

Learning and Teaching Innovation
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National Education Opportunities Network Summit: Supporting mature learners

Part-time learning in crisis

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Life-changing Learning
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Is part-time learning in crisis?

Numbers have been in steep decline since 2010

This particularly affects mature students
2014 – 2015 fell from 43K to 29K



Reasons? Impact of ELQ policy Fee rises Reduction in part-time offer

But 1 in 5 undergraduates still study part-time
Part-time learning provides crucial opportunities to students
Part-time learning benefits society (most are working)

The 5 year part-time decline has resulted in 47% fewer students registered)

2010

- 220K part-time learners on 'other' UG programmes (Diplomas, Certificates, institutional credit).
- 250K mature part-time learners

2015

- 80K part-time learners on 'other' UG programmes (Diplomas, Certificates, institutional credit).
- 110K mature part-time learners

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP: ENABLING SOCIAL MOBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The final report of the
Social Mobility Advisory Group

Recently, SMAG asserted:

“The need to move away from the perception that people only have one chance for university study, at the age of 18”.

The report starts by summarising the evidence as to where disadvantage lies. It demonstrates that **socio-economic disadvantage** continues to be the most significant driver of inequality in terms of access to and outcomes from higher education.

Social Mobility Advisory Group, Final Report (2016), p.1

A disproportionate number of students from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds study part-time as mature students.

What are the barriers preventing them from studying full-time?

Age poses different challenges, including the importance of the availability of opportunities to study **flexibly**. Mature students also need to be part of the solution. This is not only important in terms of promoting social mobility, but critical in relation to economic growth and enhancing productivity.

(Social Mobility Advisory Group, Final Report (2016) p.2

Is your institution flexible enough to meet the needs of mature students?

Research findings



‘Shoe-horned and side-lined’? Challenges for part-time learners in the new HE landscape (Higher Education Academy, 2015)

UK-wide study of part-time students, exploring perceptions of learners who were studying – against backdrop of steep decline, especially in England

3000 survey responses

50 interviews

Balance of students at universities with a significant part-time offer, and Open University students

Cohort marked by heterogeneity

Who studies part-time?

- Women, many of whom study while undertaking caring responsibilities
- Learners engaging with HE as 'first in family'
- Learners with disabilities and/or long-term health impairments
- Geographically-isolated learners
- All ages, but...

Why study part-time?

- **‘Hobson’s choice’** – all preferred idea of full-time study but had no choice due to personal circumstances
- **Fear of debt** & reduction in employer contribution to fees
- Perception that full-time HE **insufficiently flexible** to meet their needs

- Motivated by employability (better job/change of career)
- Equally motivated by second chance (missed out at 18) and love of subject

How can we be more flexible?



- Access agreements can identify spend on inclusive approaches to learning, teaching and assessment
- Develop a part-time student community and listen to its concerns – part-timers feel isolated
- Ensure clear Information, Advice and Guidance aimed at part-timers is in place (qualification pathways, funding)
- Acknowledge part-time students bring life/work experiences – this diversity enhances learning