



Supporting Mature Learners Summit

Caroline McDonald

Head of Widening Access
Birkbeck, University of London
Malet Street
London WC1E 7HX
0207 380 3123
c.mcdonald@bbk.ac.uk

@CMcDonald367



Overview

1. Quick figures
2. What do we mean by mature?
3. Challenges in working with mature students
4. Importance of this focus
5. Challenges taking on this work
6. How can we make a difference?
7. The future....

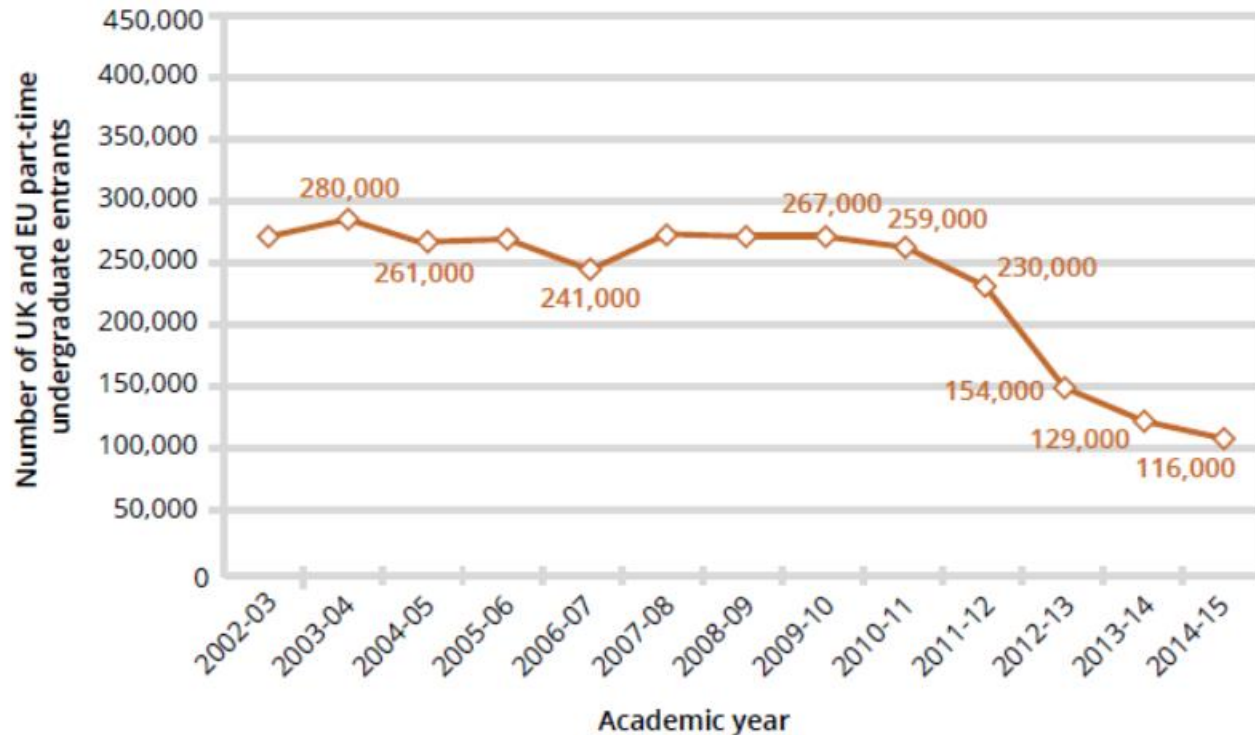


Sector figures

- Undergraduate
 - 80.5% full time
 - 19.5% part-time (90% of whom are mature)
- Part-time entrants 259,000 in 2011/12 to 111,000 in 2014/15: a drop of 50%
- The sector now has around 110,000 fewer mature learners than before the introduction of fees.



Figure 5 UK and other EU part-time undergraduate entrants, 2002-03 to 2014-15

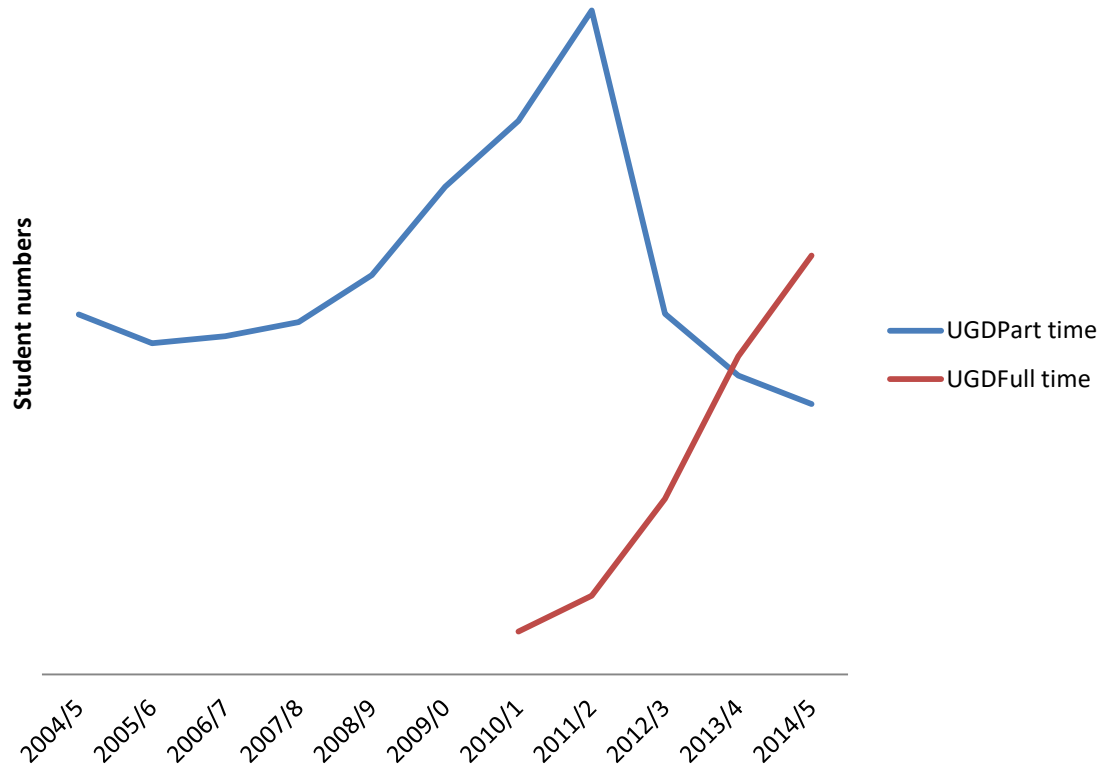


Source: Table 5, Column 2 in HESES and HEIFES data. Note: Because of volatility in part-time recruitment following the 2012 reforms, levels of uncertainty are understood to have increased notably in relation to forecasts of UK and other EU part-time undergraduate new entrant registrations included in HESES 2013. These uncertainties were quantified during the data verification processes undertaken for HESES 2014, and have led to a restatement of the number of UK and other EU part-time undergraduate entrants in 2013-14.



Birkbeck figures (2)

Enrolments by intensity of study





Who are mature learners?

Mature learners are more likely than younger learners to have characteristics associated with disadvantage and under-representation in higher education.

- have non-traditional qualifications
- come from lower socio-economic backgrounds
- have family or caring responsibilities – “my turn”
- be disabled
- be from black and minority ethnic groups
- leave higher education within a year of entering.



Why should we focus on mature students?

- Essential to the UK economy
- Social mobility
- Impact on outcomes for their children and immediate family members
- Growing importance in the Access Agreement – OFFA have recently commissioned new pieces of work to raise the profile of this issue
- Mature learners often bring to their studies a commitment to excel, and significant life experience which helps to enrich and expand the nature of student body.



Challenges of working with mature learners

- Generally not a “cohort” – it requires a much more localised and personal approach
- Debt averse - 49% of people considering part-time study in the next 5 years would not be comfortable borrowing money for higher education, compared to 25% of prospective full-time students
- IAG is poor and uptake to existing provision low
- Jigsaw puzzle of life – lots of competing priorities. All the pieces have to be in place
- Family support - this came up as one of the key reasons why people stay the course. Do not under estimate the role these people play in how they succeed.
- Time poor – they are very busy and need help squeezing things in



Challenges of working with mature learners (cont)

- Employer support – help from employers towards tuition fees has fallen by almost 20% since 2011–12
- Entry level qualifications and long time out of formal education/pre-entry attainment
- Understanding the needs of mature learners are often different to younger.
- In study progression/retention – first term is the HARDEST! We have critical wobble moments with our student.
- Institutional buy in.



How to make a difference

- Have a clear offer – differentiate how and what is on offer to adults (open days, ‘come and meet’ evenings; peer support)
- Clear entry routes and requirements
- Open Days – evening and weekend events
- Family Engagement
- Financial support
- Evening and weekend provision
- Dip in and out engagement – waiting for the right time, low risk.
- Lots of dip in and out engagement – waiting for the right time
- Strong case studies and people willing to share their story.



IntoUniversity 



GET STARTED WORKSHOPS

A series of free events giving practical advice and guidance on how to support your son or daughter into Higher Education

MAKING AN APPLICATION
TUESDAY 24 FEBRUARY
5.45PM – 7.00PM



**Higher Education
Introductory Studies**

Future Focus

Get Talking

Get Ahead

Birkbeck Chat



Bridges to Birkbeck

FE Progression Agreements

Family Learning

**Community Professional
Development Programme**

**HE Family Collaboration
Focus**

Personal Statement Service

ZIZEK'S BIG IDEAS



**A five lecture
series**

**at Idea Store
Whitechapel**





What do we do...

Partner with Enfield borough, 3 FE colleges and local community groups

EnfieldThinks
Popping-up 2015
7th April - 27th July
Unit 3 Burleigh Way, Enfield Town



get switched on
to learning



get ready to
explore



engage
your curiosity





The Future

Mature learners and part-time study is still very much on the agenda, but it needs a steer, a movement and a sector wide commitment – no one institution can rectify this.

- PT maintenance loans from 2018....prepared for this?
- PEARL
- OU have relaunched the Part-time Matters campaign and launched PEARL
- HE Summit lots of mature coverage
- OFFA funded collaborative research on mature learners outreach.



Thank you