

# The power of part-time

## Review of part-time and mature higher education

### highly-valued qualifications better job ladder

more fulfilled life enable me to work

I have never felt so valued... confidence fascinating

brighter, broader, happier future

self-esteem and confidence invaluable skills



Universities UK

I have learned on the course will prepare me for my degree at the same university. Part time education is vital to keep



# INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR



Professor Sir Eric Thomas

## Part-time and mature students are a great success story for UK higher education.

We are talking about huge numbers – nearly half a million undergraduate students studying part-time in the UK in 2011–12. We are talking about important professions – the top three subjects being subjects allied to medicine, business and administrative studies, and education. And we're talking about the ability to earn while you learn – the opportunity to fit study around work and family commitments, not the other way around.

The UK needs more graduates. Over 80% of new jobs to be created by 2020 will be in occupations with high concentrations of graduates. Flexible higher education is vital in meeting our skills needs, including new skills requirements in a fast-changing global economy.

We must also not forget the wonderful transformative powers of learning and the impact on the individual, nor the benefits

to society as a whole of a more educated population. Universities also have a duty to their local area – a sense of pride in civic engagement, a commitment to the public good. They also benefit from having a more diverse and vibrant student body.

Yet something is going wrong. Following a decade of slow decline, the numbers of students recruited to part-time courses since 2010–11 in England fell by 40% for undergraduate courses over two years: equivalent to 105,000 fewer students. In Scotland and Wales, despite their very different funding regimes, part-time entrant numbers have also declined in recent years, though indicative suggestions are that the changes in the last year seem to be less marked.

Part-time students, particularly mature undergraduates, seem to be an invisible and, in national policy terms, poorly understood cohort. They are also far more heterogeneous than young full-timers. We have found concerns that the market is skewed by a national policy system, in England in particular, designed primarily around young full-time undergraduates, into which this provision is fitted. The end result is that the part-time market risks operating in neither the interests of students, employers nor the economy.

We see this report as the beginning of a process to understand what is going on and how to address it. On some issues we can and must move quickly and it is relatively clear what needs to be done. On other issues we make recommendations for further research and modelling, to ensure that the policy interventions and institutional actions will be as targeted and successful as possible.

It will be difficult. Many of the factors are outwith universities' powers. The environment is getting more challenging, not easier. But we cannot and must not give up on these students.

UUK is pleased to have been asked by the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Minister for Universities and Science to conduct this review, and we believe

that the great strength of this report is that it is our members, the university sector, who are taking ownership of the issue and urgently seeking to work with partners to address it. I commend the recommendations in this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric Thomas', written in a cursive style.

**Professor Sir Eric Thomas**

Chair, Universities UK review of part-time  
and mature higher education  
Vice-Chancellor, University of Bristol  
President, Universities UK (2011–2013)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Part-time higher education: a powerhouse for skills

The UK relies heavily on part-time higher education to up-skill the population, in order to meet fast changing skills needs in a fast changing world. The powerhouse for the new skills base is amongst people already in employment; part-time study cannot be ignored if we want economic growth. There is also strong evidence of the social and personal benefits of lifelong learning.

- There were nearly half a million people in the UK studying part-time at undergraduate level in 2011–12, making up more than a quarter (29%) of the UK undergraduate population.<sup>1</sup>
- The vast majority – nine out of ten – are aged between 21 and 65.
- Most are studying vocational courses and in continuous full-time employment.
- The contribution of graduates from part-time study to economic prosperity in the UK exceeds that of graduates from full-time study in the three and a half years after graduation.<sup>2</sup>
- Sixty-two per cent are female and thirty-eight per cent are male.
- Forty-five per cent are parents with dependant children (in England).
- Fewer than one third received financial support from their employer (in England).

This report focuses on part-time undergraduate students, particularly those who are mature (aged over 21).

## How is part-time undergraduate recruitment changing?

While full-time undergraduate enrolments have gone up over the last ten years in the UK, part-time undergraduate enrolments have gone down. This trend has been more significant for women and mature learners. **Following a decade of slow decline, the numbers of students recruited to undergraduate part-time courses in England suddenly fell by 40% in two years (2010–11 to 2012–13): equivalent to 105,000 fewer students.** Indications for 2013–14 are that the level of decline will not be stemmed.

There is currently little evidence that people are now studying in a different way. The figures above include entrants to part-time higher education courses in further education colleges, which fell by around 3,000 between 2010–11 and 2012–13.<sup>3</sup> It is hard to quantify the numbers studying with private providers but the numbers, although growing, are likely to be small in comparison with the overall decline. The views of the organisations and individuals who responded to our call for evidence are that the decline is primarily due to people deciding not to undertake further higher level study. This would need to be investigated further but, even if it is only partly true, leads to real concerns for individuals' future employment prospects and the interests of the UK economy and society.

Part-time student numbers are also in decline in Scotland and Wales, though indicative suggestions are that the changes in the last year (2012–13) seem to be less marked. We keenly anticipate data released early in 2014 which will

1. UK-domiciled individuals and population only; only a small number (25,500 or 5%) of part-time undergraduate students are from outside of the UK. (HESA 2011–12)

2. UKCES (2011) *The impact of higher education for part-time students*

3. Enrolments to part-time directly-funded HE courses in FE colleges, excluding new providers in order to allow comparisons with previous years. HEFCE (2013) *Higher Education in England: the Impact of the 2012 Reforms*

allow us to see in much more detail what has happened across the UK.

## An urgent initial assessment of the situation

Universities UK (UUK) was invited by Vince Cable, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Science to conduct a review of part-time undergraduate higher education.

We issued an open invitation to provide evidence and received more than 140 responses, from universities, colleges, students, employers and other bodies.<sup>4</sup> We were particularly interested in the view of employers, so held further oral evidence sessions with representatives from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), the Federation of Small Businesses and the Association of Graduate Recruiters (among others), as well as with organisations which had carried out research in this area (such as the Institute for Employment Studies and the Higher Education Careers Service Unit [HECSU]). We also gathered together existing surveys, such as those carried out for the National Union of Students (NUS), Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and HECSU, and identified areas for further research.

We found a significant amount of concern about part-time higher education, as well as a relatively high degree of consensus about the likely reasons for the changes that we are seeing. There seems to be a 'perfect storm' of factors interacting: the current economic climate restricting employer support for further study, putting pressure on household budgets and changing the shape of the industrial sectors from which part-time students are traditionally drawn (particularly the public sector); changing pathways into higher education; changing demographics; and the 2012–13 changes to the funding system in England and associated increase in fees. Factors such as the rise of apprenticeships, increases in private providers (whether for profit or not-for-profit), and a shift

to online learning will also be having an impact, however difficult to quantify. The situation is complex, made up of changes in both supply and demand, and plays out differently for different types of learners.

## What should be done?

This report acts as an urgent initial assessment, identifying areas for immediate action, as well as the areas where more information is needed so that the right policy decisions are made. We see this review as the beginning, not the end, of UUK's involvement in a programme of work to protect and support this vital area of provision.

### We found...

- Many employers and potential students are not sufficiently aware of the value of part-time higher education and do not always fully understand the options, including financial, open to them.
- Information is patchy for potential students trying to find out about available courses and student finance information.
- There is a lack of visibility of the part-time offer.
- Opportunities exist for higher education providers to do more to attract and support part-time students, including through the development of more flexible learning approaches.
- Part-time study is highly vocational, yet there are opportunities for more employer-focused provision.
- There are opportunities for part-time study to be supported through Local Enterprise Partnerships in England.

4. These are analysed in detail in Annexe E, available on the UUK website at [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/UUKreviewofparttimeeducation.aspx](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/UUKreviewofparttimeeducation.aspx)

- Finance is reported as a major obstacle to participation.
- We were told that this has been exacerbated by the new funding regime and increases in institutional fees in England in 2012–13, particularly as the majority of part-time students are ineligible for a fee loan.
- Universities, colleges, students and employers believe that the restriction on loans and funding council support to those doing qualifications higher than already possessed (equivalent or lower qualifications policy) is hampering re-skilling.
- There are a number of areas where the evidence is not yet as good as it needs to be to make sound national policy decisions, particularly around the issue of potential market failure. In particular, important data about the academic year in which the research was taking place (2012–13) will not be published until 2014.

Part-time undergraduate higher education is not the concern purely of a particular part of the sector, nor can the challenges identified in this report be addressed by individual institutions acting in isolation. Our recommendations aim to:

- ensure that part-time and mature students are central to the higher education sector
- improve the visibility and understanding of part-time provision
- enhance the part-time student experience
- boost employer-focused provision
- understand better what is going on in part-time undergraduate higher education
- keep up the momentum of this review

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1: All stakeholders across the UK, including higher education providers, government, funding councils and others, should consider the needs of part-time and mature students as an intrinsic part of their thinking, not as an add-on.**

**Recommendation 2: There needs to be an urgent push at all levels – national, regional and local – to help potential students and employers understand the value of and opportunities for part-time higher education.**

**2a.** In England, UUK, GuildHE, the Association of Colleges, BIS, UCAS, the Student Loans Company, CBI, unionlearn and other interested groups should design and implement a clearly targeted national communications strategy, aimed at both potential students and employers, to encourage mature and part-time students into higher education. This should be done immediately in order to have an effect on 2014–15 entry.

**2b.** UCAS should develop its existing website coverage of part-time students, in order to provide a first port of call for those looking to study part-time at undergraduate level. This should be done as a matter of urgency and offer a similar level of information, advice and guidance on part-time courses as is available for full-time provision. We also support UCAS' work in updating Search to allow institutions to display their part-time courses.

**2c.** The funding councils should continue all efforts to improve the visibility of part-time courses on the Unistats website.

**2d.** Universities and colleges should continue and expand their valuable work to promote part-time study options and the

value of part-time study in their region and local area. We urge them, in particular, to ensure that available part-time options are highly visible on websites and other marketing material, and that information on student finance is up to date.

**Recommendation 3: Universities and colleges should take bold steps to meet the needs of potential part-time students and improve the part-time student experience.**

**3a.** Universities and colleges, of whatever size, sector or mission, are urged to consider the evidence presented in this report, particularly the evidence relating to the student life cycle, and to methods of flexible learning, including online delivery.

**3b.** Universities and colleges should consider how partnerships between higher education institutions and further education colleges can sustain and promote opportunities to study part-time.

**3c.** Universities and colleges will wish to consider the evidence in this report when considering their own course pricing.

**Recommendation 4: Employer-focused part-time higher education which meets the needs of the local economy should be boosted.**

**4a.** Universities and colleges should work in partnership with employers to develop more flexible and innovative approaches to meeting the needs of part-time students. Universities and colleges need to step up longer-term partnership arrangements with employers, while at the same time employers need to get better at articulating skills needs.

**4b.** UUK will work with UKCES to highlight innovative ways in which higher education

institutions are working with employers to meet skills requirements and strengthen the high-level skills base of the UK economy. This project, which will pay special attention to flexible provision, will also explore how the sector's contribution to employment and skills can be further enhanced.

**4c.** In England, UUK will urge its members to work with Local Enterprise Partnerships to raise awareness of and access to part-time higher education study, and to ensure part-time study plays its critical role in supporting the local growth and skills agenda.

**Recommendation 5: Further evidence and modelling is needed in order to support national policy decisions in England.**

**5a.** The findings of this review should feed into planned HEFCE work to research part-time higher education at a local and regional level. We also support planned CBI work on financing options to support more firms to up-skill and re-skill their workforces.

**5b.** We recommend that the extension of fee loans to part-time students of engineering, technology and computer science who already have a degree in a different discipline should be monitored carefully.

**5c.** We recommend that BIS and the Treasury should conduct further research around the ways in which the tax system could better incentivise support for part-time higher education study, whether for employers or individuals.

**5d.** We recommend that the impact of changes to the HEFCE funding system is kept under review, including the removal of the part-time premium.

# CHAPTER 1: WHY IS PART-TIME UNDERGRADUATE STUDY IMPORTANT?

## SUMMARY

This chapter sets out the economic, social and personal benefits of part-time higher education study. The UK relies heavily on part-time higher education to up-skill the working population, meeting fast changing skills needs in a fast changing world. It cannot be ignored if we want economic growth. There is a profound

effect on adults who are unable to take up higher education, which is felt particularly by women and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as those needing to re-skill as their jobs are lost or change. The social and economic benefits of a well educated population are under threat.

## The economic and skills benefits of part-time higher education

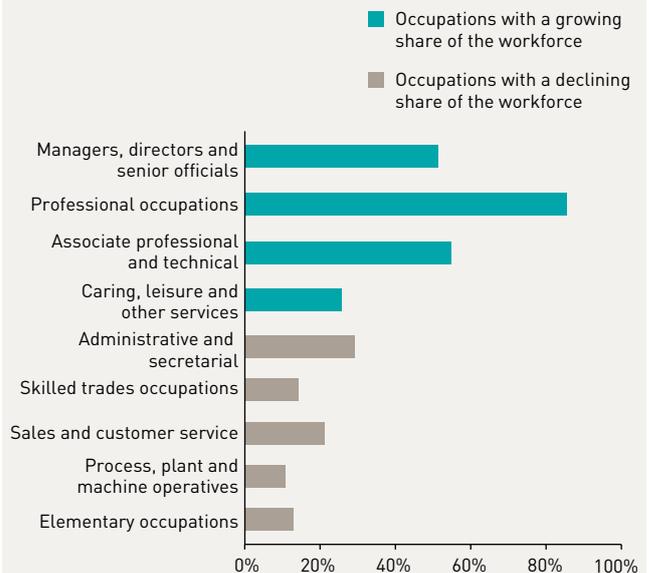
Part-time higher education plays a vital role in up-skilling and re-skilling people of working age, as well as providing a second chance to those who missed out on higher education when younger. It helps to provide the UK with the graduates it needs in order to support economic growth.

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)<sup>5</sup> has found that:

*'In the next decade, the total number of jobs in managerial, professional and associate professional occupations is projected to increase by two million while the total number of jobs in manual occupations is projected to decrease by over 400,000. Access to these professional jobs primarily depends on having a university degree or higher.'*

Over 80% of new jobs to be created by 2020 will be in occupations with high concentrations of graduates. Three of the four occupations with a growing share of the UK workforce require substantial numbers of graduates to support them, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Percentage of graduates within occupations, 2012**



Source: Labour Force Survey 2012 and UKCES (2012) *Working Futures 2010-2020*

A report by UKCES on UK skills levels and international competitiveness (UKCES 2012a) found that when the UK's projected future performance in skills (using formal qualifications

5. UKCES (2012a) *UK Skills levels and international competitiveness*

as a proxy for skills<sup>6</sup>) is set in an international context, other nations were increasing their skill levels more rapidly.

UKCES concluded that: 'At current rates of progress the UK runs the risk of falling behind. This is a real concern when viewed in the context of the UK's overall competitiveness in global markets.'

The challenge for higher education is how to keep pace with the changing nature of skills demand and ensure that there are sufficient graduates with the right skills 'fit' to meet the future needs of employers and the UK economy. In a fast changing economy, this will depend on enabling skills development throughout a working lifetime.

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**'The power house for the new skills base is amongst people already in employment.'**

Leitch Review of Skills, 2006

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In a recent report, *Tomorrow's growth: New routes to higher skills*, the CBI makes an urgent case for expanding learning models which combine work and study, including flexible higher education programmes like part-time, in order to meet the higher skills challenge.

*'The reality of longer and multiple careers over a lifetime means older individuals will have to re-skill and up-skill as technologies and ways of working change. This is already an issue – the recent CBI/ Pearson's Education and Skills Survey showed greater dissatisfaction among employers with their current workers' skills than with those of recent recruits from schools or university. Without continued investment in their skills, individuals become much more vulnerable in the labour market.'* (CBI 2013)

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**'Lifelong learning and continued professional development are vital to businesses in the fast-changing global economy – as is the capacity of individuals to undertake part-time study.'**

CBI, 2013

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Part-time higher education is vital to growth in fast developing sectors of the economy:

*'The flexibility provided by part-time study is especially crucial to ensuring that re-skilling and up-skilling of existing employees can fit with business requirements. For fast developing sectors such as low carbon and advanced manufacturing, which will require significant re-skilling and up-skilling, the availability of part-time study for employees can be a key enabler of growth.'* (CBI 2013)

On this basis part-time study has a special role to play in raising, updating and improving the skills of the current workforce and ensuring that they have the skills and qualifications employers need.

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## Impact on individuals and society

As part of this review, we have spoken with or heard from more than 150 students and graduates, as well as the NUS. They have told us about the fantastic impact part-time learning has had on them.

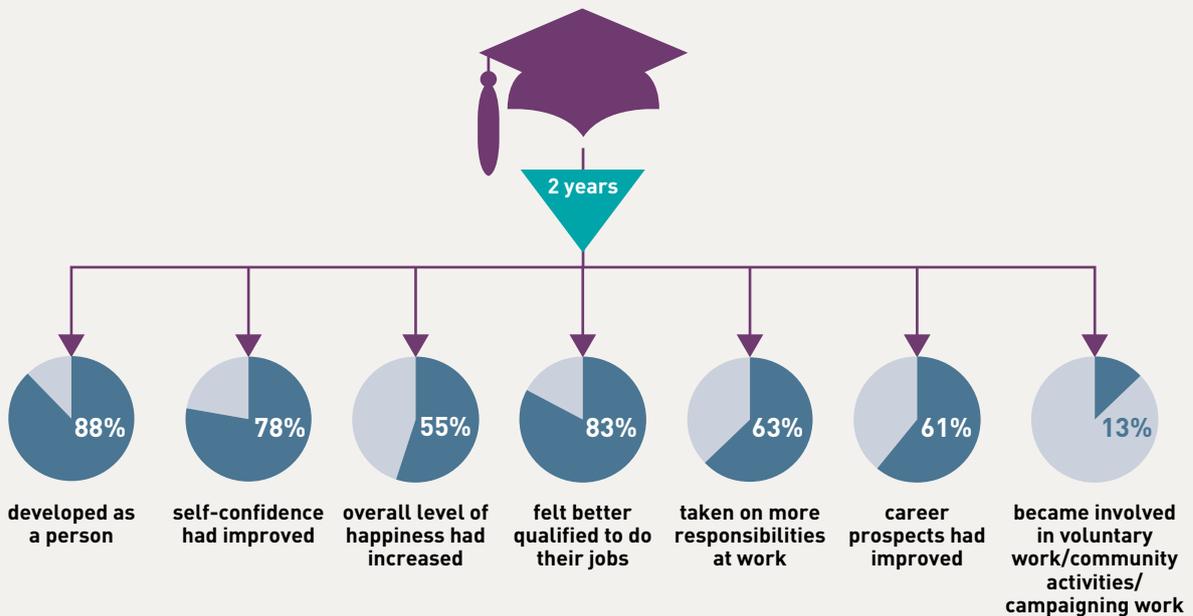
There are other benefits of part-time study well beyond the financial and career-related. The impact on self-confidence and happiness is particularly interesting, and has been seen in previous research, such as that undertaken for HEFCE in 2001.

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6. Although qualifications are only one measure of skills, UKCES acknowledges that the level of qualifications provides a valuable insight into the UK's skills base.

## How part-time study improves your life

In a survey of part-time undergraduate students two years after graduating:<sup>7</sup>



(all either 'as a result of the course' or 'the course helped')

*The wider benefits of higher education* (HEFCE 2001) found that graduates, especially men who graduated as mature students, are more likely to be civically engaged (for example, to be an active member of a community organisation) than those with A-levels, even after controlling for childhood characteristics. This is backed up by a more recent study which found that 13% of graduates from part-time higher education became involved in voluntary work, community activities or campaigning work (as a result of their course or the course helped) (Callender and Wilkinson 2013).

Part-time study also challenges social inequalities. Forty-four per cent of part-time learners are the first in their family to access higher education and 29% are from low income groups (Callender 2011). Role models in the family are particularly motivating for children to aspire to higher education. Nearly one-third of graduates of part-time courses reported that their children or family had become more interested in learning (either as a result of their course or the course helped) (Callender and Wilkinson 2013).

7. Callender C, Wilkinson D (2013) *Futuretrack: The impact of part-time learning two years after graduation* HECSU.

# CHAPTER 2: WHO ARE PART-TIME UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS?

## SUMMARY

In 2011–12, there were nearly half a million people in the UK studying part-time (including distance learning) at undergraduate level, making up more than a quarter of the undergraduate population.<sup>8</sup> They are a very diverse group, with different motivations and qualifications for entry. The vast majority are aged between 21 and 65, and these are the group on which this report is focused.

They are more likely to be female (62%) than male (38%). The link with employment is very strong: the majority are studying vocational courses, and in continuous full-time employment. The contribution of graduates from part-time study to economic prosperity in the UK, particularly in relation to earnings, exceeds that of graduates from full-time study in the three and a half years after graduation.<sup>9</sup>

## What kinds of people study part-time?

Part-time learners<sup>10</sup> are a hugely important part of the UK higher education system. In 2011–12, there were nearly half a million (490,590) UK-domiciled people studying part-time (including distance learning) at undergraduate level.<sup>11</sup> This includes Bachelors degrees, as well as higher certificates and diplomas. This represents more than a quarter (29%) of the UK-domiciled undergraduate population.

Part-time students are a very diverse group, and should not be considered as a mass. What generally distinguishes them is that they fit study around other commitments (such as work or family commitments), as opposed to full-time students, who fit other commitments around study.

## Thinking about part-time undergraduate students<sup>12</sup>

- **‘Career enhancers’**: people generally in work who want to enhance their existing career by acquiring additional skills and qualifications – probably the largest group
- **‘Career changers’**: people generally in work who want to change their career by acquiring new qualifications in a different field
- **‘Non-career learners’**: leisure learners who may already be qualified at degree level but are interested in continuing or developing their education
- **‘Career entrants’**: those interested in part-time higher education to help their

8. UK-domiciled individuals and population only; only a small number (25,500 or 5%) of part-time undergraduate students are from outside of the UK (HESA 2011–12)

9. UKCES (2011) *The impact of higher education for part-time students*

10. Definition of part-time study is in the Technical Annexe (Annexe D), available online at: [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/UUKreviewofparttimeeducation.aspx](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/UUKreviewofparttimeeducation.aspx). All statistics in this section, except where clearly stated, refer to 2011–12 UK-domiciled undergraduates registered at UK institutions, as reported by the HESA student record (2013).

11. Unless otherwise stated all figures related to part-time undergraduate provision at UK higher education institutions include The Open University. Due to the very large scale and distinctiveness of this provision, The Open University is sometimes excluded from this report’s analysis in order to present underlying sector-wide patterns or trends.

12. Adapted from BIS (2012) *Expanding and improving part-time higher education*

career entry, for example young people who are choosing to study part-time or those who want to start a career in later life, for instance after bringing up children – probably the smallest group

Policies need to take account of the needs of all of these learners, in order to avoid unintended consequences.

The great majority (92% of 2011–12 enrolments) are mature students (aged 21 or over). The discussion and recommendations in this report focus particularly on this group.<sup>13</sup> Almost all are of working age, with only a very small number (12,380, or 3%) aged 65 or over. Students in their thirties make up the largest age group (26%).

## Meet some part-time students...

**Olumide Onitiri-Coker** wanted to study for an undergraduate degree to build on his previous qualifications, which included a BTEC in business management. Following various roles and business investments in publishing, web and finance, he started a **BSc economics and social policy** at **Birkbeck, University of London** when he was 28 and graduated four years later. As he was still in the early stages of a property career and had a young family to support, studying full-time was not an option.

From September 2013, **Bee Green** will be studying in the third and final year of the part-time **foundation degree in child and family studies** through the Lifelong Learning Centre at the **University of Leeds**. Bee explains: 'Part-time study was a deliberate choice. It has enabled me to give time to study so that I am doing myself justice whilst also meeting my existing commitments to my family and work. I also thought that a part-time programme would be more geared to mature students with other people in the same boat as me.'

**Graham Lupton** is studying a **BEng Tech (hons) in electrical and electronic engineering** at **Teesside University**. He grew up in Millom, Cumbria where the Sellafield nuclear plant is a major employer, and after school started an apprenticeship there. He achieved NVQ Level 3 electrical and instrumentation, followed by an HND in electrical and electronic engineering. He now works full-time as a project engineer for AMEC at Hartlepool Power Station, while

studying part-time. AMEC is supporting him, allowing him to go to university one day a week, and paying for his books and equipment. Graham is also given time off to study for exams. The intention is that the qualification will help him progress towards CEng status and apply for more senior roles.

**Lee Potter** has just completed the second year of an **HNC in civil engineering** at **New College Durham**, progressing from a part-time Level 3 further education programme. Lee works for a local contractor and has a young family; he often starts work at 4am and then attends college.

**Grace** was told at school that she would never achieve her ambition of becoming a nurse. She is now a manager at an NHS Trust, having achieved a **BSc (hons) in applied professional studies** at the **University of Greenwich**, attending taught courses after work and completing assessed work in the evenings and at weekends. She went on to complete a Master's programme with distinction.

**Kerry Nichols** is studying towards a **BSc (hons) in psychology** with the **Open University**, after a 15-year break from formal education. As a busy mum she chose the OU for its flexibility, allowing her to fit her studies around her family. Kerry chairs many forums and boards and also works as a family support worker in a local school. She hopes that through her studies she can inspire her son and show him that if he works hard he can achieve anything.

13. For those who are particularly interested in mature students generally, the majority of whom are studying full-time, we would draw attention to the NUS/Million+ research *Never Too Late to Learn* (2012). The BIS research published in 2012, *Improving and Expanding Part-time Higher Education*, is commended to readers with a particular interest in part-time young students.

The majority of enrolments in 2011–12 were female (62% female, 38% male).<sup>14</sup> Forty-five per cent of part-time undergraduate students in England are parents living with dependant children (BIS 2013c).

## Where are part-time students studying?

Just as there is no such thing as a typical part-time student, there is no such thing as a typical part-time provider.

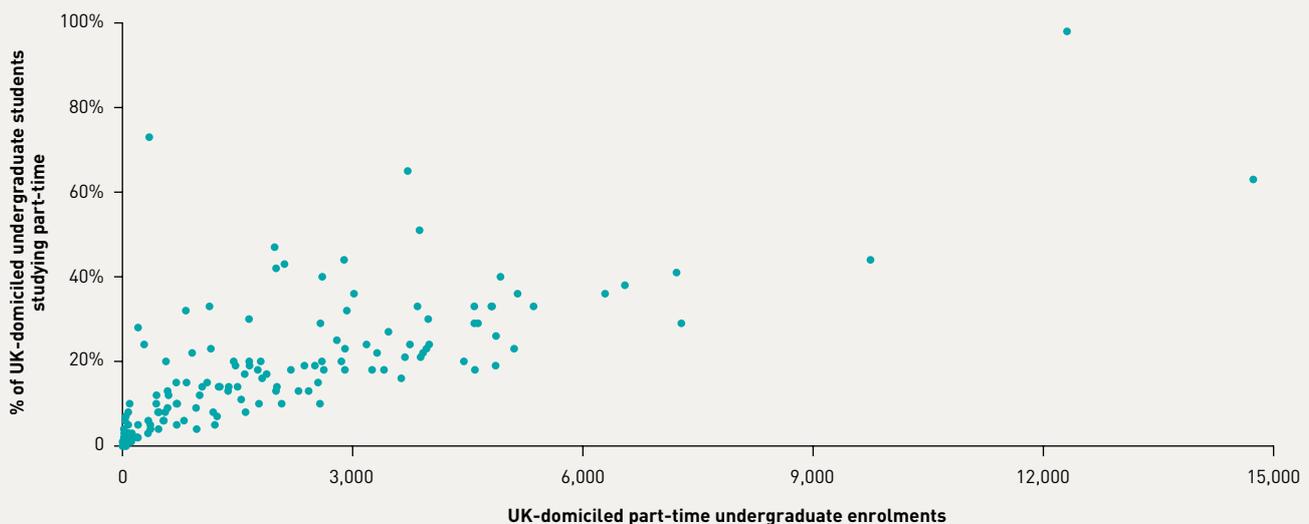
In the UK, 124 different higher education institutions<sup>15</sup> had more than 100 part-time undergraduate students registered to them in 2011–12. These were spread across a broad range of institutional types, with a number of large providers but also a long ‘tail’ of providers with a small amount of provision. Figure 2 shows the very wide range of providers, both in terms of numbers of part-time students and the percentage of the undergraduate population they represent at each institution.

The largest provider by far is the Open University, which provides exclusively distance learning, and at which 38.5% of all part-time undergraduates were registered in 2011–12. We recognise the huge and vital influence that the Open University has on the part-time student market, which has meant that we have sometimes needed to disaggregate it in this report’s analysis in order to present wider sector trends.

In England, the higher education providers with the largest number of UK-domiciled part-time undergraduate students in absolute terms after the Open University were Teesside University; Birkbeck, University of London (at which almost all students are registered as part-time); Coventry University; University of Central Lancashire; Staffordshire University; London South Bank University; The University of Hull; Anglia Ruskin University; and Edge Hill University.<sup>16</sup>

The University of South Wales, Cardiff University and Glynŵdr University are large providers in Wales, while directly funded further education colleges play a particularly strong role in Scotland, accounting for 39% of undergraduate part-time provision in 2011–12. This compares to 16% in England for the same year. In addition, 8%

**Figure 2: Distribution of UK-domiciled part-time undergraduate provision at UK higher education institutions, 2011–12 (excludes the Open University)**



14. HESA 2011–12 student record (2013)

15. Returning data to HESA student record. This excludes almost all privately-funded providers.

16. HESA 2011–12 student record (2013). Annexe D contains further information on institutional spread, including a list of part-time student numbers at named institutions. Annexe D is available online at [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/UUKreviewofparttimeeducation.aspx](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/UUKreviewofparttimeeducation.aspx)

of part-time undergraduate students registered at UK higher education institutions were taught at further education colleges in 2011–12.<sup>17</sup>

Outside of the traditional higher and further education sector, alternative providers have been increasing in both number and prominence in recent years, although the numbers are small in comparison with the half a million part-time students in the publicly funded sector in 2011–12. Students are studying part-time at an estimated 700 privately funded providers operating in the UK.<sup>18</sup> BIS has identified 8,500 UK-domiciled part-time undergraduate students registered at 200 of the most significant privately-funded higher education providers in 2011–12,<sup>19</sup> with two-thirds of these studying via distance learning.

## What subjects are part-time undergraduate students studying?

As Figure 3 shows, there is a very strong bias towards vocational subjects. The most popular

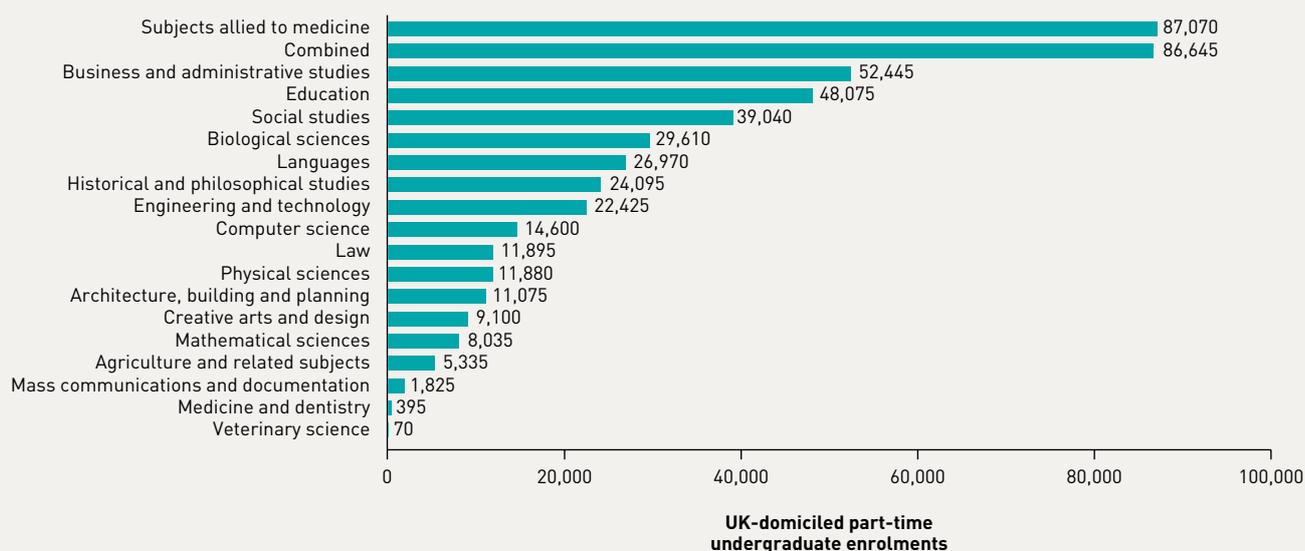
courses are subjects allied to medicine; business and administration; and education.<sup>20</sup>

## What qualifications are part-time students studying for?

The majority of part-time students are aiming for professional qualifications and higher education certificates and credits. More than four in ten (42%) part-time students are seeking an undergraduate degree, with or without honours. Fewer than one in ten (7.5%) are registered on a foundation degree (HESA 2011–12 student record, 2013).

Students are learning in different ways, including evening, weekend, day, summer, distance, blended and work-based learning.

**Figure 3: Subjects studied by UK-domiciled students at UK institutions, 2011–12**



Source: 2011–12 HESA student record

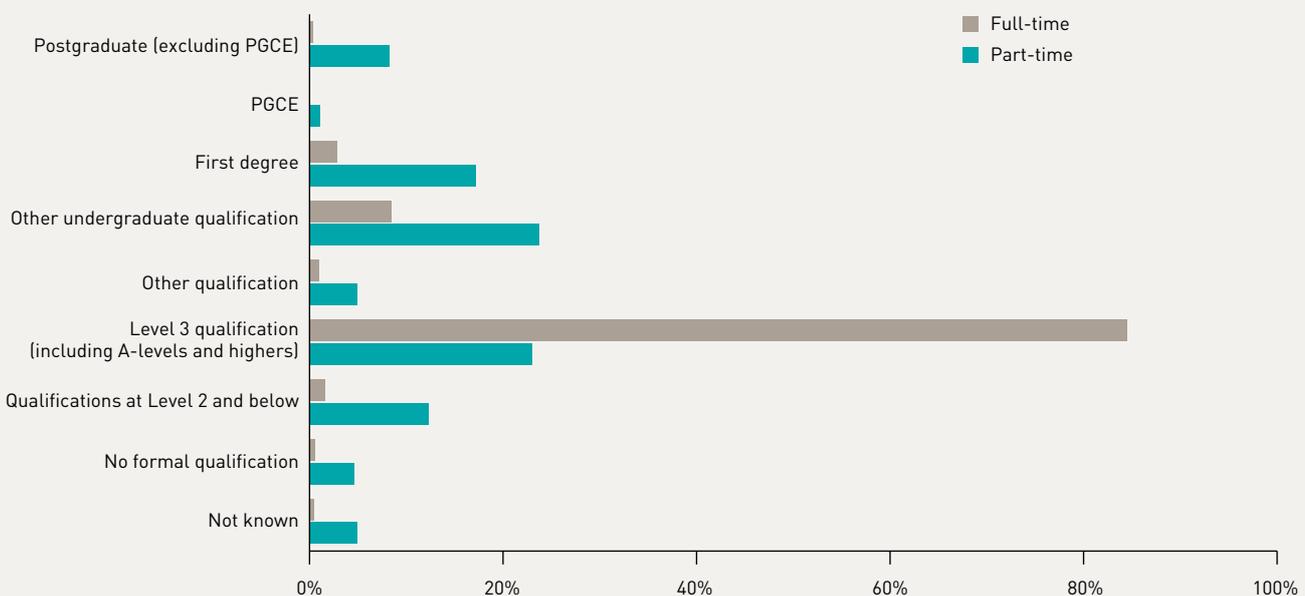
17. Higher Education Statistics for the UK (HESA 2013) and HESA 2010–11 student record

18. BIS (2013a) *Privately funded providers of higher education in the UK*, BIS Research Paper No. 111

19. This is likely to be an underestimate of the total as it represents only a subset of private providers in the UK.

20. The great majority of combined studies students are registered at The Open University.

**Figure 4: Highest qualification on entry for entrants to undergraduate courses at UK higher education institutions, 2011–12**



Source: UUK analysis of 2011–12 HESA student record

## What entry qualifications do part-time undergraduate students have?

Part-time undergraduate students are a polarised group. While the great majority of full-time students enter with Level 3 qualifications, the part-time cohort is much more varied. As Figure 4 shows, part-time students are more likely than full-time students to enter higher education with higher qualifications, such as a first degree or other undergraduate qualification. But there is also a reasonable proportion of part-time students who are entering with qualifications at Level 2 or below, or no formal qualification at all.

## What is part-time students' relationship with employment?

In England, more than four-fifths (82%) of part-time undergraduates did some form of paid work during the 2011–12 academic year, earning an

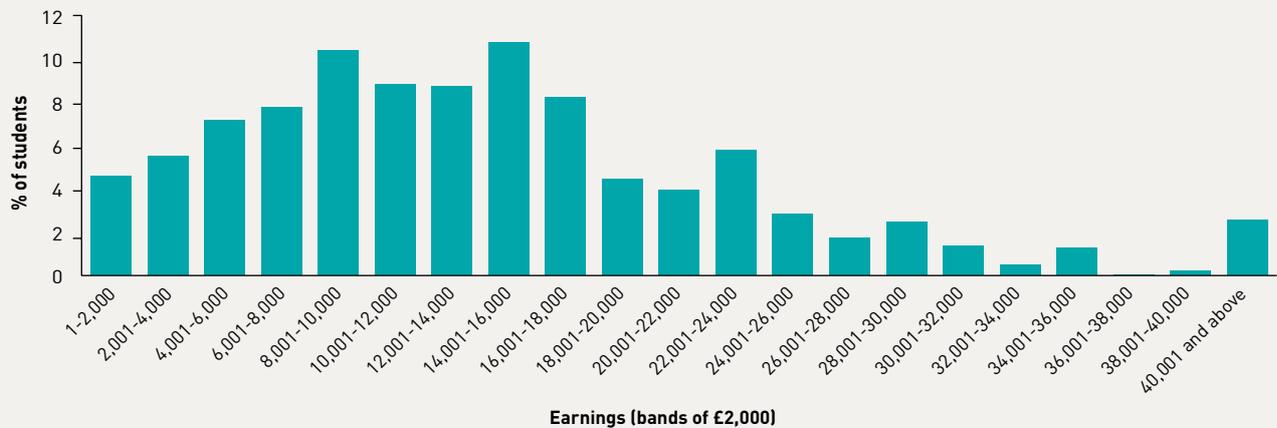
average of £14,695 if they did work. Fewer than one in five (19%) earned over £22,000. Most of those who worked were in a continuous job (71%), mainly working full-time hours (an average of 36 hours a week) (BIS 2013c).

In 2011–12, fewer than one-third (28%) of English-domiciled part-time students received financial support from their employer towards their course, averaging £1,584 (BIS 2013c). A large survey in 2008 found that:

- About a third of student employees reported that their employers paid for all their course fees as well as providing other kinds of support such as paid time off to study or payment of other course expenses.
- Five per cent of student employees reported receiving partial fee support plus additional support.
- Ten per cent of student employees received partial or full fee support but no other kinds of support.
- Thirty per cent of student employees said that they did not receive any kind of support from their employers (Callender et al 2010).

Employer support is very unequally distributed. This is to the detriment of those part-time students most in need of help to improve their job

**Figure 5: Distribution of earnings from paid work during academic year 2011–12 (part-time students in some form of work)**



Base: part-time English-domiciled students in paid work  
Source: BIS 2013c

prospects: those from working-class households with low incomes and poorly paid jobs, and low levels of entry qualifications and no prior experience of higher education. Those most likely to benefit from employer support are white, full-time workers, from the wealthiest households, already with a first or Bachelors degree (Level 4 or 5 qualifications) and taking a vocational qualification (Callender et al 2010).

## What is the financial situation of part-time students?

On average, part-time students contributed income to, rather than received income from, their families. This is the opposite of full-time students (BIS 2013c). Nearly half report that they 'regularly worry about not having enough money to meet [their] basic living expenses such as rent and utility bills' (NUS 2012).

Social security benefits (including tax credits)<sup>21</sup> were a common source of income among part-time students in 2011–12, with around

half claiming income from this source (46%) in England. This is very different to full-time students, only 8% of whom received social security payments in 2011–12 (BIS 2013b).

The contribution of graduates from part-time study to economic prosperity in the UK, particularly in relation to earnings, exceeds that of graduates from full-time study in the three and a half years after graduation (UKCES 2011a). However, as a recent BIS report has commented, the effect is only small after controlling for other factors (such as age) (BIS 2012b).

The smaller student loans (unlike full-time, part-time undergraduates are currently ineligible for maintenance loans), and higher levels of pay for part-time undergraduates suggest that they are more likely to pay back their loans at a faster rate and with higher levels of interest, both of which are of benefit to the Exchequer (UKCES 2011a).

21. Benefits that students could receive were: Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit and Carers Allowance; Working Tax Credit; Job Seekers Allowance (JSA); Employment and Support Allowance (ESA); Income Support; Housing Benefit and Local Housing Allowance; and Pension Credit and Retirement or Widows' Pension.

# CHAPTER 3: HOW ARE PART-TIME UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS CHANGING?

## SUMMARY

While full-time undergraduate enrolments have gone up over the last ten years in the UK, part-time undergraduate enrolments have gone down. This trend has been more significant for women and mature learners. Following a decade of slow decline, the numbers of students recruited to undergraduate part-time courses in England fell by 40% between 2010–11 and 2012–13: equivalent to 105,000 fewer students. Indications for 2013–14 are that the level of decline will not be stemmed in England. Worryingly, students and institutions have

argued that the availability of accessible local part-time provision is declining very quickly, and will not be easily rebuilt.

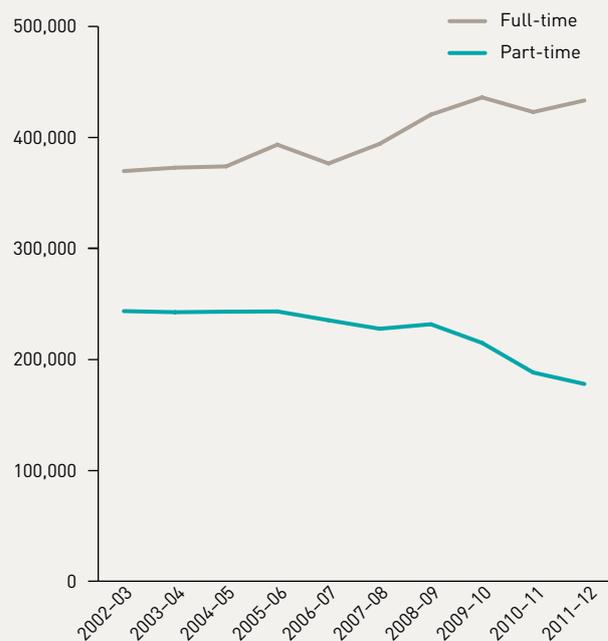
In Scotland and Wales, part-time undergraduate student numbers have also declined in recent years, though indicative suggestions are that the changes in the last year (2012–13) seem to be less marked. We keenly anticipate data releases early in 2014 which will allow us to see in much more detail what has happened across the UK.

Between 2002–03 and 2011–12, the number of UK full-time undergraduate entrants increased by 17%. However, there was an 11% drop in part-time undergraduate entrants across the period (27% if the Open University is excluded) (Figure 6).

The picture was mixed across individual higher education institutions, with approximately two-thirds showing declining numbers of entrants across this period, while approximately one fifth increased their part-time entrant numbers. Just under 10% of those institutions with part-time undergraduate entrants in 2011–12 did not have any part-time provision in 2002–03.

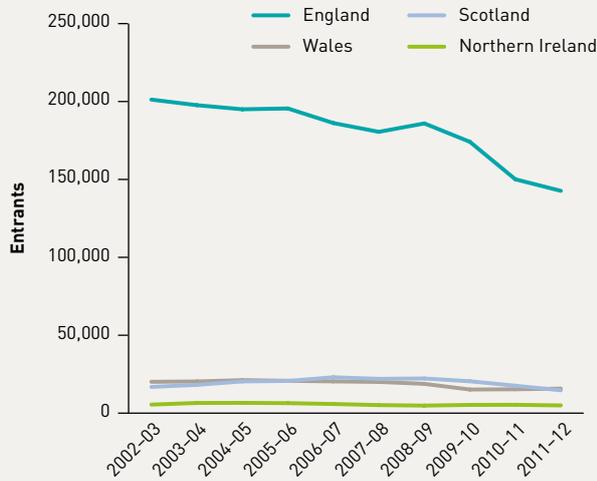
While numbers of part-time undergraduate entrants declined over the period in all four nations of the UK between 2002–03 and 2011–12, England was the hardest hit, both numerically and percentage-wise (Figures 7 and 8).

**Figure 6: Trend in UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants, 2002–03 to 2011–12**



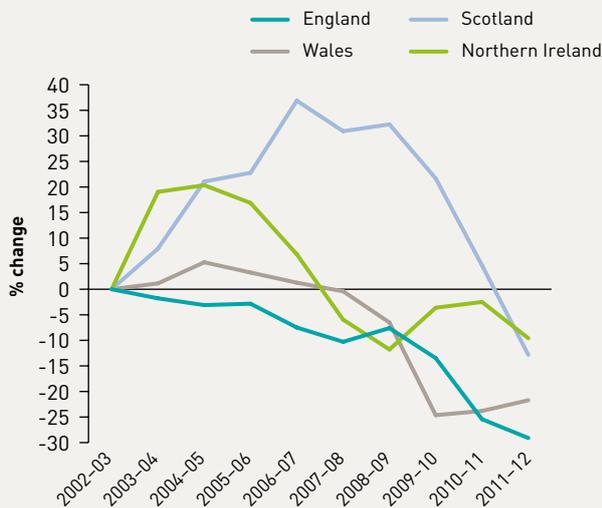
Note: excludes the Open University  
Source: UUK analysis of trend data requested from HESA student record

**Figure 7: Trends in UK-domiciled part-time undergraduate entrants, 2002-03 to 2011-12, by country of institution**



Note: excludes the Open University  
Source: UUK analysis of trend data requested from HESA student record

**Figure 8: Change in UK-domiciled part-time undergraduate entrants, compared to 2002-03, by country of institution**



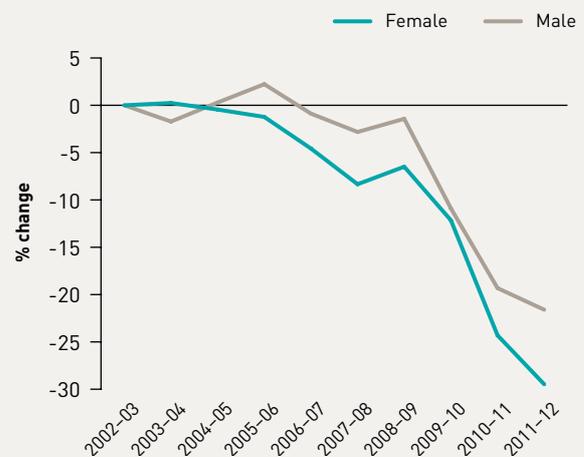
Note: excludes the Open University  
Source: UUK analysis of trend data requested from HESA student record

**Women have been most affected**

The majority of part-time students are female, and this has been the case in each of the past ten years. However, it is mostly the decline in female students that has contributed to the longer-term drop in part-time student numbers.

Between 2002-03 and 2011-12, the number of male entrants fell by 4%, whereas the number of female entrants fell by 14%. As Figure 9 shows, the picture is even more marked if the Open University is excluded; in that case, the number of male part-time undergraduate entrants fell by 22% between 2002-03 and 2011-12, but the number of female part-time undergraduate entrants fell by 29%.

**Figure 9: Change in UK-domiciled part-time undergraduates, compared to 2002-03, by gender**



Note: excludes the Open University  
Source: UUK analysis of trend data requested from HESA student record

We do not yet know the pattern of recruitment by gender in 2012-13; however, feedback from our call for evidence suggests that women will continue to be disproportionately affected, as they are over-represented in sectors which are under particular pressure (eg education, health, public administration). They also tend to have lower incomes and less access to additional sources of finance (Callender 2013).

**The biggest fall in entrants is among those in their thirties**

In numerical terms, the most significant fall has been in the number of students in their thirties with nearly 15,000 fewer entrants in 2011-12 compared to 2002-03. In percentage terms, the largest fall in entrants over ten years was in the group aged 60 and above (-36%) followed by those in their thirties (-18%). Further details of the age and gender profile of students recruited in 2012-13 will be available early in 2014.

### Something extra happened in 2012–13 in England

In 2012–13 a new funding regime for part-time undergraduate higher education was introduced in England. Fee loans were extended for the first time to some part-time students; at the same time, a large proportion of government support for part-time higher education direct to institutions (via HEFCE) was removed. These changes are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Numbers of part-time undergraduate entrants in England dropped by 33% between 2011–12 and 2012–13. This means that numbers fell by 40% since 2010–11 – equivalent to 105,000 fewer students. This figure includes entrants to HEFCE-funded part-time undergraduate courses in universities, higher education colleges and further education colleges. Separating out recruitment to directly-funded undergraduate courses at further education colleges, this dropped but at a slower rate, with a 27% drop between 2010 and 2012 (when new providers are excluded to allow for comparison with previous years) (HEFCE 2013a).

Although not directly comparable, early statistics for part-time undergraduate enrolments suggest

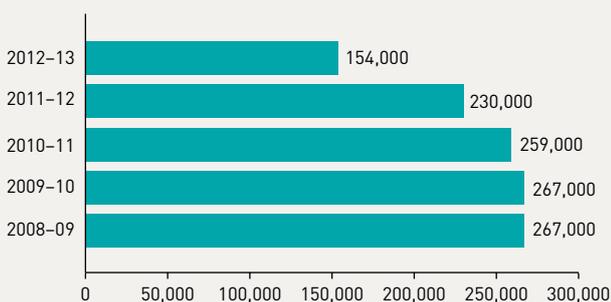
a larger decrease in England compared to the closest available figures for Scotland and Wales between 2011–12 and 2012–13.

**Table 1: Comparison of part-time undergraduate enrolments in England, Scotland and Wales according to early statistics, 2011–12 to 2012–13<sup>22</sup>**

	2011–12	2012–13	Change 2011–12 to 2012–13
<b>Enrolments (UK/EU): FTE fundable students at HEIs only</b>			
England	87,336	78,334	-10.3%
Scotland	12,817	12,326	-3.8%
<b>Enrolments (UK/EU): Fundable and non- fundable students registered at HEIs and FECs</b>			
England	352,980	282,538	-20.0%
Wales	28,366	26,643	-6.1%

Source: HEFCE, SFC and HEFCW early statistic collections

**Figure 10: People beginning a part-time undergraduate higher education course in England, 2008–09 to 2012–13**



Source: HEFCE (2013a), based on HESES and HEIFES data

There are caveats around the figures in Table 1: chiefly, that as they are based on returns to the three different funding councils they represent slightly different populations depending on the funding methods of each council.<sup>23</sup> As the figures also show enrolments rather than entrants it is difficult at this stage to directly compare the impact of reforms in England in 2012–13 with Scotland and Wales.

The general pattern of larger decreases in England does, however, support the feedback to our call for evidence, with institutions in Scotland and Wales reporting a more positive outlook on recruitment compared to institutions in England.

A more accurate picture will be available in early 2014 on release of figures from the Higher

22. Early statistics are collected by respective funding councils to inform allocation of funds and monitoring. As they are collected during the academic year they include an element of forecasting and populations reflect the funding priorities of each administration.

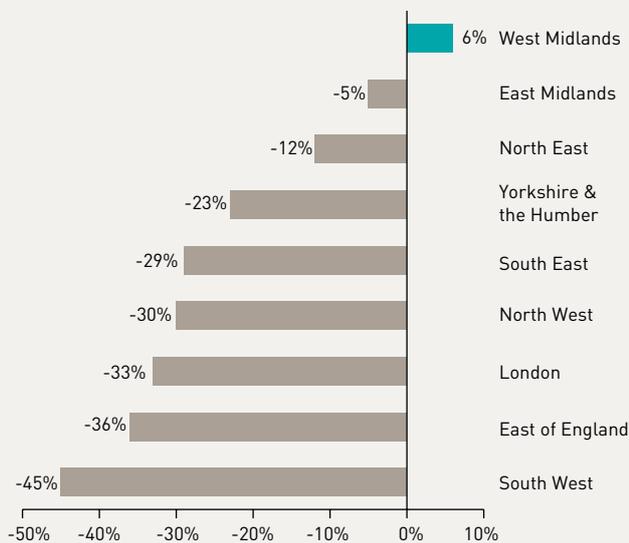
23. Scottish comparison shows fundable FTE and will therefore also reflect any changes in intensity of part-time study between years. Scottish figures also exclude part-time undergraduate provision at further education colleges. Fundable and non-fundable education provision at higher education institutions and further education colleges is included in the comparison between England and Wales.

Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student record, which will allow a direct comparison of part-time undergraduate recruitment across the UK in 2012–13.

### In England, there is a strong regional dimension to the changes we are seeing

Between 2008–09 and 2011–12 there was a decrease in part-time students in almost every region of England, yet the amount varied greatly between regions.

**Figure 11: Change in UK-domiciled part-time undergraduate entrants between 2008–09 and 2011–12 by region of higher education institution**

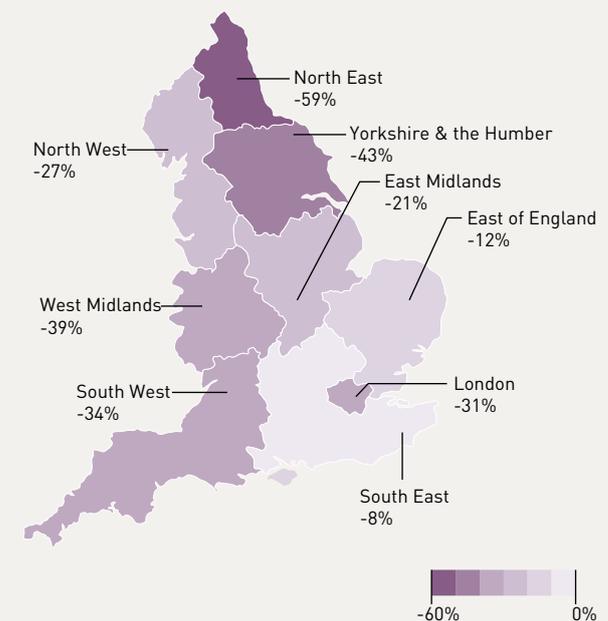


Note: England only; excludes the Open University  
Source: Analysis of trend data requested from HESA student record

The sharp national decrease in entrants between 2011–12 and 2012–13 was felt much more strongly in the north of England than the south, ranging from -59% in the North East to -12% in the East of England. This is similar to the national decrease in full-time applications between 2011–12 and 2012–13, which was felt more strongly in the north than the south; however, the range was much smaller. It is difficult to draw firm conclusions from this data without further investigation, for example understanding the different amounts of part-time higher education provided in each region. However, it is potentially important as part-time students are

not as mobile as full-time students, due to their work and family commitments, and so where accessible local provision is lost, their options are seriously limited. Therefore, we need a better understanding of the reasons for these regional changes, in order to understand the impact on potential learners. We welcome planned HEFCE research into part-time higher education at the local and regional level.

**Figure 12: Changes in part-time undergraduate entrants by region, 2011–12 to 2012–13 (England only)**



Note: includes HEIs and FECs; excludes the Open University  
Source: HEFCE

### What kinds of students were lost between 2011–12 and 2012–13?

When HESA data for 2012–13 is available in January 2014, UUK and HEFCE will carry out detailed analysis of the characteristics of entrants to part-time undergraduate provision in the first year of funding reforms. We will then be able to see whether certain groups of students have dropped more than others. We tentatively conclude, based on existing trends and qualitative responses from universities and colleges, that women in their thirties, in particular, are entering part-time higher education in smaller numbers than previously. It will be especially important to understand whether the drop is more marked

among students with equivalent or higher qualifications who do not qualify for loans and who cannot afford higher fees.

There is currently little evidence that people who were formerly studying part-time in higher education are now studying in a different way. It is hard to quantify the numbers who are studying with private providers but the numbers, although growing, are likely to be small in comparison with the overall decline. The views of the 140 organisations and individuals who responded to our call for evidence are that the decline is primarily due to people deciding not to undertake further higher level study. This would need to be investigated further but, even if it is only partly true, leads to real concerns for individuals' future employment prospects and the interests of the UK economy and society.

### **What does the picture look like for 2013–14?**

We asked a sample of UUK, GuildHE and Association of Colleges institutions about their applications and recruitment for 2013–14. The picture is quite complicated but, while some institutions are experiencing growth in certain part-time courses, we anticipate that the national picture for 2013–14 will be one of continued falling recruitment. There is little sign at this stage of the 'bounce back' seen, for example, in mature full-time applications for 2013–14 entry. We will have a better understanding when funding council statistics are published in early 2014.

# CHAPTER 4: WHAT TRENDS AND CHANGES ARE LIKELY TO BE HAVING AN IMPACT?

## SUMMARY

This chapter sets out the trends and changes in the environment (economic, technological, demographic and policy) and the likely impact of those changes on part-time students. There are a large number of likely reasons for the changes we are seeing in the part-time student population, interacting in complex ways and playing out differently across the UK. We also set out recommendations for further research where the evidence is as yet unclear.

Clearly changes have been taking place over a long period; in all four nations of the UK, recruitment to part-time higher education dropped between 2002–03 and 2011–12. In the UK as a whole, the current economic climate is having an effect, restricting employer support for further study, putting pressure on household budgets and changing the shape of the employment sectors from which part-time students are traditionally drawn (particularly the public sector). We are seeing the impact not only in declining recruitment to part-time undergraduate study, but also to part-time postgraduate study. Pathways into higher

education are also changing, while changing demographics will be having an effect as well.

UUK's call for evidence reflected an overwhelming view that, in England, the biggest issue in recent years is the 2012–13 change to the funding system and the associated increase in fees. The changes in funding coincided with by far the greatest drop in recruitment seen in the last ten years: a drop of 76,000 entrants (between 2011–12 and 2012–13) compared with a drop of 29,000 in the previous year (between 2010–11 and 2011–12). The situation is complex, made up of changes in both supply and demand, as well as external factors. We call for further research to enable a better understanding of the reasons behind the changes.

Scheduled changes to Level 3 funding in England, as well as demographic shifts and individual institutional strategic decisions at a time of huge competition and change in the sector, are likely to increase the pressure on part-time higher education.

In order to support this review, we issued an open invitation to provide evidence and received more than 140, often very detailed, responses, from universities, colleges, students, employers and other bodies, totalling more than 400 pages.<sup>24</sup> We were particularly interested in the view of employers, so held further oral evidence sessions with representatives from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), the Federation of Small Businesses and the Association of Graduate Recruiters (among others), as well as with organisations which had carried out

research in this area (such as the Institute for Employment Studies and the Higher Education Careers Service Unit [HECSU]). We also gathered together existing surveys, such as those carried out for the National Union of Students (NUS), Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and HECSU.

We asked all stakeholders why they thought that part-time recruitment had changed in recent years. From their responses, we conclude that the changes to part-time recruitment are likely

24. These are analysed in detail in Annexe E.

to be caused by a range of interacting factors, affecting both supply and demand. These will be both long standing (all four nations of the UK have seen a drop in part-time recruitment when 2011–12 is compared with 2002–03) and more immediate, in the form of a very pronounced drop in England in 2012–13. There may be an underlying issue about mature students more generally, seen also in decreases in recruitment to postgraduate part-time and mature full-time provision.<sup>25</sup>

## Potential learners

### Demographic changes

Some stakeholders have wondered about the impact of demographic changes. Are there fewer individuals of the ages which traditionally engaged in part-time study? It is difficult to calculate this, especially for part-time undergraduate recruitment, due to the predominance of mature students and variation over time of those who already hold higher education qualifications. But we have made an initial assessment.

Figures from the Labour Force Survey show that for all age groups the proportion of individuals that hold a higher education qualification increased between 1998 and 2012. This is particularly evident for those in their thirties, where those holding higher education qualifications increased from 25% in 1998 to 47% in 2012.<sup>26</sup> This pattern was stronger for women over the period.

Our initial assessment is that a reduced population from which to recruit, exacerbated by the phasing out of funding for students with higher qualifications, may have contributed to the recent reduction in part-time undergraduate entrants. However, this is not the end of the

story. The rate of *first time* participation in part-time undergraduate study for those over 30 has decreased since 2006–07, while increasing for full-time provision over the same period.<sup>27</sup> These figures should be interrogated in more detail.

### Financial pressures

Part-time learners who do participate are, in the main, not a wealthy group. In the 2011–12 academic year, 18% of part-time undergraduates were not in paid work. Of those that were, the average (mean) income from paid work was £14,695 (equivalent to £19,593 in a calendar year). This is affected by a number of high earners, and so the median level is lower, at £13,302 (equivalent to £17,736 in a calendar year) (BIS 2013c). This compares to an average annual net wage in the UK of £20,450, and a median net wage of £16,710.<sup>28</sup>

Part-time undergraduates also received income from other sources including maintenance loans, financial support from families and employers, social security benefits, and bursaries and scholarships which on average amounted to an additional £3,115 per academic year in 2011–12.

These learners are more likely than a typical full-time 18-year-old undergraduate to already have financial commitments. We have seen that, on average, they contributed income to, rather than received income from, their families (BIS 2013c). Because they are older, they are more likely to be already burdened by high rents or mortgages, childcare costs (nearly half of part-time undergraduate students in England are parents living with dependant children [BIS 2013c]), rising energy bills and consumer debt. Following the recession of 2008 and prolonged recovery, disposable household income has decreased in real terms. Average earnings for UK employees have fallen to 2003 levels in real terms.<sup>29</sup> Evidence from students, the public and institutions alike suggests that people are being deterred from part-time study on the grounds of

25. Although recruitment of mature students to full-time courses in 2013–14 has gone up compared with 2012–13, it remains below the level seen in 2011–12. [Source: UCAS Daily Clearing Analysis August 2013]

26. Labour Force Survey, July–September 1998 and 2012 quarters

27. BIS (2013) Participation Rates in Higher Education: academic years 2006–2007 to 2011–2012 (provisional) available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/participation-rates-in-higher-education-2006-to-2012](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/participation-rates-in-higher-education-2006-to-2012)

28. ONS Annual survey of hours and earnings 2011 (published 2012) available at: [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ashes/annual-survey-of-hours-and-earnings/index.html](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ashes/annual-survey-of-hours-and-earnings/index.html). Gross wages adjusted for income tax and NI contributions for 2011–12 tax year

29. [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/business-transparency/freedom-of-information/what-can-i-request/published-ad-hoc-data/econ/july-2013/equivalised-disposable-income--1977-2011-12.xls](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/business-transparency/freedom-of-information/what-can-i-request/published-ad-hoc-data/econ/july-2013/equivalised-disposable-income--1977-2011-12.xls). Real wages fall back to 2003 levels [ONS 2013] [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/mro/news-release/real-wages-fall-back-to-2003-levels/realearn0213.html](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/mro/news-release/real-wages-fall-back-to-2003-levels/realearn0213.html)

cost or perceived cost (for example, for the cost of fees or servicing fee loans, transport, books, childcare, foregone earnings).

In particular, students and higher education providers told us that the economic climate means potential students are:

- concerned about job security and whether they will be able to pay back loans or if there will be a new job to go to if they up-skill
- more risk averse
- less likely to be able to afford to drop from full-time to part-time work
- worried about asking employers for flexible working arrangements and risking their job
- less equipped to be able to pay higher education fees
- swayed by the incentive of the maintenance

grant towards full-time rather than part-time modes

- less likely to undertake study 'just for enjoyment'<sup>30</sup>

We found a strong argument that this has been exacerbated in England by recent increases in the fees charged by many higher education providers. We found that, in England, part-time fees have, overall, increased in recent years, particularly between 2011–12 and 2012–13. Although institutional survey responses partly attributed this to inflation, it was more frequently related to changes to the funding regime (including the introduction of the equivalent or lower qualification ruling and, more recently, the changes to HEFCE funding in 2012–13). Over a quarter of English UUK institutions responding to a UUK survey reported that their fees had

### New funding regime for part-time undergraduate higher education in England from 2012–13

HEFCE provides funding to universities and colleges in England.

- From 2012–13 HEFCE ceased grant funding for new-regime students studying subjects not deemed to be high cost, whether full or part-time.<sup>31</sup>
- Grant funding for courses deemed to be high cost (for example, sciences) was reduced.
- £52 million was provided as recognition for the additional costs of part-time provision. This was down from £66 million in 2011–12 and is being phased out for part-time subjects not deemed to be high cost (decreasing to £26 million in 2013–14).
- £53 million was provided for improving retention of part-time students as part of the student opportunity funding stream.

- £67 million was provided to widen access to part-time provision for people from disadvantaged backgrounds (dropping to £28 million in 2013–14).

New part-time undergraduate entrants in England from 2012–13 can apply, for the first time, for a loan to cover their fees, if they:

- do not have an equivalent or higher qualification
- are studying towards a named qualification, on more than 25% of full-time course intensity

These part-time students are not eligible for a maintenance grant, but are eligible for funding from the National Scholarship Programme (up to and including 2014–15) and from institutional scholarships or bursaries. Employers may also contribute towards fees.

30. Further detail is provided in Annexe E.

31. High cost subjects analysis using TRAC(T) data: detailed commentary (HEFCE 2012), available at: [www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/data/2012/tracthighcost/TRAC\\_methodology\\_for\\_high-costs\\_subjects.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/data/2012/tracthighcost/TRAC_methodology_for_high-costs_subjects.pdf)

risen ‘significantly’ in recent years.<sup>32</sup> All GuildHE institutions, all alternative providers and almost all further education colleges responding to the survey reported increases in fees in recent years. However, across all types of institutional respondents the picture is very mixed in terms of the reported amounts and timings of fees increases. These figures also only report on a relatively small number of respondents. HESA data on fees in 2012–13, due to be published in early 2014, will give us a much clearer picture of this complicated situation.

There is a contrast with Scotland and Wales, where institutional survey responses reported, in the main, that fees had stayed the same or only had small inflationary increases in recent years, and where responses were notably more upbeat about part-time recruitment.

English respondents from across all of the different respondent types (students, further education colleges, higher education institutions, employers and others) suggested that finance remains a serious obstacle to participation, even with the extension of government-sponsored fee loans from 2012–13, for the following reasons:

- **Equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQ) ruling.** The ELQ ruling is the main reason for part-time students being ineligible for a fee loan. A significant proportion of part-time students are those undertaking an additional first degree (for example, in a different subject to their first qualification due to a change in career); the ELQ ruling announced in 2007 means that the loan is not available to them. In addition, as the higher education providers do not receive funding for these students, course costs are not subsidised at an institutional level – a particular issue in high-cost subjects such as sciences and engineering. This is a barrier to people using higher education for a change of profession, and counter to the government’s intention of having a workforce with the appropriate skills.

- **Other issues about fee loan eligibility.** Some learners are not eligible for a loan if studying below 25% full-time equivalent intensity. Others may have been put off by the government requirement to register for a named course and qualification, whereas in the past they would have built up credit from short pieces of study.
- **Fee loans are less attractive than expected.** We heard that mature potential students put a different value on debt than young people. Our survey responses told us that they are less likely than young people to want to take on a loan for study, and have a ‘fear of assuming massive debt from fees’ (student response), especially if they are older or are supporting dependants who are also in higher education.
- **Self-funded learners are unwilling or unable to pay the fee increases.**
- **Lack of timely and high quality communication to potential part-time students about how the new fee and loan system works.** Any brand new student support system would take time to be understood, especially one which is, arguably, more complicated than the system for full-time students, given that the majority of learners are ineligible. It has also proved harder to reach potential mature students than potential young students.
- **Unintended consequences.** Reported unintended consequences included applicants ‘assum[ing] that if the fee is four times higher then the attendance and workload has gone up that much too’ or chasing the maintenance allowance by applying for a less preferred course which is categorised as full-time but where the contact hours are least.

The government expected only 30% of part-time undergraduate students to be eligible for student loans (BIS 2010).<sup>33</sup> Early indications are that a smaller proportion than expected are taking the loans out, but we will not know precisely until January 2014.<sup>34</sup> As of 27 May 2013, 34,200

32. Further detail is provided in Annexe E

33. This was based on a proposed eligibility for loans of 33% intensity of study. Expected numbers of eligible students would therefore be greater, since this was lowered to 25% intensity.

34. Even then, that will not cover students eligible for student loans at private providers, which do not make returns to HESA.

applicants for tuition fee support in the 2012 entry cohort were considered eligible (approved for payment).<sup>35</sup> This represents less than one quarter of the 154,000 entrants to undergraduate higher education study in England in 2012–13.<sup>36</sup> BIS expects this to rise somewhat with applications later in the year.

### Changing routes into higher education

Typical pathways into higher education such as school are not relevant to potential mature students. Mature students are more likely to come through further education routes, short higher education courses, access and foundation degrees, and employers.

Unfortunately, some of these pathways have been eroded over recent years, for example through:

- the ending of funding that allowed subsidised short courses that often served as a route into education
- closure of lifelong learning or continuing education departments, reported in detail in the call for evidence
- withdrawal of funding of Access to Higher Education Diplomas for people aged 24 and over in England (notwithstanding that Access to Higher Education students who go on to complete higher education can have their access loan written off)
- ending of funding for Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning partnerships in England, which supported the building of progression pathways which would have supported mature learners. At the moment there is no strong evidence on how far the activities supported through Office for Fair Access (OFFA) Access Agreements are making up for the demise of these national and regional programmes, particularly with reference to mature learners.

There are new challenges for universities and colleges to accommodate; for example, the recent expansion of apprenticeships will have an impact. As apprentices have jobs, progression to part-time higher education provision linked to developing the knowledge and competence they require in their current and future job roles will be fundamental.

## Employers

A widely held view among all stakeholder groups was that, largely due to the recession, employers' financial resources for part-time study are reduced. Respondents argued that employers were less likely to have substantial budgets for training or to have resources to allow for flexibility to release staff for training. We heard that some employers were concerned about the long-term prospects of their business and whether it was worth funding training for their staff. Historically between 30 and 40% of part-time students get help with fees from employers, but the views of the stakeholders who responded were that this has dropped.

The Student Income and Expenditure Survey (BIS 2013c) found a decrease in the percentage of part-time students in England receiving financial employer support between 2007–08 (33%) and 2011–12 (28%). A number of respondents to our call for evidence supported research findings (Callender and Wilkinson 2012) that, even where employers continue to help with tuition fees, they cannot afford to be so generous (especially where fees are increasing) and therefore students are having to pay a higher proportion themselves.

Worryingly, the Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL) points out that confusion over the loan system may make employers feel excused from paying fees for their employees. We do not have good data on how much this is happening.

A report for HECSU and BIS compared employers who employed higher education students in both 2009 and 2011 and found a reduction in some employers' willingness to provide support with tuition fees for employees:

*'About one in four employers had cut back on such [financial] support during the recession and the great majority of them had not subsequently restored support to pre-recession levels. One in six employers had also cut back on allowing employees to have paid time off work to study for exams. Furthermore, about 45% of employers of part-*

35. Parliamentary question from Shabana Mahmood to David Willetts, answered on 26 June 2013

36. Reported by HEFCE in the Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey (HESES) and Higher Education in Further Education Students Survey (HEIFES) (HEFCE 2013a)

*time HE students said that increases in HE tuition fees were likely to lead to a reduction in their provision of full fee support for employees. In some cases these employers were still willing to consider providing partial fee support but one in five employers considered it likely that even partial fee support would be cut back.*

*Follow-up interviews with some employers suggested that cuts in fee support reflected difficult economic conditions as well as higher fees. These findings may understate the drop in employer willingness to support part-time HE study because this sample of employers contains a much larger proportion who are generally supportive of part-time HE study than would be found in a nationally representative sample of British employers.'* (BIS (2013e) Employer Support for Part-time Higher Education Students)

The picture is not a simple black and white one; we note evidence from the CBI that 'firms in key sectors are maintaining and even increasing skills investment through the challenging economic conditions of recent years.' (CBI 2013). Some institutions gave us examples of employer support which was robust and indeed expanding. The differences might be explained by two things: firstly the profile of the employers under discussion, and secondly the place where the education is taking place.

First, it is possible that our respondents were focused on the public sector and/or different sectors/sizes of employer to those considered by the CBI research. Respondents to the UUK survey particularly identified public sector cuts: 'with services such as Health and Policing pushing the responsibility for higher education pre-qualifications required before entry into service over to the students, where they are expected to fund these qualifications themselves' (Kaplan Open Learning). Several further education respondents identified reductions in local authority training budgets – 'social work, education and child care' – as problematic. We heard that employers, for example in healthcare, could not afford to pay the increased fees themselves and were unwilling to 'encourage low paid workers into debt' (University of Leeds).

Others, including the Federation of Small Businesses, discussed particular risk-aversion among small and medium enterprises. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) summed this up: 'The uncertainty caused by the global financial crisis has made businesses [SMEs] more risk-averse towards investing in education provision which is often viewed as expensive, inflexible, time-consuming and with benefits which are imprecise.'

Second, it is possible, if not yet proven, that we are seeing an acceleration of an existing trend for employers to look outside of the higher education sector for their employee training needs. We found examples of courses that were offered in universities in the past, now being offered as

## CASE STUDY

### The Construction Industry Council told the review...

'Recent research commissioned by CIC indicated that part time higher education [in construction and built environment provision] has fallen away, and recently at some rate. For example, it was reported in March 2013 that part time construction and built environment provision in one university was only 10% of what it was two years before. It can be assumed that construction and built environment employers are not funding as many part time students as they were. The exact decrease and precise reasons

for it cannot be established without specific research. But it seems reasonable to suggest that if construction and built environment employers are not funding as many part time students as they were, one reason is higher tuition fees, another is the continuing effects of recession... Employers would be unwise to invest when they don't know if they can pay the fees and/or employ the worker during study and long enough after to recoup [the cost of fees] from enhanced performance.'

## CASE STUDY

### The Association of Business Schools told the review...

'The part-time market has been in decline in the area of business and management for a number of years, with students finding it harder to get sponsorship from employers and difficult to sustain self funding. The new fee regime makes this more difficult for students. This situation persists at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. One of a number of ways that the Association of Business Schools are addressing this is through improvements

to the curriculum to ensure that it is fit for purpose for a future workforce and employers' needs. We are currently working with the Chartered Management Institute and Quality Assurance Agency on a joint project to look at the curriculum and ensure that it effectively engages business and delivers the desired student employability outcomes. The project will do this by engaging with local businesses through CMI's regional boards.'

courses unaffiliated with the higher education sector and accredited solely by employers or a professional or trade body. Private providers are also becoming increasingly important in particular subjects, such as business and management. The data is poor so it is hard to quantify this; these providers are likely to be picking up a small number but certainly not all of those 'missing' from the publicly funded higher education sector.

where to focus their efforts, and may withdraw courses even where demand exists. Others are reluctantly closing courses where demand is no longer sufficient to sustain them, noting that it will be very hard to rebuild provision should demand rise in the future. Still others are responding with vigorous marketing efforts, employer engagement and the creation of new courses; there is already evidence from some institutions that these are having a positive effect (for example, interest in applications up on previous years).

## Higher education providers

The headline figures of a drop in part-time enrolments are the result of a drop in both student demand *and* higher education provision, interacting in complicated ways.

Part-time provision must not be looked at out of context, but rather as part of the wider changes to the higher education system, leading to much more competition for all types of students. Institutions are making hard choices as they respond to the need to differentiate their offer in an increasingly competitive marketplace. And they are considering how part-time fits with their brand reputation and strategic priorities, including postgraduate provision, full-time undergraduate provision (particularly that which is deregulated, ie ABB or above at A-level or equivalent) and international provision.

We have found that higher education providers are reacting in a variety of ways, often varying within the same institution. Some will choose

Further education colleges play an important role in part-time higher education, but there is little evidence that they are immune from the pressures. Our call for evidence found very similar concerns about recruitment from further education colleges as from higher education institutions, and HEFCE found that enrolments to directly-funded part-time higher education fell between 2010 and 2012, although not quite as quickly as in higher education institutions:

*'Part-time recruitment to undergraduate courses at further education colleges that are funded directly through HEFCE shows a 19 per cent fall between 2010 and 2012 when new providers are included. When they are excluded to allow for comparison with previous years, there has been a 27% drop (around 3,000 fewer students). These figures do not include changes in franchised part-time places. The falls continue and intensify a longer-term trend.'* (HEFCE 2013a)

Private providers will be expanding their numbers in certain subjects (particularly business and

administration, for example), although the numbers will be small in comparison with the numbers lost overall. The great majority of privately-funded higher education providers are located in London or the south east of England,<sup>37</sup> which are not the regions experiencing the greatest falls in recruitment.

## Looking to the future

Part-time higher education has always been a much more volatile market than full-time higher education. The situation is also changing faster than ever before. In short, we expect the situation to be more challenging in the future.

Provision that has gone cannot be immediately and easily built back up should demand recover. This means less choice for potential students who are not willing or able to travel.

There are a number of important incentives to higher education providers to develop part-time provision, for example:

- fulfilment of civic engagement, widening participation and employer responsiveness missions
- part-time's continuing position outside of student number controls in England
- flexibility around fee levels, as these are not pegged in detail to intensity of study in England

However, these are currently counteracted by disincentives, for example:

- declining and unpredictable demand (though clearly not for all kinds of provision – and that is the challenge to institutions)
- less central funding than before (for example, the gradual removal of the part-time premium in England)
- pressure on employer co-funding
- pressure on funding generally, making cross-subsidies between modes of provision at institutional level unsustainable

- part-time being a more expensive kind of provision to put on – and, some would argue, harder to do well
- part-time students having comparatively lower retention rates and not boosting institutions' standing in the league tables, at a time of intense competition

Some institutions will continue to champion part-time provision, seeing it as a core part of their mission; others may turn to it if their full-time provision is under pressure; but it remains a volatile market with limited incentives for involvement.

That said, private providers seem to be much more optimistic about growth:

*'Seventy-two per cent of private providers responding to a survey carried out on behalf of BIS stated that they expected an increase in their flexible modes of study in the next five years. There was little difference in this answer between institutions operating for profit or not for profit.'*

*Seventy per cent of students at privately funded higher education providers responding to a survey stated that 'the opportunity to study in a flexible way, eg. part-time, by distance/online learning or work-based learning' was an important factor in choosing their course. This was the fourth most important factor, after 'personal interest in the subject', 'relevance of the course/qualification to my current/future job or career' and 'range of modules/options available on the course'.* (BIS 2013a)

With reference to supply routes, we are particularly concerned about the impact of the introduction in England of 24+ Advanced Learning Loans for adults for Level 3 qualifications from 2013–14. Grant funding to further education providers has been removed from the start of the 2013–14 academic year for all new Level 3 (eg A-level or equivalent, BTEC awards, diplomas and NVQs at Level 3) starters aged 24 and over. The government estimated a 40% drop in the number of learners if this option were pursued, which translates as a reduction of 46,000

37. BIS (2013a) Table 6. Fifty per cent of privately funded higher education providers responding to the survey were based in London, 20% in the south east. The report notes that the location of the head office is only one indicator of where the providers operate, given that many have multiple offices across the UK and many offer distance learning.

learner starts in 2013–14 and 87,000 in each year from 2014–15 onwards (BIS 2011b). This means fewer adults studying the kinds of further education courses which could lead them on to higher education.

In addition, of the reduced number of learners that do go into further education, some may be wary about adding a higher education loan on top of their further education loan. It is important that the message is well understood that, if a

student has both a further education and a higher education loan, they will not pay back more per month than they would if they only had a further education loan (ie there will be a single payment and deduction at 9% above the threshold regardless of how large the balance or how many loans an individual has). Another important message is that students taking Access to Higher Education courses will have their loan written off if they progress to higher education.

## CHAPTER 5: WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

### SUMMARY

In carrying out this review we were struck by the commitment of many individuals, institutions and organisations to part-time and mature students, and the diverse, often grassroots, work going on to address the issues set out in the report. There is a need both to disseminate institutional good practice and to take forward activity at a national level, and this chapter sets out recommendations to achieve this.

We see this report as the beginning, not the end, of UUK's involvement in a programme to protect and support this vital provision. The report makes recommendations, based on the available evidence, to improve the uptake of part-time study, such as an urgent push to help potential students and employers understand the value of and opportunities for part-time higher education. We also set out other steps that universities and colleges

should consider to improve the part-time student experience, across all stages of the student life cycle. We go on to recommend how employer-focused part-time higher education can be boosted, in order to meet the needs of the local economy.

In other areas, such as the English higher education funding system, we make recommendations for further modelling and investigation, so that the right policy decisions can be made.

Finally, UUK is committed to working in partnership with others to champion this essential provision. We will work with other stakeholders to monitor part-time higher education and to support the recommendations made in this report, including research recommendations.

We have looked at the changes in part-time provision, their impact and the potential reasons for them. Now we set out practical solutions to the challenges and problems that have been described, including examples of good practice in encouraging and supporting part-time students gathered from UUK's call for evidence.

In carrying out this review, we have been struck by the breadth of interest in part-time learners across all kinds of higher education providers, whether members of UUK, GuildHE or the Association of Colleges, or alternative providers. It is not possible to say that part-time higher education is the province of a particular kind of provider, and we welcome that. There are incentives – which must be retained – for all types of providers to engage in part-time higher education, and different challenges and opportunities as well.

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### Ensuring that part-time and mature students are central to the higher education sector

In the past, the very different and specific needs and motivations of part-time students have not been considered sufficiently carefully; rather, part-time students (usually mature) have often been expected to behave in broadly the same way as full-time (usually young) students. This model has clearly not served those students well. Therefore, we begin with an overarching recommendation:

**Recommendation 1: All stakeholders across the UK, including higher education providers, government, funding councils and others, should consider the needs of part-time and mature students as an intrinsic part of their thinking, not as an add-on.**

## Improving the visibility and understanding of part-time provision

**Recommendation 2: There needs to be an urgent push at all levels – national, regional and local – to help potential students and employers understand the value of and opportunities for part-time higher education.**

Our call for evidence found compelling and repeated arguments that part-time provision was frequently invisible or misunderstood.

We recommend an urgent push to help potential students and employers understand the value of and opportunities for part-time higher education.

This should take place at a number of levels: a national communications programme, supported by a comprehensive and inspiring national website hosted by UCAS; improved national Key Information Sets for applicants; and excellent institutional information, advice and guidance at the local and regional level.

### A national communications programme (England)

The UUK call for evidence found a strong call from all stakeholder groups for, in NIACE's words:

*'a national and co-ordinated public awareness campaign in England to inform potential part-time students of the opportunity and benefits of part-time study along with details of the public support they may be able to access.'*

A number of national bodies, including BIS, UUK, Student Loans Company (SLC), UCAS

**'A clear communications strategy should be put in place to ensure that both students and employers understand finance options for both part-time higher education study and the new Advanced Learning Loans.'**

CBI, 2013

and unionlearn, are already working hard to raise awareness of part-time study, promote its benefits and explain about the financial support available. This work is aimed at a variety of stakeholders, including students on Access to Higher Education courses, the media, employers and potential applicants accessing the UCAS and SLC websites.

We believe that there are benefits in bringing together and giving an extra push to existing communications efforts of national stakeholders, as well as working in partnership to develop further efforts in identified areas of need. We recommend that the main national stakeholders come together to share their communications priorities and to identify gaps and how they might be addressed. This should be underpinned by evidence of what works, in order to avoid a poorly targeted and scattergun approach with little impact.

Such partnership working should develop and share useful resources which can then be promoted regionally and locally, and make a louder noise about part-time than can be achieved by individual organisations working in parallel, alone.

This review suggests that the key messages should be:

- **Raising awareness of part-time as an available mode of study**, including options about where and how to study.
- **Finance opportunities**. The general consensus in May 2013, when we issued our call for evidence, was that there is still a lot of misunderstanding about the new student finance system for part-time students. There are a number of national sources of existing

## National resources aimed at potential part-time learners, their advisers and others

Martin Lewis/MoneySavingExpert guide and video  
[www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/part-time-student-loan-guide](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/part-time-student-loan-guide)

Student Finance England – Part-time loans and grants  
[www.sfengland.slc.co.uk/part-time-study.aspx](http://www.sfengland.slc.co.uk/part-time-study.aspx)

Student Loans Company – core script for media on part-time finance  
[www.slc.co.uk/media/277036/core\\_script\\_part\\_time\\_1314\\_v3.pdf](http://www.slc.co.uk/media/277036/core_script_part_time_1314_v3.pdf)

Student Loans Company – Loans for part-time study 2013–14  
[www.sfengland.slc.co.uk/media/598136/sfe\\_fspt\\_loans\\_1314\\_d.pdf](http://www.sfengland.slc.co.uk/media/598136/sfe_fspt_loans_1314_d.pdf)

Student Loans Company – Part-time grants 2013–14  
[www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/641877/sfe\\_fspt\\_grants\\_1314\\_d.pdf](http://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/641877/sfe_fspt_grants_1314_d.pdf)

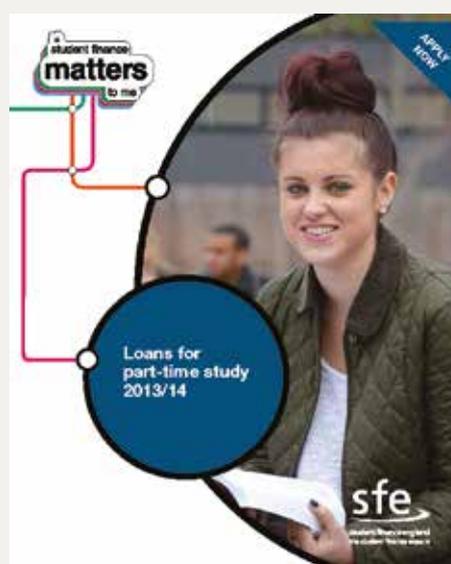
Gov.uk student finance guide aimed at mature learners  
[www.gov.uk/mature-student-university-funding](http://www.gov.uk/mature-student-university-funding)

The Student Room (funded as part of its partner activity with the Student Loans Company) – Student Finance Zone section aimed at applicants to part-time study  
[www.thestudentroom.co.uk/content.php?r=597-Part-time-students](http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/content.php?r=597-Part-time-students)

Higher Learning at Work – information and guides for learners in work by unionlearn  
[www.higherlearningatwork.org](http://www.higherlearningatwork.org)

Open University – Ways to pay for a qualification in England  
[www3.open.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/qualification/ways-to-pay/england.htm](http://www3.open.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/qualification/ways-to-pay/england.htm)

UCAS – How and where to study  
[www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/flexible-study/how-and-where-study](http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/flexible-study/how-and-where-study)



information, the best of which could be promoted further.

- **Benefits of gaining higher education qualifications**, such as career progression, increased earnings, and job and personal satisfaction.

We support the work of the BIS Student Finance Tour, which is targeting prospective part-time higher education students, including mature learners, for the first time in 2013–14, reaching out to those people currently studying in further education colleges, particularly Access to Higher Education courses. It follows a similar style to the full-time Student Finance Tour, using a peer-to-peer approach: the presenters are former part-time or mature students. The tour focuses on providing prospective higher education students with all the information about the student finance package, with the presenter also sharing their experience of studying at a higher level to bring the presentation to life.

In particular, we support the use of success stories of people who have studied part-time and high profile advocates who had benefitted from part-time higher education. UUK has gathered many such success stories during the course of its review. Indeed, mature part-time students themselves feel that they should be used as a resource more, and their knowledge should be made use of at both an institutional and a national level.

We also want to see national bodies integrating part-time higher education into their more general communications work, so that higher education is promoted to all groups and then the options of part-time and full-time are explained. Young full-time provision should not be seen nationally as the default mode. UUK is committed to leading the way on this.

**Recommendation 2a: In England, UUK, GuildHE, the Association of Colleges, BIS, UCAS, the Student Loans Company, CBI, unionlearn and other interested groups should design and implement a clearly targeted national communications strategy, aimed at both potential students and employers, to encourage mature and part-time students into higher education. This should be done immediately in order to have an effect on 2014–15 entry.**

### **A comprehensive and inspiring national website (UK)**

At the moment there is no single excellent source of information about part-time study, operating at a national level. This is a missed opportunity. The campaign described here needs to drive traffic to a single authoritative source of information about part-time study, including financial support for eligible students. We believe, and the call for evidence responses suggested, that the UCAS website is an excellent home for this.

Historically part-time courses have not featured on the UCAS website, and this is one of the biggest disparities between the support systems for full-time and part-time learning. However, UCAS is using the launch of its new website, [ucas.com](http://ucas.com), as an opportunity to include information and advice for part-time students. This is accessed through a link on the homepage at [www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/flexible-study](http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/flexible-study) and includes information about different types of flexible provision, student case studies, time management advice and financial information, and a link to the student finance section of the [gov.uk](http://gov.uk) website. UCAS tells us that it will continue to develop this resource, including more case studies and videos and information to support learners. We strongly support this.

UCAS also told the review that it has recently undertaken research to understand whether there was any appetite for UCAS to play a larger role in information and advice for the undergraduate part-time and flexible study market. Respondents believed UCAS could be a valuable information and advice provider for applicants to undergraduate part-time study. In addition to the general advice and information described above, the majority of respondents to UCAS' own survey said there would be value in listing their undergraduate flexible and part-time study courses on a tool like UCAS Search. UCAS therefore intends to ensure Search provides the ability for institutions to display their part-time courses. They anticipate that this will be delivered during 2014.

**Recommendation 2b: UCAS should develop its existing website coverage of part-time students, in order to provide a first port of call for those looking to study part-time at undergraduate level. This should be done as a matter of urgency and offer a similar level of information, advice and guidance**

**on part-time courses as is available for full-time provision. We also support UCAS' work in updating Search to allow institutions to display their part-time courses.**

### Helpful and accessible national datasets (UK)

Respondents to our call for evidence argued that the 'invisibility' of part-time higher education in national datasets, including Key Information Sets (KIS) (on the Unistats website, and underpinning league tables) was a problem. Applicants are not presented with the full range of modes of study they might want to choose from, and so there is a risk that they think that full-time study is the only option open to them.

Changes to improve collection of data on part-time courses and to collect information on place of delivery were made in the KIS guidance issued to higher education providers in December 2012. These changes, alongside other changes to improve the search function, mean that part-time provision should now be easier to find on the Unistats website. The inclusion of a facility to filter by location of course delivery may also be of particular help to part-time students who are looking to identify relevant courses in a particular geographical area. We support these moves.

**Recommendation 2c: The funding councils should continue all efforts to improve the visibility of part-time courses on the Unistats website.**

### Excellent institutional information, advice and guidance (UK)

In the call for evidence, higher education providers told us about where potential students looked for information, citing mainly institutional websites and prospectuses, and peers (informal sources). This is backed up by the findings of other research:

*'Mature learners are less likely to use public sources of information before entering HE and are more likely to rely on institutional sources of information (eg HEI websites and prospectuses). (Foskett and Johnson, 2010; McVitty and Morris, 2012). Mature learners'*

*decisions are more likely to be shaped by family, friends and colleagues than formal providers of IAG [information, advice and guidance]. Part-time learners tend to rely heavily on informal sources, and do not turn as readily to professionals. Formal support, where sought, tends to be from learning providers such as colleges and universities.'* (HEFCE (2013b) Literature review of research into widening participation to higher education: Report to HEFCE and OFFA by ARC Network)

We heard about a good deal of work going on locally to encourage applications from mature learners to part-time study, supported by often small-scale research by higher education providers. Providers and students told us about the:

- need to ensure that, on websites and other marketing material, available part-time options are highly visible
- importance of ensuring that websites contain the latest up-to-date and comprehensive information on part-time student finance. This will ensure that certain prospective students are not at a disadvantage because their local institution is not providing up-to-date information online
- power of role models ('people like you'). Previous and current part-time students could be used as advocates and to disseminate useful information to current and potential students (and employers) within the institution
- efforts to ensure that branding is not dominated by pictures of young people
- vital importance of getting the first point of contact right (for example, that the named contact for the course has the correct information about part-time options, is quick to respond, does not just quote the headline fee but explains the financial package/module cost at the same time)
- detailed work they had done segmenting the market and developing a tailored approach for each type of learner, including a distinct learning offer, style of learning, brand proposition (both message and brand), approach to engagement, support of transition needs and on-course support

The review also heard about difficulties in finding out about part-time higher education opportunities on institutional websites. This was considered by a Jisc report in 2012, with

specific reference to online delivery, but the lessons would seem to apply more widely. Jisc recommended that:

*'There are significant gains to be made by improving the discoverability of all courses on institutional websites, aggregation services and the web more generally. While the study found examples of good practice, a significant number of institutional websites do not provide course-specific search facilities. Many of those that do provide such functionality do not provide sufficient granularity of search options; for example, few sites enabled a search based on mode of delivery, which is an important consideration for students seeking to study online. The study also found that, generally, ODL [open and distance learning] courses offered in partnership with commercial providers were easier to find on the web when using search engines, such as Google, than equivalent courses offered directly by HE/FE institutions.'* (White 2012)

**Recommendation 2d: Universities and colleges should continue and expand their valuable work to promote part-time study options and the value of part-time study in their region and local area. We urge them, in particular, to ensure that available part-time options are highly visible on websites and other marketing material, and that information on student finance is up to date.**

## Meeting the needs of part-time students

**Recommendation 3: Universities and colleges should take bold steps to meet the needs of potential part-time students and improve the part-time student experience.**

The higher education sector collectively makes a commitment to civic engagement, social mobility,

high quality teaching and meeting the nation's skills needs. Part-time undergraduate higher education plays a vital role in advancing all of these.

Universities and colleges, of whatever size, sector or mission, should consider how the needs of part-time students can be aligned with their institution's strategic priorities, in order to meet the requirements for flexibility from students and employers.

We also recommend that universities and colleges should consider steps to improve the part-time student experience, across all stages of the student life cycle. While satisfaction levels are high (the 2013 National Student Survey suggests that overall satisfaction of part-time students is four percentage points higher than for full-time),<sup>38</sup> there is room for continuous improvement, in order to encourage more people into higher education, aid retention and enhance satisfaction.

It starts by taking a strategic approach. Universities and colleges may wish to identify a named individual with strategic responsibility for part-time undergraduate students. Such a role would take oversight of the whole of the part-time student experience at the institution, from recruitment to careers, to ensure that it is as good as it can be, and that feedback is collected and acted on.

This section now considers the following aspects of the student experience:

- Access, including the role of OFFA and Access Agreements in supporting this
- Applications and admissions, including the role of UCAS and the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) programme
- Different types of provision, including short courses, massive open online courses and online provision, and HE in FE
- Teaching and retention of part-time learners, including support from the Higher Education Academy and views of the NUS (including pedagogies; information and induction; credit accumulation and transfer; flexible timings; infrastructure; child-friendly campuses)
- Employability and careers advice
- Fees, including students' interaction with the SLC

38. Eighty-nine per cent of part-time students from HEIs registered in England were satisfied with the quality of their course, compared to 85% of full-time students. This includes The Open University, which has a particularly high level of satisfaction.

### OFFA told the review...

'OFFA's knowledge of part-time students is not as comprehensive as that of full-time students as part-time students have only been regulated since September 2012, and establishing the characteristics of part-time students in terms of disadvantage is made all the more problematic by the fact that the majority of them are mature learners. In addition, the introduction of fee loans for part-time students, HEFCE's proposed funding changes and other changes that might develop, may all impact on the take up and provision of part-time study options and so our need for much better intelligence is even more acute.

Although we have yet to do an analysis of part-time within access agreements, in terms of the raw sector level figures, institutions' predictions of part-time fee income and headcount for 2013–14 entry, in their 2014–15 access agreements, fell by roughly 40% (fee income) and 20% (headcount), when compared with their predictions for the same entry year in their 2013–14 access agreements. These are raw sector level figures and do not provide any understanding of the interplay between supply and demand.<sup>39</sup>

We have identified part-time and mature provision as a possible area for an increased analytical focus over the coming year and will also be developing our processes for 2015–16 access agreements in the coming months. In addition, we will be developing our plans for monitoring 2012–13 access agreements over the summer and this will include how we assess institutions' commitments to part-time students.'

### Access and the role of OFFA and Access Agreements

Universities and colleges are making considerable efforts to widen participation to mature and part-time learners. Some (but

far from all) of this effort is linked to funding from higher level fees, as agreed with OFFA in Access Agreements. From 2012–13 onwards, for the first time, any institution in England that charges students over the basic level of £4,500 in an academic year for part-time courses must have an approved Access Agreement with OFFA.

OFFA's 2014–15 guidance encourages institutions to 'consider different types of courses that may be more attractive and accessible to your target groups and different types of learners, including mature students – for example, through part-time courses, distance learning, two year degrees, accelerated degrees and foundation years'. OFFA also encourages institutions to take a broad view of outreach so that it includes outreach directed at potential mature learners aspiring to full or part-time study, as well as young learners. OFFA particularly encourages institutions to focus on part-time student retention and success.

In 2012–13, an estimated £13.38 million from higher fees from part-time students was to be spent on financial support, outreach and student success.

We welcome OFFA's renewed and stronger focus on part-time and mature learners in the guidance for 2015–16 Access Agreements and endorse its increased analytical focus on this group.

In addition, OFFA also told us that, 'As part of the HEFCE/OFFA national strategy for access and student success we have identified part-time study and mature learners as one of the emerging priorities that the strategy will address'. We endorse HEFCE and OFFA's intention to prioritise part-time and mature learners in the National Strategy for Access and Student Success. UUK will continue to work with HEFCE and OFFA in the implementation of the strategy.

### Applications and admissions: the role of UCAS

Currently higher education providers manage all applications for part-time courses, rather than applications being managed nationally by UCAS. In the UUK call for evidence, we found only limited support for UCAS to undertake an online application service. This was backed up by UCAS'

39. This does not include The Open University, which submits an agreement to a different timetable due to its recruitment cycle.

own research. The main reason given for this was that institutions already have an established model that suits their own needs and those of potential applicants. Part-time students are far less likely to be mobile and so more likely to be applying to only one or a small number of institutions. This is unlike full-time students, who generally make multiple applications, meaning that a nationally managed system is far more efficient.

However, one consequence of this is that there is very limited data about applications to part-time courses. This means, among other things, that it is hard to get an early indication of how applications are looking at a national level, in the same way as one can for full-time students. This causes particular difficulties at this time of turbulence in the part-time market. While this subject did not come up in the call for evidence, UCAS found that 57% of respondents to its survey thought positively of the implementation of a shared data service. We note that UCAS already has systems in place to exchange data with institutions and is working on a more automated reporting function for applicants who have applied directly. To support these developments UCAS will set up a small working group consisting of key part-time institutions to look at requirements for a data sharing/management information-type service, with a view to developing this into a pilot. UUK looks forward to being part of these discussions.

### Applications and admissions: the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions programme

The Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) programme has published guidance on practical procedures and principles for the fair admission of part-time students. The main points are collated into a summary checklist to enable providers to quickly review their progress in this area: [www.spa.ac.uk/support/goodpractice/parttimeadmissions](http://www.spa.ac.uk/support/goodpractice/parttimeadmissions)

In 2013–14, SPA intends to update this good practice guide UK-wide but with a focus on England. SPA told us that it may also develop good practice on the recognition of prior learning for the admission of full-time and part-time students.

### Different types of provision

Respondents to the call for evidence, across all respondent groups including HE in FE and GuildHE institutions, called for more flexible

delivery to attract and support part-time learners. Responses encourage the consideration of flexible delivery in terms of course scheduling and modular study, and more options for study via online and blended learning. This echoes the view of HEFCE published earlier in 2013.

In this report we discuss three particularly important types of flexible provision: short courses; massive open online courses (MOOCs) and online learning; and HE in FE.

‘More traditional part-time provision will have to continue to respond to new, innovative forms of higher education, such as the continuing development of online learning, which is already a key element in the delivery of many part-time courses. Lower-cost models of higher education and increasing flexibility in where and when learning happens may be attractive to both students and employers. They may also be attractive to students for whom more traditional part-time study is not an option. Any response to part-time decline will need to take account of the need to support a diverse range of students, including providing more responsive financial support, and to encourage beneficial innovation in course delivery.’ (HEFCE 2013a)

“‘Going to university” will take on many varied meanings and manifestations over the next ten years.’

Dame Lynne Brindley, Chair, Online Learning Task Force

### Short courses

‘Taster’ or short courses are seen by respondents as an excellent way of attracting potential students to higher education and providing a smoother transition for those who have not studied for a while. Respondents felt that if higher education institutions and further education colleges do not provide them,

employers and students will look outside the sector. Short courses or 'bite-sized' provision can be easier for part-time students to plan for. There is general support across the stakeholder groups for reversing the trend in reducing short courses and for finding ways to finance them within the new fees and loan regime.

### Massive open online courses (MOOCs) and online provision

The role of online learning in supporting part-time learners was a topic of some limited interest in the call for evidence, and has been investigated by a number of recent initiatives such as the 2011 HEFCE Online Learning Task Force. The task force found 'increased opportunities for enhanced flexibility... as students seek more work-based, flexible and part-time opportunities, to fit work and learning opportunities into their lives'. It concluded that:

*'Online learning – however blended with on- or off-campus interactions, whether delivered in the UK or overseas – provides real opportunity for UK institutions to develop responsive, engaging and interactive provision which, if offered at scale, can deliver quality and cost-effectiveness while meeting student demands for flexible learning.'* (HEFCE 2011/01, Collaborate to compete: Seizing the opportunity of online learning for UK higher education)

One particular form of flexible provision that has attracted some attention is MOOCs. MOOCs are designed as flexible, independent learning modules that use online recorded content and automated assessment. They operate at a massive scale by largely dispensing with academic support for students, in contrast to more conventional online learning that maintains a ratio between teachers and students. By offering courses from high profile research-intensive selective institutions, the US companies offering MOOCs have rapidly attracted large numbers of students. Coursera, the largest of the three main US platforms, attracted over three million registrations by April 2013. The Open University-owned Futurelearn, that partners with over 20 UK universities, has just launched its first courses in September 2013.

MOOCs represent a global, high volume model of flexible delivery that has proved attractive to advanced learners looking for free or low-

cost provision. However, it is unlikely that the dramatic growth in numbers of students studying on MOOCs is responsible for a decline in part-time undergraduate provision, for three reasons. Firstly, these courses have only been offered in any systematic form since the summer of 2012. Secondly, courses to date typically attract learners who have already completed at least an undergraduate degree, or at the very least are studying for one. Finally, MOOCs remain largely informal modes of study, with a large proportion of hobby learners and variable levels of engagement in courses, which generally do not lead to academic credit or awards.

### MOOCs: emblematic of a broader shift in attitudes towards online education

'Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) expand the opportunities for students from different backgrounds to engage in lifelong learning. In particular, flexible pathways may help to support the ongoing development of individuals already in the labour market and play an important role in meeting the challenges of equipping the labour force with the skills needed for advanced knowledge economies. This is particularly relevant in the context of the decline in part-time student enrolments, which raises questions about the attractiveness of existing models of flexible part-time provision.'

There is a potential synergy between open flexible models of learning and conventional models of higher education. As standalone courses MOOCs currently provide insufficient support to develop the same cognitive and procedural skills needed by many students and employers. Institutions may find benefit in considering how their courses and awards can integrate independent prior learning pathways into a more rounded educational experience. This approach may be particularly attractive to vocational, part-time and international students.'

*(UUK (2013) Massive open online courses: higher education's digital moment?)*

A key question facing MOOCs when considering their viability as formal parts of higher education is in relation to the high levels of drop outs between registration and completion. As MOOCs have low barriers to entry the initial enrolment on courses is typically very high, as students sign up to see what a course may have to offer. Many of these students will not start the course at all. After the initial drop off in numbers in the first week of the course there is a steady drop off in enrolments. There are also a variety of patterns of engagement with the course, from committed learners who study all the elements in sequence to more casual engagement with courses that may sample certain elements. However, due to their large size, even if a large proportion of students drop out this can still result in a large number of students completing a course. When looking at it in terms of a per unit cost, although concrete figures are not available, whilst the initial cost to an institution of designing and running course is relatively high the actual per unit cost of completing students could be as low as £20.

Looking to the future, the long-term impact of MOOCs on higher education is not yet clear, with commentators taking very different views as to their likely trajectory and impact. A BIS literature review, *The Maturing of the MOOC*, concludes:

*'MOOCs will disrupt business as normal in several domains of HE activity. Undergraduate teaching and recruitment, pedagogy, commercial CPD [Continuing Professional Development], and most particularly international recruitment and reputation may be sharply affected.'* (BIS 2013d)

A UUK report on MOOCs, *Massive open online courses: higher education's digital moment?* (2013), explored the role that MOOCs may play in the development of flexible models of higher education. The central challenge is moving from the current model of largely informal learning toward one that leads to formal credit and awards. Although there are limits to what MOOCs can offer at present, they are developing rapidly and can potentially make a wider contribution when allied to other types of online and face-to-face learning. We recommend that the potential contribution that MOOCs can make to part-time learning should be kept under review, including:

- the role that open online models of delivery can play in improving the attractiveness of

conventional online and face-to-face courses for different types of students and employers

- institutional and sector arrangements for facilitating the recognition of MOOCs and other forms of independent prior learning for entry onto paid-for courses and toward a final higher education award

In our call for evidence, a very small number of higher education institutions suggested that MOOCs ('a great example of flexible learning for adults') may present a threat to traditional forms of part-time higher education as employers and potential students switch to them instead. However, other contributors to the review took a much more cautious approach, and by far the great majority did not mention them at all.

Student choice is vital, and some groups are likely to retain a preference for face-to-face learning. An Institute for Employment Studies survey of working adults with no previous experience of higher education found that, of those who would consider higher education in future, by far the most commonly preferred mode of study was part-time, either during the day (18%) or, more often, in the evening or at weekends (32%). Only 13% preferred distance or online learning (DIUS 2008). However, as this study was conducted in 2008 it preceded a significant shift in the availability of broadband in the UK, including mobile, and the embedding of online social networking into day-to-day life.

More recently, a 2013 survey by the Mixed Economy Group (MEG) of more than 350 students following part-time learning courses at 15 colleges asked 'What would help you to learn better?' It found the most significant factors to be more time away from work, more class contact hours and more private study time at the college. 'More on-line or distance learning' trailed behind. The (unpublished) MEG report notes that 'College staff should take note of the significant lack of interest in on-line or distance learning recorded here. Often seen as a more economical way of delivering provision, it is clearly of little interest to this group of respondents.'

### Teaching and retention of part-time students

Part-time completion rates remain significantly lower than those for full-time study. For the most recent year available, 36% of part-time first degree entrants aged 30 and under and 34% of those aged over 30 were not continuing after their

second year of study. This compares to 11.6% for mature full-time first degree entrants one year after entry.<sup>40</sup>

A number of studies have looked at the reasons for this; the findings are well-summarised by a large NUS survey which found that 39% of part-time undergraduates interviewed had seriously considered leaving their course. While this was the same percentage as for full-time undergraduates taking part in the survey, the reasons given were strikingly different. The most commonly cited reason by far was 'the difficulties of balancing study and other commitments' (cited by 60% of those who had seriously considered leaving – nearly twice as many as full-time undergraduates), followed by financial difficulties (45%), personal, family or relationship problems (27%) or health problems (24%) (NUS 2012). This adds further emphasis to the argument that the key to inclusive academic practice is recognition of the complicated lives that part-time students lead.

The sector is supported in addressing the learning needs of these students by the Higher Education Academy (HEA), through materials available on their website.

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**'The need to develop new ways of learning is a live issue in higher education, largely linked with the demand for increased flexibility of pace, place and mode of delivery. Increasing student fees, with the result that many more students may choose to work their way through HE, means that the sector needs to identify pedagogies that are going to empower student learning, offering increased choice and facilitating high quality provision.'**

Dr Alison Le Cornu, Higher Education Academy

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The HEA's 'Flexible Pedagogies: Preparing for the future' project is looking at:

- part-time learners and learning
- transfer of credit and the implementation of the Bologna process
- technology-enhanced learning
- employer engagement and work-based learning
- institutional systems and structures
- new pedagogical ideas

The part-time learners and learning strand identifies and analyses suitable teaching approaches within the context of flexible learning and delivery for part-time learners. It makes recommendations, based on case studies, about why and how institutions might work towards the implementation of these approaches within the context of flexible delivery. We expect that higher education providers will want to consider carefully the recommendations of the project (HEA 2013b), as well as the HEA's Flexible Learning guides, with a view to improving flexible learning and teaching opportunities.

The NUS describes the importance of inclusive academic practice, including at induction, as well as through personal tutors and union engagement.

'Based on what we know from survey data, segmentation and tailoring of pre-arrival information may be complemented by inclusive practice on arrival and thereafter.'

Contact with current students in a similar position and on a similar course could provide a useful bridge at least during transition. Students studying at a distance and online ought to be able to make contacts like this via social media.

It is not possible to give people more time, but flexibility in course scheduling, early provision of course schedules and timetables and careful design and review of assessment practice with students could help.

Given that personal tutoring appears to be ubiquitous even for part-time students, attention at departmental or course level to how those students are enabled to engage with a personal tutor, and how effective that relationship is in supporting student engagement would be very useful.

Students' unions (and NUS) need to address part-time student academic engagement and prioritise flexibility and inclusivity in developing academic representation structures.'  
(NUS, June 2013)

### Information and induction

Respondents to the UUK review suggested that there could be better pre-course support, for example, by providing reading lists and timetables in advance and preparing potential students for what the course will entail. Induction should be tailored to part-time students and help in overcoming worries they may have about studying or exams.

### Credit accumulation and transfer

A small number of respondents to the review, including NIACE, a students' union and a further education college, discussed continuing support for the implementation of credit accumulation and transfer schemes. These support transfer between different higher education providers, for example, if a mature student moves for employment or personal reasons and wishes to continue their part-time study elsewhere.

A recent review by the HEA found that 'while systems are in place to ensure credit transfer and accumulation, they are not producing the expected levels of impact' (HEA 2013a). This highlights the challenges that many UK institutions may face in the future to meet the needs of students seeking increasingly flexible learning opportunities. We would encourage providers of higher education to engage with the findings of that review.

### Flexible timings

Several higher education institutions highlighted that providers need to stop thinking along the traditional full-time degree model and 'policies and procedures need to be focused on a flexible model that accommodates the traditional paradigm within a more generic flexible model with multiple access and exit points'. In the words of a respondent from a higher education institution, they need to allow students 'to "drop in and drop out" of learning as necessary', for example with modular learning or block courses.

Respondents to UUK's call for evidence stressed that providers need to adapt timetables to suit part-time students. This includes early release of timetables, trying to keep the day of part-time lectures the same throughout the course year and having lectures, tutorials and contact hours on the same day for part-time students rather than spread throughout the week.

One students' union provided the results of a survey of mature students, of which nearly half were also part-time; the biggest reported problem making it difficult for them to study was timetabling (clearly linked to other highly cited problems: 'balancing family commitments',

## CASE STUDY

### Coventry University College

Coventry University College, which is wholly owned by Coventry University, prides itself on offering 'life-shaped learning'. All of the college's part-time higher education courses include both classroom-based and online learning. Part-time courses can be studied at different times – whether that is weekday mornings, evenings or on a Saturday. Tutorial support is provided outside the normal class times. It can take only four years to complete

a part-time degree at Coventry University College. Each course is made up of short blocks of six-week durations. Students can study up to three blocks in one year. They need to study 12 blocks for a degree, eight for an HND and four for the HNC. However, they can choose to slow the pace down and study one block at a time. Finally, fees are significantly lower than those at many other comparable institutions.

'balancing work commitments', 'parking, commuting and transport access and costs').

We heard conflicting views about how far university campuses still run on a 9 to 5 basis, Monday to Friday. Many universities were keen to share examples of 24/7 provision of facilities such as libraries, computing and learning resource centres; students supported this but were keen to point out the need for teaching, not just facilities being open, at weekends and evenings. Clearly this varied from institution to institution.

Part-time mature students are much more likely to need flexibility and support for emergency family or work situations, such as competing work deadlines or childcare. They may also need flexibility around assessment and deadlines, as a student explains, 'to reflect the "juggling" of commitments with which almost all part-time students have to wrestle.'

### Infrastructure

Flexibility is not all about moving courses to online and distance learning. Respondents explain that many part-time students still want the face-to-face higher education experience and for them making campus resources more flexible is paramount. Respondents suggest facilities that make campuses more family-friendly such as crèche provision, playgrounds and family accommodation. They also suggest making campuses '24-hour'. This would mean that students could study in the library or meet in cafes at all hours of the day or at weekends and not just typical 9 to 5 hours. Other suggestions include physical spaces specifically for part-time students so that they can interact face-to-face and not just online – a part-time students' common room, for example. Other examples are provided in *Never Too Late To Learn: Mature students in higher education* (2012), by Million+ and NUS.

### Child-friendly campus

As we have seen, nearly half of part-time undergraduate students in England are parents living with dependant children (BIS 2013c). However, there are arguments that these are an 'invisible cohort' and that further support for their needs would improve the student experience. In the words of the Nuffield Foundation:

*'Students with children are not getting the support they need to succeed in higher education. While student parents are a growing presence in higher education, national and university policies continue to address the needs of students as if they had no caring responsibilities. However, there was also some variation between universities, with some offering some extensive provision for student parents and reviewing their policies on the basis of how this group would be affected.'* (Moreau and Kerner, Nuffield Foundation, 2012)

The NUS has a campaign supporting the 'Child-friendly campus',<sup>41</sup> which sets out a number of recommendations for students' unions and higher education providers to improve the experience of students with young children. Providers will want to consider the recommendations of the NUS campaign and how far they are applicable to their own situation.

### Employability and careers advice

As we have seen, part-time learners tend to undertake their programme whilst already in full-time employment and their motivation to study is largely related to desire to progress in their career (Callender and Wilkinson 2013). That does not mean that there is no need for careers information, advice and guidance (IAG); part-time learners who receive careers IAG whilst studying their programme report higher levels of job satisfaction. In addition, certain groups of part-time learners, such as 'career changers', will be looking for more targeted information on their chosen new career.

Research has found that many university careers services are geared towards young graduates entering the labour market for the first time, and that part-time students often do not use university careers services because they were unaware of them or do not believe that they cater for students like them (Callender et al 2010).

The support needs of part-time learners:

*'tend to include helping them to recognise the value of their experiences and provide interventions that develop the long term*

41. For more information, see: [www.nusconnect.org.uk/news/article/matureparttime/Child-friendly-campaign-gets-launched/](http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/news/article/matureparttime/Child-friendly-campaign-gets-launched/)

- Eighty per cent of part-time undergraduate leavers were in employment and 4% were unemployed and looking for work six months after graduation (equivalent figures for full-time students were 70% and 8%). Generally part-time unemployment is lower across all qualification types compared to the equivalent for full-time leavers.
- Median salary for part-time first degree leavers six months after graduation was £26,000, compared to £20,000 for full-time first degree leavers (mean of £28,500 and £20,000 respectively). (*Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education, 2011–12, Statistical First Release 192; HESA, July 2013*)

*career management skills which will enable them to progress within their chosen field (rather than developing transferable skills or indeed less on embedding opportunities for work experience and so on).*' (HEFCE 2013b)

## CASE STUDY

### University Campus St Albans

University Campus St Albans (UCSA) officially opened in June 2013, with its first part-time honours degree in business management and innovation available for applicants.

A joint venture between the University of Hertfordshire and Oaklands College, it offers innovative and affordable flexible part-time degree programmes for people who wish to combine both work and study. Flexible part-time pathways of study have been designed to provide those with busy lives improved career prospects.

The new degree programme is delivered from both Oaklands' St Albans Campus (one evening

**Recommendation 3a: Universities and colleges, of whatever size, sector or mission, are urged to consider the evidence presented in this report, particularly the evidence relating to the student life cycle, and to methods of flexible learning, including online delivery.**

### HE in FE

As we have seen, about one quarter of part-time undergraduates in 2010–11 studied at further education colleges. Further education colleges responding to the call for evidence described the importance of college provision in enabling local choice (especially for less mobile students), and in particular its close links to the employability agenda. Representative bodies including the 157 Group, Mixed Economy Group and Association of Colleges were keen to stress these benefits.

We found good examples of partnerships between higher and further education which will support part-time study, such as University Campus St Albans; on the other hand, we also received comments about increased competition between providers. We hope that the Association of Colleges/BIS research on higher education in further education colleges, particularly at part-time level, will consider the opportunities for partnerships in further detail.

a week) and the Hertfordshire Business School (one Saturday a month). The programme is flexible, allowing students to start and stop at different times and build their way to a degree in a way to suit them. Typically students will study over a four-year period but there are options to accelerate the learning over three calendar years, while others may take a longer route in order to fit study around life. People can also attain smaller awards if studying for a full honours degree is too great a commitment. The course fees are £4,500 per year if undertaken over four years.

**Recommendation 3b: Universities and colleges should consider how partnerships between higher education institutions and further education colleges can sustain and promote opportunities to study part-time.**

### Fees, including pricing and the role of the Student Loans Company

Institutions are already learning from their experiences so far in relation to tuition fees. Mature students seem to be much more sensitive to changes in price than some might have expected, with increases apparently having a pronounced effect on demand. Mature potential students have shown themselves to behave in a quite different way to young potential students when faced with fee increases. The evidence suggests that the following approaches being taken by institutions may be particularly helpful in terms of responding to the needs of these students:

- Breaking down more of their courses so that students can more easily apply for and take shorter chunks, building these up to gain a more substantial qualification where wished but without full commitment from the beginning. This has benefits in terms of being not only more financially attractive, but also attractive to individuals who are less confident about their ability or wish to take on the demands of a full qualification.

Some institutions told us that the funding system made it difficult for them to do this. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) Commission on Higher Education suggests that:

*'[Part-time students] are... not well served by a funding system that requires them to take out a large loan to cover the cost of an entire qualification. For this group of students, it may be more appropriate to shift towards a funding model where individual credits or modules are priced separately by institutions. This would make the upfront costs more manageable, and smaller loans could be made available to cover each one. While full-time students would still be able to take out the maximum loan to cover an entire qualification, part-time students and employers could build up their qualification in smaller chunks.'* (IPPR 2013)

- Advertising even more clearly when students pay (ie in instalments, not a huge cheque up front) as there is poor understanding of how the system works among the general public.
- Considering carefully their pricing structure and its attractiveness to different types of potential learners, in particular, where part-time fees have been simply pegged to full-time fees. This involves having a detailed appreciation of the segmentation of the various markets institutions serve.
- Implementing discounts when working with partners, such as unionlearn (the learning and skills organisation of the TUC).

**Recommendation 3c: Universities and colleges will wish to consider the evidence in this report when considering their own course pricing.**

The SLC plays an essential role in the administration of loans for part-time students, and we welcome the way in which it has evaluated the experience of administering the first year of loans in 2012–13 and taken forward essential lessons. It is vital that the information that it provides is as up-to-date and accurate as possible.

It is also important that the system can cope with non-standard start dates, particularly as it moves from being paper-based to electronic.

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## Employer-focused part-time higher education

**Recommendation 4: Employer-focused part-time higher education which meets the needs of the local economy should be boosted.**

This section sets out, in quite broad terms, some of the ways in which higher education providers are working, and can work more, with employers to provide the part-time courses which employers value and their employees need. This includes enhancing dialogue, courses designed for employer needs, higher apprenticeships,

'Recent CBI surveys have shown an increasing interest amongst businesses in working more closely with universities and colleges to deliver more flexible, learn-while-you-earn options, ranging from sandwich courses and better part-time options through to higher apprenticeships and course co-design.'

CBI, 2013

co-funding, reviewing assessment and accreditation, the role of unions and the role of Local Enterprise Partnerships. It does not pretend to cover the ground fully, nor to evaluate previous programmes such as the Higher Level Skills Pathfinder and HEFCE co-funded projects – that would be the work of an entire report in its own right. Rather, it concentrates on the views expressed in the responses to UUK's call for evidence and supporting discussions with employer representative bodies (such as the CBI, Federation of Small Businesses and Association of Graduate Recruiters, as well as the UK Commission for Employment and Skills [UKCES] and the National Centre for Universities and Business).

The call for evidence found many examples of good practice in university engagement with employers to develop and support part-time undergraduate provision.

## CASE STUDY

### The University of Warwick

The University of Warwick has developed a Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degree in Early Years (SEFDEY) in partnership with further education colleges and employers. It provides a unique, innovative programme targeting non-traditional learners from a diverse range of professional, social and cultural backgrounds. The foundation degree forms a central component of the university's widening participation strategy, making a major contribution to Warwick's community engagement.

The Warwick SEFDEY is unusual in having developed and sustained exceptionally strong partnerships with local employers. The team works with five local authorities and over 100 smaller voluntary, independent and private employers. Crucially, forward planning has led to sustainability and a blended learning model is currently being developed to reach a wider geographical audience.

## CASE STUDY

### The Open University in Scotland

The Open University in Scotland is engaged in developing a range of innovative models for facilitating learning in the workplace to demonstrate the essential contribution part-time provision can make to growing Scotland's economy. An example of a highly successful work-based model developed by the Open University in Scotland in an area of skill shortages is a partnership with Rolls-Royce

and the union Unite. Having identified a lack of opportunity for shop floor shift-workers and remote workers to up-skill, a flexible pathway was developed which enables engineering workers, who may have previously completed an apprenticeship, to progress towards a BEng. Currently there are nearly 40 shop floor workers on the programme and the model is being extended to other large engineering employers.

**CASE STUDY****Glyndŵr University**

Glyndŵr University runs courses that involve partnerships with Airbus, Toyota, Clwyd Theatr Cymru (Mold) and Tata Steel. Students can progress from craft apprentice level at Airbus

to chartered engineer through qualifications that are delivered at every level, including HNC/HND, foundation degree, BSc, MSc and PhD.

**CASE STUDY****Durham University**

Durham University is working with KPMG, the professional services firm, and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) to put on an innovative school leavers' programme. The six-year programme is a mix of part-time and full-time study.

During the degree phase, which will last for four years, students will spend part of the time in residence at Durham University, where they will study for a BSc in accounting at the Business School, and part of the time working

at KPMG. It is envisaged that the majority will then spend a further two years with KPMG in order to achieve full chartered accountant status through ICAEW, as the launchpad for a career in accountancy and business. KPMG pays the full university and professional tuition fees for each student in addition to a starting salary of around £20,000 (in London). Students receive a salary throughout the six-year period.

Similar schemes are running at the University of Exeter and the University of Birmingham.

Yet there was widespread agreement across both institutions and employers that dialogue

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**'The co-construction of curricula, that meet the needs of industry and are attractive to students, is key.'**

University of Bath

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needed to be enhanced further. This is important across the range of higher education provision (modes and levels), but particularly important for part-time provision, since the majority of it is vocational in nature.

We found a strong view amongst higher education institutions that part-time courses, which are frequently vocational in nature, should be tailored to fit in with employers' and employees' needs, through partnership working between employers and institutions.

This was matched by the views from employers. For example, the CBI suggests that 'one way to address the skills mismatch is to develop more partnership-based provision, with greater levels of business involvement in colleges and universities'. Their publication *Tomorrow's growth: new routes to higher skills* also sets out a number of examples of innovative delivery partnerships, including business-designed courses, school leaver programmes, advanced and higher apprenticeships and work-based learning programmes.

We know that this is not a simple matter. Other contributors to the UUK call for evidence pointed

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**'Increasingly HEIs need to provide specific learning and accreditation to employers, not try to sell generic course provision.'**

University of South Wales

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**'Working collaboratively with other HEIs and FECs can better facilitate providing a holistic offer. Employers and HEIs need to work together to identify the most appropriate modes of study and design the curricula to meet employer needs.'**

University of Derby

out the difficulties in co-construction of curricula: suppliers have different goals to employers and different employers have different requirements. Therefore problems with control over, and content of, courses can arise. As the CBI notes, businesses need to get better at articulating skills needs. But there is a clear agreement that these are problems which must be overcome, rather than universities continuing to put on the same provision as before.

Where a dedicated point of contact for employers at a higher education provider does exist, it improves dialogue and success. Stakeholders also suggested that assessment measures and accreditation should be reviewed, in order to have better fit with employers' needs. Employers want assessment strategies that 'can be directly applied to an individual's work environment, so that the employer can more directly see the impact and benefits of undertaking the programme' (157 Group) rather than a 'lengthy quality assurance process which employers neither understand nor value.' (University of South Wales)

The Quality Assurance Agency recognises that:

*'employers are interested in sharp, focused, skill-specific employer-led courses and courses that lead to professional accreditation. It may be that employers do not relate as well to some of the newer higher education course structures and that the language higher education providers use is not clear to the employer. Higher education providers need to ensure they realise employer requirements in order to get buy-in from employers to the value of part-time higher education.'*

In order to support part-time study, we concur with the actions recommended in the CBI report *Tomorrow's growth: New routes to higher skills*, that:

- Businesses need to look at their skills procurement policy – are HR teams equipped with the understanding to specify the skills the business really needs?
- Universities and colleges need to develop business outreach into a core function that has influence over curriculum design.

**Recommendation 4a: Universities and colleges should work in partnership with employers to develop more flexible and innovative approaches to meeting the needs of part-time students. Universities and colleges need to step up longer-term partnership arrangements with employers, while at the same time employers need to get better at articulating skills needs.**

**Recommendation 4b: UUK will work with UKCES to highlight innovative ways in which higher education institutions are working with employers to meet skills requirements and strengthen the high-level skills base of the UK economy. This project, which will pay special attention to flexible provision, will also explore how the sector's contribution to employment and skills can be further enhanced.**

### Apprenticeships

New forms of employer-focused higher level study are likely to have an impact on the world of part-time higher education. In particular, there is a considerable government push towards Higher Apprenticeships (HAs) in both England and Wales. In terms of scale, £25 million is being invested to support 23,000 HA starts by May 2015 (starts between 2009–10 and 2011–12 were in the low thousands each year). Age 25+ dominates, so HAs are certainly relevant to mature students.

HAs are provided across a wide range of industry sectors at Levels 4 and 5 (Higher Education Certificate and foundation degree levels) and

are in development at Level 6 (Bachelors degree level) and Level 7 (Master's degree level). However, the knowledge and competency requirements of HAs can be and, in many, if not most cases, are being delivered through the use of non-prescribed higher education qualifications (ie without the involvement of a higher education awarding body such as a university).

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**'The development of Higher Apprenticeships present universities and colleges with significant new opportunities to develop new partnerships with professional bodies and employers, widen participation and develop new HE qualifications for new groups of learners.'**

University Vocational Awards Council

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We agree that institutions will want to consider whether new forms of provision such as HAs provide a good way for them to meet the needs of learners and employers, compared to existing part-time modes of delivery, and also a way to help with progression to higher levels of higher education.

Joy Carter, Chair of the University Vocational Awards Council, adds:

*'Many universities are enthusiastic about Higher Apprenticeships and the involvement of universities will very much benefit the learner. It is important, therefore, that Higher Apprenticeship students are not counted within the Student Number Control and that universities are appropriately consulted as part of the development of Higher Apprenticeships.'*

## Unions

Unions act as another route for the encouragement of employees into higher level learning. Around 4,000 learners a year undertake higher education programmes via the union route. However, unionlearn (the learning and skills organisation of the TUC) figures for 2012–13 report a 25% fall in union learners undertaking higher education programmes.

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**'The policy environment has changed, resulting in realignment in focus from conventional part-time HE provision towards apprenticeships – with apprenticeships becoming more appealing to company sponsors and the students themselves. This may not be a bad thing, but the sector has yet to realign itself to understand and fully embrace this new provision.'**

University of Wolverhampton

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Although the higher education numbers are currently relatively small, with much more emphasis placed on basic skills and further education, unions and unionlearn have an important role to play. There is growing interest from unions in higher education and continuing professional development linked to higher education. There are more opportunities for universities and colleges to engage with unionlearn, including through a Memorandum of Understanding, to get messages out to union members about learning opportunities. Unionlearn also works with individual higher education institutions to develop bespoke programmes and improve access to existing courses.

Unionlearn's Higher Learning at Work website ([www.higherlearningatwork.org](http://www.higherlearningatwork.org)) also helps adults to find out more about the different routes they can take through higher learning in England. The site provides information about funding available to make learning more affordable and the discounts negotiated with higher education partners for union members.

## Local Enterprise Partnerships

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are partnerships between businesses and local authorities which undertake activities to drive economic growth and create jobs. The 39 LEPs are spread across England, and each one has been called on by the government to develop a Local Growth Plan to support applications to

## CASE STUDY

### Higher education involvement in a Local Enterprise Partnership

Coast to Capital (C2C) is a LEP that stretches from the West Sussex coast at Chichester to Croydon, via Brighton and the Gatwick Diamond. It combines areas of high growth and developing industries with some of the most challenging areas of deprivation in the country. The development of the Skills Strategy is being led by a Task and Finish Group chaired by Professor Clive Behagg, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Chichester (and education representative on the LEP Board).

Professor Behagg says: 'Universities have a significant opportunity to work with their local LEP to inform the development and delivery

of the Skills Strategy for their region. Now is the time for universities to support the LEPs to identify the skills that will enable businesses to grow and then to connect meaningfully with further education and private skills trainers to ensure that those skills needs are met. But Coast to Capital (C2C)'s Skills Strategy will not be a supply side narrative – rather it will represent a meaningful engagement with business to define local needs and the best way to address them. Given that, there is a huge potential for funded part-time study to be part of the solution to economic growth and regeneration.'

'Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) could be useful partners [in universities building high quality part-time undergraduate provision which meets the needs of local employers]. Developing the quality of the local workforce is an important part of their remit. Because so few full time students take up work close to the university they studied at, promoting full time degrees will not necessarily help them but part time degrees will be more relevant.'

#### Federation of Small Businesses

both the Single Local Growth Fund from 2015 (set to total around £12 billion by 2020–21) and the European Structural and Investment Fund for England (set at £5 billion for the period 2014–20).

Each LEP is expected to develop a Skills Strategy that will highlight those skills issues that inhibit sustainable economic growth within the LEP's geographical area. This strategy will

inform and support the ambitions identified in the LEP's Local Growth Plan and will be reflected in the LEP's European Structural Investment Plan. The government guidance for LEPs (*Growth Deals: Initial Guidance for Local Enterprise Partnerships*, July 2013) calls for 'skills providers and Local Enterprise Partnerships to forge active partnerships and work together to ensure delivery of courses that meet local labour demand'. The guidance for the European Structural and Investment Fund features the need for a wide range of skills to be developed, including higher level skills in particular economic sectors, and skills to support entrepreneurship, social inclusion, employability, SMEs and the social economy. It is likely that a proportion of the skills education needed for economic growth will be undertaken part-time, by employees already in work.

This is a considerable opportunity for higher education providers to work with employers to develop part-time higher education which meets the needs of the local and regional area.

**Recommendation 4c: In England, UUK will urge its members to work with Local Enterprise Partnerships to raise awareness of and access to part-time higher education study, and to ensure part-time study plays its critical role in supporting the local growth and skills agenda.**

## Improving the evidence base

### Recommendation 5: Further evidence and modelling is needed in order to support national policy decisions in England.

We found a number of areas where the evidence is not yet as good as it needs to be to make sound national policy decisions for this highly diverse group of learners. In England, higher education is in transition to a more market-based system in which there is an increased private contribution towards costs, together with public funding to avert market failure where this occurs and where it is of strategic national interest. There are strong concerns that part-time higher education is an example of market failure under the new funding regime in England, but it is not yet completely clear exactly what should be done about it, or how public funding could most effectively be deployed as a result. Answering this question will be particularly important given the competing pressures on public funding which are likely to remain for the foreseeable future.

A number of different bodies are already planning or engaged in such research, and it will be important to bring such research together to ensure that it is appropriately targeted and acted on.

In terms of priorities for research, we need to improve our understanding of what has happened in England and why. This should encompass engagement with students, students' unions, potential students and employers, as well as with higher education providers. It would also require more quantitative and economic analysis. Fundamental questions include:

- *Who are the missing students in England?* UUK will carry out this work, based on HESA 2012–13 data, when the data is available from January 2014.
- *What is happening at local and regional levels?* HEFCE intends to undertake some more detailed work in this area.
- *What is happening specifically in HE in FE?* UUK is pleased to have been invited to join the steering group for the Association of Colleges and BIS project that is examining part-time recruitment to degree level courses in further education colleges, identifying barriers to

expansion and making recommendations to enhance colleges' capacity to develop higher education provision and support growth.

- *What are the characteristics of those who have or have not taken out part-time fee loans in England in 2012–13 (and looking forward to 2013–14)?*
- *What are the views of working adults without higher education qualifications?* This has not been researched on a large scale since 2008.
- *What fees are being charged?* This information will be available from the HESA student record return for 2012–13 in January 2014. Any review of HEFCE funding for part-time students, including the part-time premium, would need to examine both fees and unit costs for different types of part-time provision, given that the latest robust research on the costs of provision dates back to 2004.
- *Why are the numbers of women studying part-time dropping more than the numbers of men?* How does this relate to changes to young higher education participation, as well as to wider demographic and economic changes, participation in the workforce and so on?

In terms of policy solutions, we are particularly interested in how funding barriers can be addressed, in particular:

- a selective relaxation of the 'equivalent or lower qualifications' policy in England
- revisions to the tax system to support employer and individual contributions
- other methods of incentivising employer support. We note that the CBI will be undertaking 'further work on financing options to support more firms to up-skill and re-skill their workforces, particularly focusing on how to address the issue of skills provision for key industrial strategy sectors' (CBI 2013). We strongly support this and look forward to the outcomes of this work.

We also recommend that the HEFCE funding system is kept under review, including any impact of the phasing out of the part-time premium.

**Recommendation 5a: The findings of this review should feed into planned HEFCE work to research part-time higher education at a local and regional level. We also support planned CBI work on financing options to support more firms to up-skill and re-skill their workforces.**

### Equivalent or lower qualifications (England)

We found that funding is a barrier to participation in part-time higher education. In particular, the 'equivalent or lower' (ELQ) policy introduced in England in 2007 was frequently cited by respondents to our call for evidence as a barrier for part-time learners wishing to re-skill. Most respondents did not, however, go into detail about how the ELQ policy might be changed, in particular the scale of change. The CBI argued earlier this year that there was a strong case for identifying exemptions to the ELQ ruling to help businesses in key sectors raise the skills levels of their workforces (CBI 2013). The IPPR Commission on Higher Education was more specific, recommending extending loans to ELQ students on certain courses that are deemed strategically important for the nation's industrial strategy (IPPR 2013).

In September 2013, the minister for universities and science announced a selective relaxation of the ELQ ruling. Fee loans will be extended to part-time students of engineering, technology and computer science who already have a degree in a different discipline. The intention is to help to build the nation's skills in strategically important sectors of the economy. We welcome this intention and look forward to further discussion with the government about the policy's implementation.

Changes to the ELQ policy should be implemented carefully, as it is not easy to predict how they will play out in terms of both available supply and student demand. We need to be careful to ensure that there will be sufficient provision in the identified subjects. This is particularly important as part-time students are less mobile than full-time students. In addition, HEFCE grant is usually made available in respect of high-cost subjects of this type. There would be a disparity if the ELQ relaxation were for fee loans only and not for HEFCE grant.

In terms of demand, there are logistical issues around the communication of this new opportunity to potential students, and the administration of the loans by the Student Loans Company. We will want to monitor how attractive these new fee loans are to mature students. It is also important to consider the issue of deadweight, for example, how far the funding might be taken up by 'career enhancers' (who are more likely to have been funded anyway by their

employers), rather than 'career changers'. Some mature students will have an incentive to study part-time instead of full-time.

Finally, we are particularly keen to explore whether the relaxation of the ELQ policy will have implications for student number controls, since we would not wish to see these introduced for part-time provision.

**Recommendation 5b: We recommend that the extension of fee loans to part-time students of engineering, technology and computer science who already have a degree in a different discipline should be monitored carefully.**

### Incentives in the tax system (UK)

Our call for evidence found arguments to incentivise employer and employee contributions, particularly through the tax system through tax allowances, exemptions, credits or relief.

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**'The Government might... in the longer term, examine how the tax and national insurance systems might be developed to encourage individual and employer investment in higher education.'**

### NIACE

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This is not a simple issue: we would agree with the conclusions of a European-wide survey of tax incentive systems for education and training that:

*'Tax incentives are appreciated by employers and employees, particularly in reducing education and training costs and for their low levels of bureaucracy. However, tax incentives are often criticised for their high deadweight effects, especially among large enterprises and highly qualified individuals. Additionally, they can be detrimental as they end up favouring those groups already with best access to education and training.... They have to be fine-tuned to other joint financing*

*policies to achieve the best outcome possible.*  
(European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, CEDEFOP, 2009)

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**'Tax policy, including both the overall design and structure of the tax system and the specific treatment of investment in human capital relative to other types of investment, can help to set the right incentives for individuals and employers to invest in post-compulsory education and training.'**

OECD, 2012

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There are a number of possible options for incentivising both employee and personal contributions. This report does not go into detail, but we suggest a number of options that might be thoroughly investigated by BIS and HMRC. A number of the arguments were discussed in more detail by Landman Economics in its report for unionlearn, *Tax relief on training: investigating the options for reform* (Reed 2011).

Employers currently receive tax relief on their support for work-related training for employees, including part-time higher education study. One argument is that there should be a more generous allowance in the form of employer tax credits, as has been suggested for apprenticeships.<sup>42</sup> Another suggestion is for the government to restrict corporation tax and income tax relief to 'training that leads to an accredited qualification or continuing professional development (CPD)', and to channel the associated savings into employer

National Insurance contributions for employees undergoing training (IPPR 2013).

In the UK, there is no tax relief for individuals for self-financed training (ie where the cost of study is not reimbursed by the employer). This has a particularly marked impact on those students who are not eligible for student loans, do not benefit from employer support and so have to pay large sums upfront. These prospective students face the prospect of trying to fund a part-time honours course of, say, £15,000 out of post-tax earnings. This is despite the fact that graduating from part-time study is associated with higher earnings<sup>43</sup> and so increased contributions to the Exchequer. We note that in other countries, such as the Republic of Ireland<sup>44</sup>, United States<sup>45</sup> and Canada, there is tax relief (in the form of credits and/or deductions) available for student tuition fees for higher education courses, including part-time courses.

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**'Since tax and spending policies might interact with each other, collaboration across government levels and departments is essential. For example, the impact of an increase in tuition fees on the incentive to invest in education is magnified by the tax system if personal tax relief is not provided for the cost of tuition fees.'**

OECD, 2012

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42. Doug Richards, in his independent Review of Apprenticeships (published in 2012), recommends that funding must create the right incentives for apprenticeship training. He argues that 'The purchasing power for investing in apprenticeship training should lie with the employer. Government should contribute to the cost, but this should be routed via the employer, in order to ensure relevance and drive up quality... A preferred approach would be to fund apprenticeships using the National Insurance or tax system – for example through a tax credit, similar to the R&D tax credit. The funding system should be kept simple and accessible, including for small firms.'

43. Twenty-nine per cent of part-time graduates reported a pay increase three years after study (either as a direct result of their course or the course helped). Callender C and Wilkinson D (2013) *Futuretrack: The impact of part-time learning two years after graduation* HECSU

44. See: [www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/leaflets/it31.html](http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/leaflets/it31.html)

45. See: [www.irs.gov/Individuals/Tax-Incentives-for-Higher-Education](http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Tax-Incentives-for-Higher-Education)

The 1994 Group argues for employees to receive tax relief on employer loans:

*'There might also be value in encouraging employers who cannot directly fund their employees' study to instead provide employees with interest-free or low-cost loans for training at Higher Education Institutions. Loans from employers to employees are not subject to income tax if the total loan value is less than £5,000. However, annual tuition fees are now typically above this level. There might be value in HMRC providing an extra-statutory concession for employer loans to cover the costs of study at Higher Education Institutions. The cost to government of such a measure would be negligible as it would be limited to the tax being received on a notional interest rate on loans which are currently advanced above this level, but it would send an important signal about the government's attitude toward employer-supported training.'* (1994 Group briefing, The Decline of Part-time study, 2013)

A final model is put forward by Birkbeck, University of London, which argues for a Higher Education Salary Sacrifice Scheme to enable students in employment to receive a tax-free degree. Upfront payment would be made to the higher education provider by the employer, and then, under the terms of a salary sacrifice scheme established by HMRC, the student would pay their employer back monthly through their salary (with repayments based on gross salary, ie before tax). It would provide a third option for paying for a degree alongside the two current options, a student loan and outright payment.

**Recommendation 5c: We recommend that BIS and the Treasury should conduct further research around the ways in which the tax system could better incentivise support for part-time higher education study, whether for employers or individuals.**

### **HEFCE's funding system should be kept under review**

We support the current policy, which keeps part-time student numbers out of student number controls. This gives higher education providers precious flexibility in responding to student demand and gives them the space that is required to plan for growth in a more strategic manner.

HEFCE is committed to 'Continued funding for part-time learning on the same basis as for full-time provision, including for high-cost subjects, widening participation and improving retention, and to support flexible learning including accelerated and intensive courses' (HEFCE 2013).

We found some concern about this parity of funding in responses to the call for evidence. Institutions told us about the higher costs of part-time students, including higher administration costs per student (as administration costs are by headcount not intensity), smaller cohort sizes, academic staff time, increased attrition, and keeping services/laboratories/studios open longer.

Recognition of these higher costs in the HEFCE funding method via the part-time premium is being phased out for lower cost subjects, at the same time as funding for widening access to part-time provision for people from disadvantaged backgrounds is also dropping from £67 million (2012–13) to £28 million (2013–14). There is some flexibility to pass these costs onto students or sponsoring employers as the cap on part-time tuition fees is not linked in detail to intensity of study. However, this is challenging considering the found price sensitivity of mature potential learners (ie they seem to react more strongly than young potential learners to price changes) and limited eligibility for student support for part-time undergraduate study when compared to full-time. It is also challenging given our findings about the pressures on employer support. We therefore conclude that the cumulative effect of these funding changes is causing reported problems for providers of part-time undergraduate education, at a time when it is proving difficult to pass them on to students and employers.

‘While the current spending settlement will not allow for permanent restoration [of the part-time premium], it is right to look at alternative routes to providing additional support to these [part-time] courses.’

CBI, 2013

Any argument to revisit the part-time premium would need to update the unit costs of teaching a part-time student, last investigated in detail by JM Consulting for HEFCE in 2003. It would also need to take into account the wider funding climate: the recent Spending Round for 2015–16 announced further cuts to the HEFCE teaching grant of at least £45 million, and it is not yet clear where these will fall.

**Recommendation 5d: We recommend that the impact of changes to the HEFCE funding system is kept under review, including the removal of the part-time premium.**

## Keeping up the momentum of this review

This report acts as an urgent initial assessment, identifying areas for immediate action, as well as the areas where more information is needed so that the right policy decisions are made.

It will be essential to maintain the momentum of this review, through harnessing the energy and actions of all of the different stakeholders with the ability to make a difference. UUK will discuss with other interested parties, including the CBI, OFFA, HEFCE, BIS, UCAS, SLC, NUS, unionlearn, Association of Colleges and GuildHE, how we can work together to make a difference and help to ensure that recommendations are put into place in a coordinated and cost-effective way.

UUK is committed to working in partnership with others to consider future funding and policy solutions, supported by further evidence and modelling. We see this review as the beginning, not the end, of UUK’s involvement in a campaign to protect and support this vital provision.

# ANNEXE A: STEERING GROUP MEMBERSHIP

## Higher education

Professor Sir Eric Thomas, Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Bristol (Chair)

Professor Clive Behagg, Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Chichester (GuildHE nominee)

Lucy Collins, Head of Widening Participation and  
Undergraduate Recruitment, University of Bristol

Dr Stella Cottrell, Head of Lifelong Learning,  
University of Leeds

Professor John Coyne, Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Derby

Tricia King, Pro-Vice-Master for Student  
Experience, Birkbeck, University of London

Professor David Maguire, Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Greenwich

Rajay Naik, Director of Government and External  
Affairs, The Open University

Professor Mary Stuart, Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Lincoln

## NUS

Fee Wood, Part-time and Mature Officer

Debbie McVitty, Head of Policy and Research

## Business

Carl Gilleard, Chief Executive, Association of  
Graduate Recruiters (to July 2013)

Michael Stevenson, Vice President, Global  
Education, Cisco (to May 2013)

## BIS

Gordon McKenzie, Deputy Director

Kirun Patel, Policy Advisor, Future Regulatory  
Framework

## UUK officers

Fiona Hoban, Policy Adviser

Fiona Waye, Policy Adviser

# ANNEXE B: METHODOLOGY, CONTRIBUTORS TO THE REVIEW, AND THANKS

The methodology for conducting this review included:

- Two witness sessions with eleven invited expert witnesses (March and April 2013)
- Open survey to all interested stakeholders, including universities, further education colleges, students, students' unions, employers and other relevant bodies (April to May 2013)
- Individual meetings with experts and groups, including representatives of higher and further education mission groups (including the Association of Colleges, Mixed Economy Group and 157 Group)
- Particular emphasis on collating the employer voice, through discussions with the CBI, Federation of Small Businesses, Association of Graduate Recruiters; involvement of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills
- Close liaison with the NUS, including through its contribution on the steering group, as well as facilitated discussion at the Mature and Part-time Sections Conference (April 2013) and Championing Mature Students Conference (March 2013)
- Virtual network of 50 self-selected interested people
- Literature review
- Analysis of datasets (such as HESA, HESES and HEIFES)
- Liaison with Universities Scotland and Higher Education Wales

We are grateful to all those who contributed, including:

- 157 Group
- 1994 Group
- Association of Colleges (AoC)
- Cabinet Office
- Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
- Construction Industry Council
- Continuum
- Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
- Disability Rights UK
- Employability, Business and Industry Policy Network, Universities UK
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE)
- GuildHE
- Higher Education Academy (HEA)
- Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU)
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)
- Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)
- Higher Education Liaison Officers Association (HELOA)
- Institute for Employment Studies
- Laser Learning Awards (LASER)
- Leeds University Union
- Linking London
- Million+
- Mixed Economy Group (MEG)
- National Association of Student Money Advisers (NASMA)
- National Centre for Universities and Business (formerly the Council for Industry and Higher Education)
- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)
- National Union of Students (NUS)
- Office for Fair Access (OFFA)
- Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)
- Russell Group
- Scottish Funding Council
- Specialist Institutions' Forum, Universities UK
- Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (SCUTREA)
- Student Loans Company (SLC)
- Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA)
- TUC Education (unionlearn)
- UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)
- University Alliance
- Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL)
- UCAS
- University of Central Lancashire Students' Union
- University and College Union (UCU)
- Workers' Educational Association
- Professor Claire Callender, Institute of Education and Birkbeck, University of London

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- Annexe D: Technical annexe
- Annexe E: Analysis of responses to the call for evidence



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