The impact of financial support on part-time learners in higher education

Mohammed Hussain
m.a.hussain@leeds.ac.uk

M.J. Morgan
m.j.h.morgan@leeds.ac.uk
The LLC is about widening opportunity

We aim to:

• ensure that the University is genuinely open to mature and part-time learners and those of any age from under-represented communities who need focussed support;

• engage with the city and region to support widening participation, develop the local workforce and assist the University to reach diverse communities;

• work in partnership with faculties and services to the benefit of mature, part-time and foundation level students.
Number of part-time undergraduates on sustained* courses at the LLC 2015-2016:

**122 (FTE)**

84% taught on bespoke programmes in the LLC; 16% studying full-time degrees on a part-time basis elsewhere in the University

*Degree, Foundation Degree, Diploma of Higher Education, Certificate of Higher Education (i.e. excluding CPD and other short courses)
Background: the national picture

- Declining numbers of part-time learners starting higher education courses
- Focus on retention (TEF)
- Push from OFFA to move financial support away from individual bursaries to group activities
- Lack of knowledge/evidence about the relationship between part-time learners and financial support

= need to know more about the relationship between part-time undergraduates and financial support
Means-tested institutional bursary (‘Leeds Financial Support’) awarded to all part-time undergraduates on sustained courses

- *Pro-rata* of full-time rate (up to £1,670)
- Household income sole criterion
- Paid in cash
The project

- Small scale research project 2015-2016 to investigate impact of Leeds Financial Support on LLC part-time undergraduates
- Online survey winter 2015-2016 (completed)
- Focus groups spring/summer 2016 (ongoing)
The project: online survey

- Sent to LLC students who
  - Were on a sustained part-time undergraduate programme
  - Started their course from 2012 onwards
  - Were in at least their second year of study

- 140 students eligible

- 55 respondents (39% response rate)
Responses to some of the questions in the online survey
Q: did you receive Leeds Financial Support (LFS)?

- Yes: 49 (89.1%)
- No: 5 (9.1%)
- Not sure: 1 (1.8%)
Q: What is your household income?

- Up to £25,000: 44 (83%)
- £25,001-£30,000: 2 (3.8%)
- £30,001-£36,000: 1 (1.9%)
- £36,001-£42,600: 3 (5.7%)
- £42,601 or above: 3 (5.7%)
Q: Did the availability of LFS affect your decision to come to Leeds?

- Yes, it was very important/the deciding factor: 11 (19.6%)
- It was important, but not the deciding factor: 17 (30.4%)
- It was one factor I considered but wasn't that important: 5 (8.9%)
- It didn't affect my decision at all: 23 (41.1%)
Q: How important has LFS been in helping you to remain on your course?

Very important: I wouldn't still be here without it 24 (44.4%)
Quite important 22 (40.7%)
Helpful but not hugely important 5 (9.3%)
Not important at all 3 (5.6%)
Q: How have you spent your LFS?

- Child care costs 12 (5.6%)
- Travel costs 39 (18.3%)
- Consumables (e.g. paper, pens, printer ink/printer credits etc.) 35 (16.4%)
- Books 39 (18.3%)
- Hardware (e.g. laptop, iPad, phone etc.) 21 (9.9%)
- Software and/or software upgrades 13 (6.1%)
- As a substitute for wages lost when attending the course 11 (5.2%)
- Council tax 5 (2.3%)
- Utility bills (e.g. phone, electricity, gas etc.) 17 (8%)
- Food & other consumables 17 (8%)
- Other 4 (1.9%)
Q: If you hadn’t received LFS, what do you think the effects might have been?

- Pressure on household finances: 36 (23.4%)
- Pressure on personal finances: 39 (25.3%)
- Difficulties in paying for child care: 11 (7.1%)
- Difficulties in travelling to university and/or work/voluntary placements: 29 (18.8%)
- Difficulties in buying course resources (e.g. consumables, books, hardware, software etc.): 35 (22.7%)
- Other: 0
- No effect at all: 4 (2.6%)
The loss of earnings from attending the course is made up from the LFS ... without it I could not afford to attend

I am able to cut down a few hours at work so I can concentrate on my studies

I needed support to put my son in nursery so I could attend uni

Financial support has made me feel much better mentally and very positive about my studies

Without it I wouldn’t be able to afford the laptop and printer I have needed to let me participate in my degree

Without it I would financially struggle to buy books

This year household income has reduced dramatically ... LFS will be keeping me at university
Next steps

• Focus groups to explore issues further, especially:
  ➢ Attitudes towards debt of part-time learners from low-income backgrounds
  ➢ Pre-arrival knowledge of financial support
  ➢ The role of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) in supporting decision-making about part-time study

• Sharing of data/intelligence between institutions?

• Collaborative research?
Discussion

• What financial support does your institution provide for part-time undergraduates?

• Do you know if there is any relationship between this support and (a) the recruitment and (b) the retention of your part-time learners?

• What role does specialist pre-entry Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) for adults play in your institution, particularly with regard to financial issues?

• Would you be interested in data-sharing and/or collaborative research?