year part-time honours degrees<sup>4</sup>
- other forms of flexible learning<sup>5</sup>.

5. Throughout this study, 'flexible learning' refers to programmes piloted as part of the Flexible Learning Pathfinder project. There are forms of flexible learning and courses of study using flexible learning at pathfinder and other institutions which were not included in the pilot scheme

6. Among the pathfinder institutions, there were 390 students on two-year accelerated honours degree courses in 2008-09. Of these, 235 entered in 2008-09.

7. There were 10 students on four-year accelerated part-time honours degree courses, all at the same institution.

8. There were 2,390 students on other types of flexible programmes at pathfinder institutions. Of these, 1,455 were aiming for a first degree. In this report, these other forms of flexible learning are referred to as 'Other FL'.

9. This report looks in more detail at the characteristics of the 390 accelerated two-year students in the academic year 2008-09 and compares them to full-time three-year students aiming for a first degree at pathfinder and other higher education institutions. Because three-year students have a different age, institution and subject profile from two-year accelerated students, the percentages have been adjusted for each characteristic (see paragraph 15). The results are as follows:

- a. Sixty-three per cent of two-year accelerated students were mature, compared to an adjusted proportion of 34 per cent for three-year students. Forty-seven per cent of two-year accelerated students were aged between 21 and 30, compared to 16 per cent of three-year students.
- b. Fifty-one per cent of two-year accelerated students were male, compared to the adjusted percentage of 50 for three-year students.
- c. Twenty-three per cent of two-year accelerated students were living outside the UK before the start of their course, compared to the adjusted percentage of 28 for three-year students.

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<sup>3</sup> An honours degree delivered intensively over two years, with the same content and the same number of credits as a traditional three-year degree. These are also sometimes referred to as 'fast-track' degrees. For information on variations on the model of delivery, see page 9 of 'Accelerated learning programmes: a review of quality, extent and demand' (Higher Education Academy, May 2007), available at [www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/flexible](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/flexible).

<sup>4</sup> An honours degree delivered on a part-time basis over four years. This offers the flexibility of working part-time in a related area while studying.

<sup>5</sup> Courses delivered by flexible methods such as part-time study, distance learning, blended learning, work-based learning or a combination of these methods. They included foundation degrees delivered over three years, foundation degrees with distance-learning top-up, and professional development courses.

- d. Forty-two per cent of two-year accelerated students entered with A-levels as their main qualification, compared to the adjusted percentage of 44 for the three-year students.
  - e. Forty-one per cent of two-year accelerated students were from neighbourhoods with low participation in higher education, compared to the adjusted percentage of 42 for the three-year students.
  - f. Forty-one per cent of two-year accelerated students reported themselves as minority ethnic, compared to the adjusted percentage of 32 for the three-year students.
  - g. Six per cent of two-year accelerated students reported themselves as disabled, compared to the adjusted 8 per cent for the three-year students.
10. The National Student Survey shows that 74 per cent of the two-year accelerated students who were surveyed were satisfied with their course, compared to 81 per cent of three-year students.
11. The report also looks in more detail at the courses designated 'Other FL'. Although it cannot be deduced from the HESA data, a wide variety of these other forms of flexible learning were piloted, including work-based learning, continuing professional development, and foundation and masters degrees delivered in flexible and innovative ways.
12. The data show that, of the 1,455 Other FL first degree students in 2008-09:
- a. Five hundred and forty-five were on four-year sandwich courses, that is, courses that included a period of work experience. Nearly all of these were studying a course in business and administrative studies, or in architecture, building and planning.
  - b. Three hundred and ninety were part-time, and most of these were on six-year courses. Two hundred and forty of the 390 studied in the subject area of Architecture, building and planning.
  - c. Five hundred and twenty were full-time, and the majority were on three-year courses. Most of these studied a course in the subject area of business and administrative studies or computer science.

### **Action required**

13. No action is required in response to this document.

## Important points about the analysis

### Rounding of numbers in the report

14. In line with data protection guidance, all counts of students referred to in the report are given in terms of a headcount of students who were active at any point during the academic year, rounded up or down to the nearest five. Totals and sub-totals are calculated based on unrounded values, and then rounded to the nearest five. For this reason, the sum of the values given in a table may not be equal to the total shown in that table. Percentages are not rounded.

### Comparing student populations

15. Throughout the report, 'adjusted' figures or proportions are referred to when comparing students on a two-year accelerated course with those on a three-year course. This is because two-year accelerated students, in general, tend to be of a particular age group, take particular subjects and study in a particular type of institution. A straight comparison with three-year students would show differences between the two populations in terms of these characteristics, rather than mode of study. To address this, we have compared the two-year accelerated degree students with three-year degree students of a similar age range and taking the same subjects, and where there are sufficient numbers, in a similar type of institution.

## Flexible learning courses

### Type

16. Eight higher education institutions (HEIs) have been piloting different forms of flexible learning since 2006-07 through the HEFCE-funded Flexible Learning Pathfinder project<sup>6</sup>. The institutions provided information on the courses to HEFCE in such a way that the courses could be identified on the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) record<sup>7</sup>. This report focuses on those studying on flexible learning programmes as part of the Pathfinder project in 2008-09.

17. A number of different types of flexible learning were piloted by the pathfinder institutions:

- two-year accelerated honours degrees
- four-year part-time honours degrees
- work-based learning
- continuing professional development
- foundation and masters degrees delivered in flexible and innovative ways.

18. In this report, we pay particular attention to accelerated honours degrees since these are easily identified from the data and are of particular interest from a policy perspective. Four-year accelerated part-time honours degrees are also easily identified, but there are too few students taking them for robust conclusions to be drawn.

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<sup>6</sup> See [www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/flexible](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/flexible) for more information on the Flexible Learning Pathfinder project.

<sup>7</sup> HESA runs a database of information collected on every higher education student attending a UK institution.

19. Table 1 shows the number of students on each type of course. Note that in all tables in this report, 'FL' refers to flexible learning activity at a pathfinder institution.

**Table 1: Number of students at UK HEIs 2008-09**

Type of FL	Total
Two-year accelerated	390
Four-year part-time accelerated	10
Other FL	2,390
<b>Subtotal: pathfinder FL</b>	<b>2,790</b>
All other provision	2,622,770
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,625,560</b>
Pathfinder FL	0.1%

20. Table 1 shows that there were more students in the Other FL category than in the other two flexible learning categories. There were only 10 students on the four-year accelerated part-time degree, and for the reason given in paragraph 18, four-year students will not be considered from this point on in the report. Overall, 0.1 per cent of all students were on a Flexible Learning Pathfinder programme.

## Level

21. Table 2 shows the level of study for each type of flexible learning.

**Table 2: Level of study for students at UK HEIs 2008-09**

Level of study	Two-year accelerated	Other FL	All other provision
Postgraduate research	0	0	134,010
Postgraduate taught	0	255	526,170
First degree	390	1,455	1,396,855
Other undergraduate	0	680	565,735
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>2,390</b>	<b>2,622,770</b>

22. Table 2 shows that there were 680 Other FL students studying for an undergraduate qualification below degree level and 255 studying on a taught postgraduate course.

23. For the rest of this report the focus will be on students aiming for a first degree.

## Profile of students on two-year accelerated honours courses

### Year of entry

24. Table 3 shows the number of flexible learning students who entered their courses in 2008-09.

**Table 3: Students on a first degree course in 2008-09**

Year of entry	Two-year accelerated	Other FL	All other provision
2008-09	235	540	494,520
Before 2008-09	155	915	902,335
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>1,455</b>	<b>1,396,855</b>

25. Most of the two-year accelerated students were entrants in 2008-09, but the majority of students on an Other FL course entered before 2008-09.

**Institution**

26. Table 4 shows the number of FL students at each of the pathfinder institutions. For anonymity, the names of the institutions are not given, but the letters used are consistent throughout this section.

**Table 4: Students on a flexible learning first degree course in 2008-09, by institution**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Two-year accelerated</b>	<b>Other FL</b>
A	65	0
B	35	1,380
C	125	0
D	75	50
E	30	0
F	0	20
G	40	0
H	20	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>1,455</b>

Table 4 note: Where there are fewer than five students on a course, the number is shown as zero.

27. Table 4 shows that there were seven institutions with two-year accelerated honours students, and that one institution (B) had many more Other FL students than any other institution.

28. Table 5 shows the same, but splits students by whether or not they entered in 2008-09.

**Table 5: Flexible learning students on a flexible learning first degree course in 2008-09 by institution, split by year of entry**

Institution	Year of entry	Two-year accelerated		Other FL
A	2008-09	55	0	
	Prior to 2008-09	10	0	
B	2008-09	10	510	
	Prior to 2008-09	25	870	
C	2008-09	80	0	
	Prior to 2008-09	50	0	
D	2008-09	20	15	
	Prior to 2008-09	55	35	
E	2008-09	20	0	
	Prior to 2008-09	5	0	
F	2008-09	0	15	
	Prior to 2008-09	0	5	
G	2008-09	30	0	
	Prior to 2008-09	10	0	
H	2008-09	15	0	
	Prior to 2008-09	0	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>540</b>	
	<b>Prior to 2008-09</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>915</b>	
<b>Total</b>		<b>390</b>	<b>1,455</b>	

29. Table 5 shows that at some institutions, for example institution A, most of the students on a two-year accelerated course had entered in 2008-09. However, at other institutions, such as institution D, most had entered previously<sup>8</sup>. At institution H, all the flexible learning students started in 2008-09.

### Subject area

30. Table 6 shows that both the two-year accelerated and other FL students were spread over a number of subject groups, with a concentration in the business and administrative studies group.

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<sup>8</sup> In four of the pathfinder institutions, the first students on the flexible learning pilot courses started in 2006-07. Three institutions had students commencing in 2007-08, and in one, the first students entered in 2008-09.



**Table 6: Subject groups of students in 2008-09**

<b>Subject group</b>	<b>Two-year accelerated</b>	<b>Other FL</b>	<b>All other provision</b>
Architecture, building and planning	0	505	37,930
Business and administrative studies	265	530	172,525
Creative arts and design	5	0	124,625
Education	0	70	50,545
Languages, literature and related subjects	10	20	89,190
Law	80	0	66,485
Mathematical and computer sciences	20	220	93,660
Physical sciences	10	0	64,135
Social studies	0	55	138,405
Combined studies	0	50	44,135
Other subject areas	0	0	639,835
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>1,455</b>	<b>1,396,855</b>

Table 6 notes: 'Other subject areas' refers to those unlisted subject areas where there were zero, one or two two-year accelerated or Other FL students. These were: Biological sciences; Engineering; Historical and philosophical studies; Mass communication and documentation; Medicine and dentistry; Subjects allied to medicine; Technologies; and Veterinary sciences, agriculture and related subjects.

### **Profile of students on two-year accelerated honours courses**

31. This section aims to compare the profile of students on a two-year accelerated full-time first degree course to those who were on a three-year full-time first degree course. 'Three-year students' refers to those studying full-time on a first degree course that is not part of the pathfinder scheme (although the courses may still be at a pathfinder HEI).

32. As Table 6 showed, two-year accelerated degree courses were in a particular set of subject areas. It is known that different subject groups tend to have a different profile of students. As a consequence, a straight comparison of FL students with three-year students would be misleading, so we use the adjustment approach discussed in paragraph 15. In addition, Table 7 shows that a greater proportion of students on two-year accelerated programmes were mature (that is, aged 21 or over at the start of their course), and mature students tend to have a different profile to younger students. Finally, different institutions also tend to have different profiles of students, so this, too, should be accounted for.

33. As noted in 15, a solution to this problem is to use a simple adjustment that accounts for the differences in subject and age group and, where there are sufficient numbers, institution, by giving an adjusted value for three-year students.

### **Age group**

34. Table 7 shows the number of students in each age group (based on their age at the start of their course), and the proportion of the total they make up.

**Table 7: Number of students in each age group 2008-09**

Age at start of course	Two-year accelerated	Percentage	Three-year	Percentage
18 or below	45	12%	321,485	44%
19-20	100	25%	258,825	35%
21-30	185	47%	115,960	16%
31-40	40	11%	26,675	4%
41-50	15	4%	11,455	2%
Over 50	5	1%	2,360	0%
Unknown	0	n/a	20	n/a
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>736,775</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 7 notes: Students with unknown age are excluded from the percentages.

35. Table 7 shows that almost half of two-year accelerated students were aged 21-30 when they started their course, compared to 16 per cent of three-year students. Most of the young (that is, below 21 when the course started) two-year students were 19 or 20 when they started their course, whereas most young three-year students were 18 or below.

36. Sixteen per cent of two-year accelerated students were over 30 when their course started, compared to 6 per cent of three-year students.

37. Table 8 shows the broader age group of the two-year accelerated degree students, compared to the proportion of three-year full-time first degree students who were mature (21 and over), adjusted only by subject group and institution. Of the 390 two-year accelerated students, 245 (63 per cent) were mature. The raw proportion of three-year students who were mature was 21 per cent, but when this percentage is adjusted to account for the different subject and institution profile of the two-year accelerated students, the figure is 34 per cent.

**Table 8: Adjusted age group profile of two-year accelerated and three-year first degree students in 2008-09**

Two-year accelerated	Mature (21 and over)	245
	Young (under 21)	145
	<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>
	Mature	63%
Three-year	Mature (adjusted)	34%
	<i>Mature (not adjusted)</i>	21%
	Difference (adjusted)	30%

38. A substantially greater proportion (30 percentage points) of two-year accelerated honours students were mature than would be expected for three-year students when adjusting for the different subject and institution profile.

39. For the rest of this section, the adjustment will account for age group as well as subject group and institution.

## Sex

40. Table 9 compares the percentage of male two-year accelerated honours students with the percentage of male three-year students adjusted for age, subject group and institution.

**Table 9: Adjusted sex profile of two-year accelerated and three-year first degree students in 2008-09**

Two-year accelerated	Male	195
	Female	195
	<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>
	Male	51%
Three-year	Male (adjusted)	50%
	<i>Male (not adjusted)</i>	43%
Difference (adjusted)		1%

Table 9 notes: Although for two-year accelerated students the numbers of males and females appear equal, this is due to rounding; the percentages are correct. See paragraph 14 for an explanation of how the figures are rounded in this study.

41. Table 9 shows that just over half – 51 per cent – of the two-year accelerated students were male. Taking the raw numbers of three-year students, 43 per cent were male, whereas if numbers are adjusted for age, subject and institution to account for the different profile of two-year accelerated students, the proportion of male three-year students is 50 per cent. The difference between the adjusted and the non-adjusted rates also shows that three-year mature students at pathfinder institutions studying the same subjects as two-year accelerated students had a larger proportion of males (50 per cent) than the sector average for three-year students (43 per cent).

42. In summary, this table shows that once adjustments for age, institution and subject are taken into account, students on two-year accelerated degrees are very slightly (one percentage point) more likely to be male.

### **Domicile**

43. Table 10 shows the percentage of students who were living outside the UK prior to starting their course. For three-year students the non-adjusted proportion is 12 per cent, and the adjusted proportion, 28 per cent.

**Table 10: Adjusted domicile profile of two-year accelerated and three-year first degree students in 2008-09**

Two-year accelerated	UK	300
	Other EU	35
	Non-EU	50
	<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>
	Non-UK	23%
Three-year	Non-UK (adjusted)	28%
	<i>Non-UK (not adjusted)</i>	12%
Difference (adjusted)		-5%

44. The proportion of two-year accelerated students from outside the UK was five percentage points below what would be expected, based on their age and subject profile: 23 per cent compared to 28 per cent.

45. A comparison with the non-adjusted three-year rate would suggest that a greater proportion of accelerated students were from outside the UK, but the adjusted difference shows that the raw difference is more than explained by the disparity in the subject, institution and age group profile.

### Entry qualifications

46. The HESA record contains information on the qualifications a student held when they started their course. Table 11 shows the proportion of students whose highest entry qualifications were A-levels or equivalent.

**Table 11 Adjusted entry qualification profile of two-year accelerated and three-year first degree students in 2008-09**

Two-year accelerated	A-levels and equivalents	160
	Other	225
	Unknown	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>
Three-year	A-levels and equivalent	42%
	A-levels and equivalent (adjusted)	44%
	<i>A-levels and equivalent (not adjusted)</i>	75%
	Difference (adjusted)	-3%

Table 11 notes: Students with unknown entry qualifications are not included in the percentages.

47. A slightly lower percentage of students on two-year accelerated programmes entered with A-levels as their main qualification than the adjusted percentage of three-year students.

### Local area participation rate

48. POLAR is a measure of young participation in higher education in the local area around a student's home prior to entry<sup>9</sup>. It divides UK areas into five quintiles, numbered 1 to 5, so if a region is in quintile 1, it is in the lowest 20 per cent of areas in the UK in terms of young participation in higher education. This measure will also be used for mature students for simplicity, because there is little difference between POLAR and the equivalent measure for mature students.

49. Table 12 shows the number of students on a two-year accelerated course in each POLAR quintile and the percentage in the lowest two quintiles: 41 per cent. Most of the 100 students with an unknown POLAR quintile were from outside the UK.

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<sup>9</sup> Based on higher education participation of 18 and 19 year-olds. See [www.hefce.ac.uk/polar](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/polar) for more information.

**Table 12: Adjusted POLAR profile of two-year accelerated and three-year students in 2008-09**

	1 Lowest	60
	2	60
	3	55
	4	60
Two-year accelerated	5 Highest	55
	Unknown	100
	<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>
	Quintiles 1 & 2	41%
Three-year	Quintiles 1 & 2 (adjusted)	42%
	<i>Quintiles 1 &amp; 2 (not adjusted)</i>	<i>28%</i>
	Difference (adjusted)	-1%

Table 12 notes: Students with unknown POLAR group are not included in the percentages.

50. A slightly lower proportion of students on a two-year accelerated degree came from areas with low higher education participation than those on a three-year degree: 41 per cent compared with 42 per cent (when adjusted for age, institution and subject).

### Ethnicity

51. The HESA record holds information on the self-reported ethnicity of students. Table 13 shows the proportion of students who reported themselves as being from a minority ethnic background.

**Table 13: Adjusted ethnicity profile of two-year accelerated and three-year first degree students in 2008-09**

	Minority ethnic	140
	White	205
	Unknown	45
	<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>
	Minority ethnic	41%
Three-year	Minority ethnic (adjusted)	32%
	<i>Minority ethnic (not adjusted)</i>	<i>24%</i>
	Difference (adjusted)	9%

Table 13 notes: Students with unknown ethnicity are not included in the percentages.

52. The proportion of two-year accelerated students who were from a minority ethnic background was nine percentage points above what would be expected, based on their age, institution and subject profile: 41 per cent, compared to 32 per cent for three-year students.

### Disability

53. The HESA record holds information on the self-reported disability status of students. Table 14 shows the proportion of students who reported themselves as disabled.

**Table 14: Adjusted disability profile of two-year accelerated and three-year first degree students in 2008-09**

Two-year accelerated	With disability	25
	No known disability	360
	Unknown	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>
With disability		6%
Three-year	With disability (adjusted)	8%
	<i>With disability (not adjusted)</i>	9%
Difference (adjusted)		-2%

Table 14 notes: Students with unknown disability status are not included in the percentages.

54. A slightly lower percentage of students on a two-year accelerated course were disabled than would be expected, based on their age, institution and subject profile: 6 per cent, compared to 8 per cent for three-year students.

### Socio-economic class

55. This report does not include analysis of the socio-economic class of the 2008-09 students because the data quality in the HESA record was not good for that year – for example, 68 per cent of young two-year accelerated students were reported as having an unknown socio-economic class. Analysis of these data could therefore result in misleading conclusions.

### National Student Survey

56. The National Student Survey (NSS) is a survey of mostly final year students<sup>10</sup>. It seeks to determine their satisfaction with different aspects of their course. There are 22 different questions. This section focuses on question 22, which asks how satisfied a student was with their course overall.

57. Table 17 shows the number of students who were surveyed in 2008-09 or 2009-10, and the percentage who were satisfied. Note that an answer of 'Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' is shown as 'Not satisfied', in line with standard practice.

**Table 17 National Student Survey results for 2008-09 and 2009-10**

Surveyed	Satisfaction	Two-year accelerated	Other FL	All other provision
Surveyed	Satisfied	125	180	212,995
	Not satisfied	45	90	49,360
	No answer	110	190	138,560
<b>Total surveyed</b>		<b>280</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>400,915</b>
Not surveyed		110	610	335,865
<b>Total</b>		<b>390</b>	<b>1,065</b>	<b>736,775</b>
Satisfied (of those who answered)		74%	66%	81%

<sup>10</sup> Not all students included in the NSS are in their final year: some are repeating their penultimate year and some are on flexible courses where it is not possible to determine their final year. For more information on the NSS see [www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss).

58. Table 17 shows that 280 two-year accelerated students had been surveyed by 2010, and 170 answered the question on overall satisfaction. Of these, 74 per cent were satisfied with their course, compared to 66 per cent of full-time Other FL students<sup>11</sup> and 81 per cent of three-year students. If the subject and age profiles of the two-year accelerated students are taken into account, as they have been in previous sections (but excluding institution here because of the small numbers), the adjusted proportion of three-year students who were satisfied remains at 81 per cent. Therefore, even with adjustment, a slightly higher proportion of three-year students were satisfied with their course than were two-year accelerated students.

## Other flexible learning courses

59. In this section, the Other FL provision will be considered in more detail. It is known from other sources that there were a wide variety of different forms of flexible learning included in this category, including work-based learning, continuing professional development, and foundation and masters degrees delivered in flexible and innovative ways.

60. Table 20 shows the mode of study of Other FL students in 2008-09.

**Table 20: Mode of study for students aiming for a first degree in 2008-09**

Mode of study	Other FL	All other provision
Full-time	520	1,043,435
Sandwich <sup>12</sup>	545	111,745
Part-time	390	241,675
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,455</b>	<b>1,396,855</b>

Table 20 notes: 'All other provision' excludes the 390 accelerated two-year degree and 10 FL four-year students.

61. Table 20 places the Other FL students into three categories: full-time, sandwich and part-time. The largest of these was the group of sandwich students. With these courses, it took the form of a one-year placement.

62. These three different types of courses were likely to attract different types of students, so they are considered separately for the remainder of this section.

63. Table 21 shows the expected length of course for Other FL students in 2008-09, split into the three different modes of study.

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<sup>11</sup> Part-time Other FL students have been excluded from this part of the analysis.

<sup>12</sup> A sandwich course is a course that includes at least one work experience placement.

**Table 21: Expected course length for Other FL students aiming for a first degree in 2008-09**

Expected course length (years)	Other FL		
	Full-time	Sandwich	Part-time
Up to two	25	0	0
Three	495	0	0
Four	0	545	20
Five	0	0	0
Six	0	0	365
<b>Total</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>390</b>

Table 21 notes: Where there are fewer than five students on a course, the number is shown as zero.

64. Table 21 shows that there were 25 Other FL students on a two-year course, all full-time. As would be expected, most full-time students were on a three-year course and most sandwich students were on a four-year course. All part-time students were on a course lasting at least four years, and most planned to study for six years.

**Table 22: Number of Other FL students aiming for a first degree in 2008-09**

Year of entry	Full-time	Sandwich	Part-time
2008-09	200	240	100
Before 2008-09	320	305	285
<b>Total</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>390</b>

65. Table 22 shows that for each type of Other FL course, there were some students who started in 2008-09 and some who started previously<sup>13</sup>.

**Table 23: Subject groups of Other FL students aiming for a first degree in 2008-09**

Subject group	Other FL		
	Full-time	Sandwich	Part-time
Architecture, building and planning	35	225	240
Business and administrative studies	200	310	15
Education	25	0	50
Engineering	0	0	0
Languages, literature and related subjects	0	0	20
Computer sciences	210	5	5
Social studies	50	0	5
Other	0	0	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>390</b>

Table 23 notes: Subject groups with some students but fewer than five are shown with a zero.

66. Table 23 shows that most part-time Other FL students studied a course within the Architecture, building and planning subject area, as did nearly all the sandwich students, or a course in the area of Business and administrative studies. Most full-time Other FL students did a course in Computer science or Business and administrative studies.

<sup>13</sup> See footnote 8.



**Table 24: Age at start of course of Other FL students aiming for a first degree in 2008-09**

<b>Age at start of course</b>	<b>Full-time</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b>Sandwich</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b>Part-time</b>	<b>% of total</b>
18 or below	185	36%	255	47%	65	17%
19-20	205	39%	215	39%	70	18%
21-30	115	23%	70	13%	140	36%
31-40	10	2%	5	1%	60	15%
41-50	0	0%	0	0%	40	10%
Over 50	0	0%	0	0%	15	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 24 notes: Age groups with fewer than five FL students are shown with a zero.

67. Table 24 shows that almost half (47 per cent) of students on Other FL sandwich courses were aged 18 or below at the start of their course; 86 per cent were 20 or under and just 14 per cent were aged between 21 and 40.

68. Of the students on full-time Other FL courses, 36 per cent were aged 18 or below at the start of their course and 75 per cent were 20 or under, whereas 25 per cent were aged between 21 and 40. In both the sandwich and full-time categories, only 1 per cent and 2 per cent respectively were in the 31-40 age group and there were no students aged 41 and over. This pattern contrasts with the Other FL part-time category, where 17 per cent were 18 or under, 35 per cent 20 or under and 36 per cent 21-30, with a considerable proportion of students in the age ranges 31-40 (15 per cent) and 41-50 (10 per cent). Four per cent were over 50. It seems that the full-time and sandwich courses appealed more to younger students and the 21-30 age range than did the part-time courses. Part-time provision, on the other hand, while still attracting considerable numbers of students aged 20 and under, appealed to mature students (aged 21 and over) more than did full-time and sandwich courses.

## **Next steps**

69. The data presented in this report focus on the personal and course characteristics of the students undertaking formal flexible learning pathway provision in the academic year 2008-09.

70. We plan to enhance this analysis in spring 2011, using HESA data relating to the academic year 2009-10, both to take into account later cohorts of students, and to continue tracking the students present in 2008-09 as they graduate and progress into further study and/or employment.

71. We are not considering qualification rates (graduation rates in the case of first degree provision) in this study, because the majority of those on flexible learning courses in this report were not expected to graduate in the academic year 2008-09. Although 60 or so of the 390 two-year accelerated honours students did so, we have chosen not to report here because these students are likely to be atypical with regard to flexible learning provision.