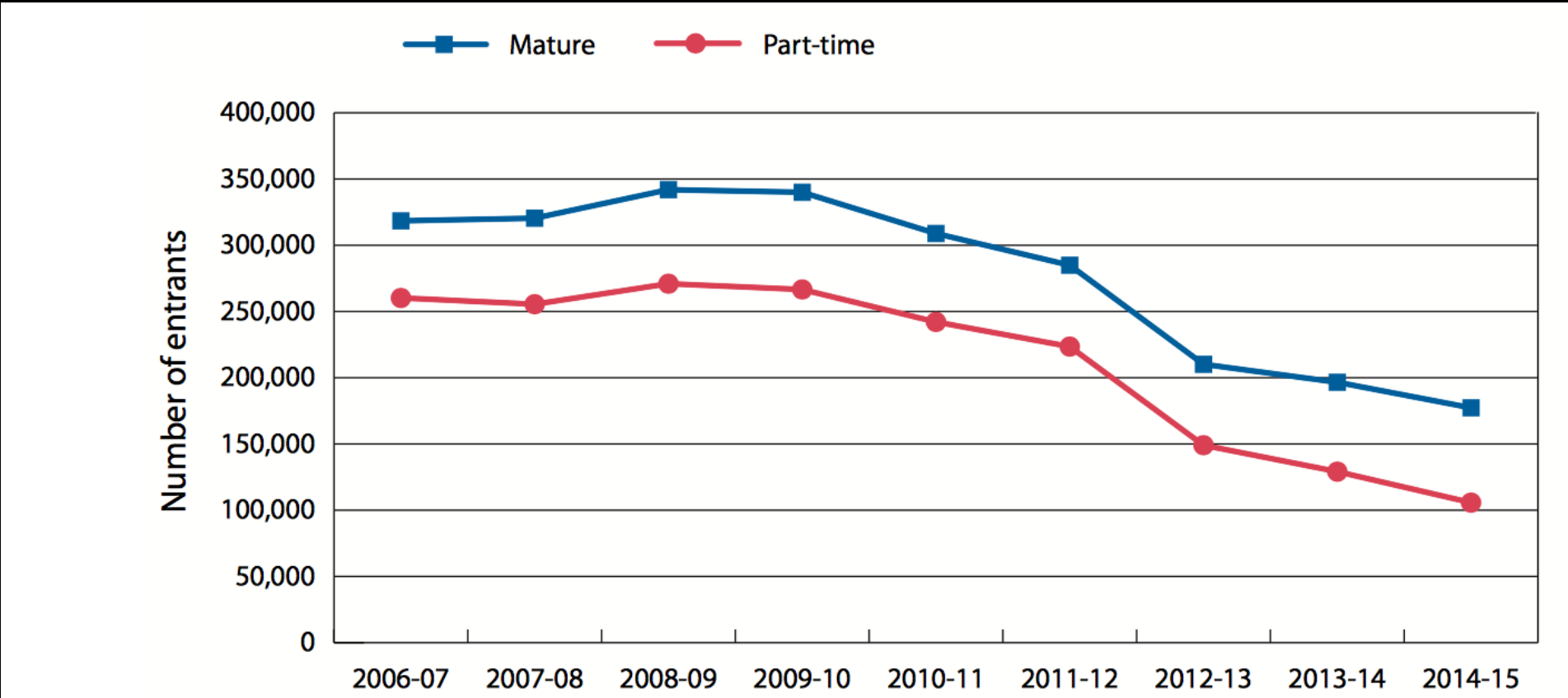# GROWING UP

Martin Webster – National Education Opportunities Network
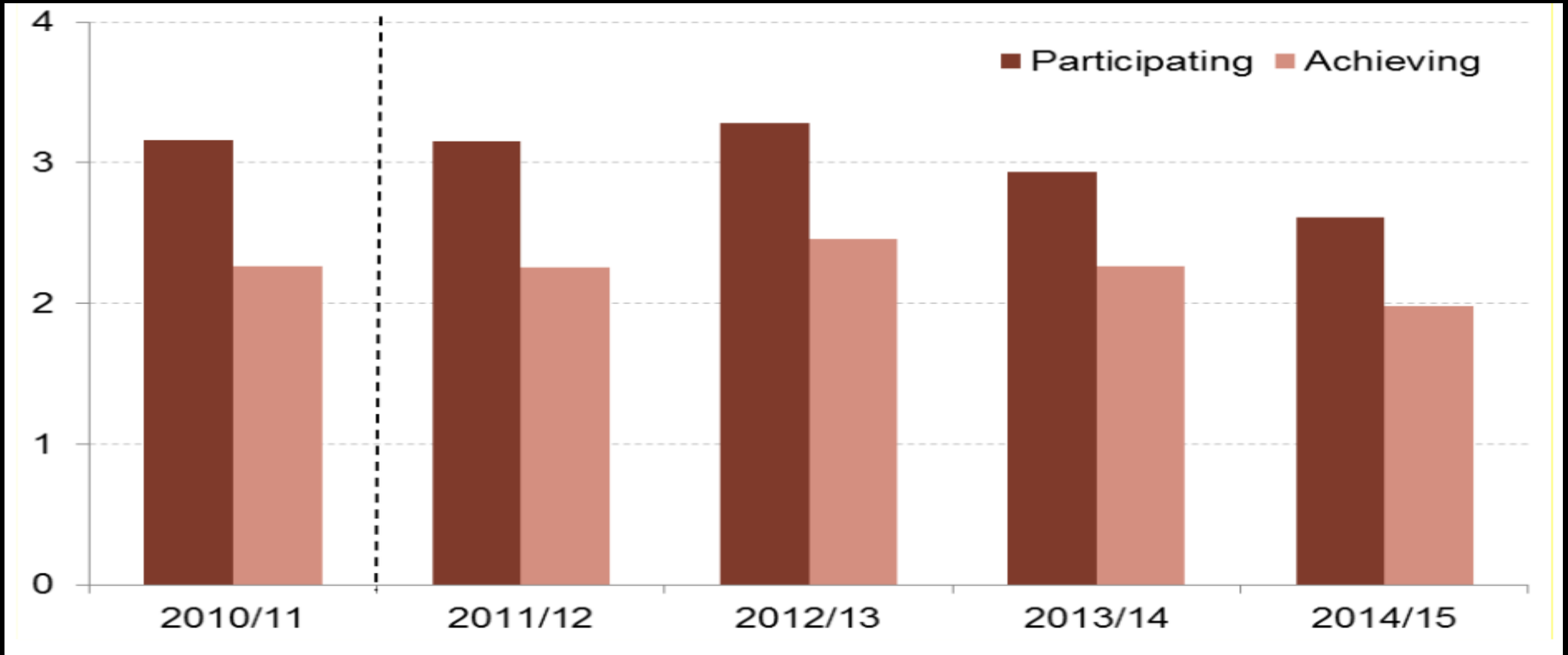
- Background;
- What activities are going on?
- What do members cite as the challenges?
- Observations;
- Initial recommendations;
- Conclusion.

BACKGROUND

ADULT LEARNER (19+) IN FE

"It is critical that the whole sector works to reverse this decline and we have called on institutions to consider what more they can do to attract and support part-time and mature learners in their latest access agreements."

"If you have experienced a decline in the number of mature learners applying for higher education at your institution, you should consider committing some of your access expenditure to addressing this."

Type of organisation	Number of responses
Charity	1
Million+ Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)	1
National Networks of Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) Partnerships	1
Other HEIs	8
Russell Group HEIs	4
University Alliance HEIs	3
FE Colleges	2
TOTAL	20

CURRENT AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES

- HEI's who responded concentrating existing activities on mature students (60%);

- HEI's to develop new activities (68%);

- 37.5% allocating additional resource to work with mature students;

- Just under 30% plan to carry out research into the needs of mature students;

CURRENT ACTIVITIES (ACCESS TO HE)

- Sessions that look to support the learners' current studies;
- Running an Access to HE Conference for local college students;
- Support with UCAS statements;
- Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) sessions;
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for careers' advisors;
- Student finance sessions;

Not always straightforward due to intensity of Access courses and commitments of mature learners.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES (OTHER MATURE STUDENTS)

- Community Groups – 'Health For All', 'Young Fathers' Group', Mental Health Groups.

- Community learning settings and college settings – bespoke activities for mature learners;

- Partnership with Adult Family Learning Advisors – sessions to support current studies;

- Work with mature learners studying GCSE etc;

- Creative Arts Easter School.

OTHER WORK

- Compact scheme;

- Post application Summer Schools and/or specific inductions for mature learners;

- Mentoring / buddy scheme;

- Mature students' network – Learners from level 2 to level 7, social events and peer to peer support;

- Progression agreements;

- Foundation Years;

- Specific department that deals with mature students.

CHALLENGES

Answer	% agreeing
Ability to target mature learners	66.67
Understanding the particular requirements of this group	41.67
Support from policymakers	16.67
Working in partnership with colleges and other organisations to support this group	62.5
Support from own organisation's senior leadership team	8.33

CHALLENGES

"Mature learners are more difficult to target than 'standard' university applicants due to their diverse circumstances and being less accessible through traditional means such as school and college cohorts. These students also have a broad range of life circumstances which have prevented them accessing HE in the past, and this creates barriers to them engaging with education now."

"The majority of mature learners come through the 'Clearing' process, which is often too late to advise this cohort on how to develop a portfolio of application. Mature learners are a hard to reach group."

CHALLENGES

- Flexibility of provision

'We don't offer enough part time provision which would enable mature learners to study around work and family"

OBSERVATIONS

- Some innovative work going on to attract mature learners;
- Strength – mature applicants appear to get offered a lot of transitional support, particularly through Access to HE route and post application;
- Reactive vs Proactive;
- Proactive approach appears more challenging (resource intensive)
- Foundation Years, accepting students with non traditional qualifications, appear to be successful approach;
- No mention from any respondents about Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL);

INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- A need for better sharing of 'practice' in the sector;

- Widening access teams - understanding situation in own institution and ensuring this is raised with Senior Management Teams; (Mature Student Action Plan)

- Need to reverse declining numbers studying pre HE;

- Support from policy makers and OFFA (through access agreement submission and monitoring);